

THESIS

REMEMBERING THE 1936-37 UAW-GM SIT-DOWN STRIKE:
STRATIFICATION OF A UAW MEMBER'S IDENTITY
IN SITDOWNERS MEMORIAL PARK

Submitted by:

Aaron Keel

Department of Communication Studies

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Karrin Vasby Anderson

Greg Dickinson
Kenneth J. Kirkland

ABSTRACT

REMEMBERING THE 1936-37 UAW-GM SIT-DOWN STRIKE: STRATIFICATION OF A UAW MEMBER'S IDENTITY IN SITDOWNERS MEMORIAL PARK

In 1937, the United Automobile Workers (UAW) won recognition from General Motors (GM) through the historic sit-down strike in Flint, Michigan. This strike marked the beginning of the labor movement and the battle for worker's rights that is continuing into the present day. Sitdowners Memorial Park (SMP), located in Flint, remembers and commemorates the striker's great achievements in 1937. It is also a place where citizens encounter compelling narratives of the past, pay tribute to those who have come before them, build community, negotiate identity, and receive instruction for the present and future.

In this thesis, I explore SMP as an experiential landscape. In exploring the park, I answer two questions. First, how does SMP construct a UAW member's identity? Second, how does SMP represent female gender roles and, more specifically, what kind of agency is attributed to women as members of the UAW in this counterpublic space?

I argue that SMP enlists memories of the sit-down strike and its impacts on society to reinvigorate a dying community and offer visitors rhetorical resources justifying pro-union perspectives. In doing so, a counterpublic identity is created. In

establishing a UAW member's identity as counterpublic, still fighting for recognition from the larger public, SMP also reinforces the worker/homemaker double bind that is prevalent as part of many women workers' historical and contemporary lived experience. This double bind can inhibit female workers' agency within the counterpublic space of the UAW where they can occupy a "counterprivate" space. Today, however, through the corrections and additions to the park over time, female workers are granted agency, but they are reminded that their participation in the public comes at a cost; the double bind continues to discipline them.

Ultimately, SMP works to educate its visitors on the progress that the UAW has attained and the social significance of the sit-down strike. Through this education and remembering, SMP advocates that a visitor to the park must work to maintain what was won in 1937 and participate in a pro-union fight by carrying on the strikers' tradition of progressive politics.

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

On December 30, 1936 workers at a General Motors (GM) manufacturing plant in Flint, Michigan refused to leave at the end of their shift and began one of the most significant strikes in U.S. American history. This 44-day strike marked the beginning of a labor movement that was “heard around the world.”¹ Although the United Auto Workers (UAW) was formed in 1935, they were not formally recognized by General Motors until the end of this strike in 1937. It wasn’t until 2003, however, that a monument was built to commemorate the historic achievement and the UAW. Then, in 2005, the monument grew into a commemorative park, and in 2009 a dedication to the women of the strike was added.

Sitdowners Memorial Park (SMP) is a constantly changing text. Today, the park features two distinctly different monuments, the original monument built in 2003 and the women’s monument built in 2009. The original monument featured five male workers and one female positioned around a continuously burning flame. In 2009, however, the female statue was moved to be included as part of the new women’s monument, where she can still be seen today. Since 2003 the park has also added a large granite globe that floats on water, empty stone car benches around the park’s perimeter, flower beds that read “UAW,” plaques describing the park and the role women played in the strike as well as in the women’s movement, a plaque of the original contract between General Motors

and the UAW, and a brick pathway between the various exhibits engraved with names of the original strikers.² The latest addition to the park was dedicated on Labor Day 2010. It features a large stone plaque which rises from the ground and commemorates the leaders of the UAW since the great strike along with a notable secretary. It describes their contribution to the UAW and how they all helped make the park possible.

Interestingly, SMP was built during a time in which GM and unions were experiencing a decline from prominence. The women's monument was added at the height of this decline. This is notable because, during this time, many were beginning to blame the union for GM's downfall and the unemployment rate in Flint.³ Therefore, SMP and the additions to it could have been a reaction to a perceived loss in power and solidarity within the community. Visitors unfamiliar with the strike, or those who are not members of the UAW, could view what is represented at SMP as the downfall of the American middle class.

Within Flint, however, this park serves an important role in terms of remembering the past, building community, and negotiating identity. Memorials, museums, and commemorative artifacts such as SMP are locations where citizens encounter compelling narratives of the past, pay tribute to those who have come before them, and receive instruction for the present day and future. Thus, these memory places are not just about the remembering past, they are also about enacting the present and the meaning within them can change with time or depend on the visitor.⁴

I first visited the park in 2009 based on the recommendation of a friend in the UAW. Growing up in Flint, the importance of the sit-down strike and of a strong union was instilled in me from a very young age. My great grandfather was an original striker,

and in school we spent ample time discussing the strike and its outcomes. Everyone knew someone who worked for GM and everyone seemed to drive a union-made car. To not support the union in Flint seemed to be a dangerous act. As I grew older and moved away from Flint, however, I realized this was a unique situation and not everyone had been exposed to this pro-union rhetoric. Consequently, I began to reflect on my views of the auto industry, my own identity, and the world more broadly.

SMP is a particularly intriguing place where identity is negotiated because of its complexity as a park, the continually changing landscape, and the diversity of identities represented within it. Within SMP, identity is represented and negotiated throughout the various memorials. The most obvious identity represented is that of a union member. If one looks a bit further, however, there are also representations of General Motors, man, woman, child, and Flint resident. Additionally, there are references to capitalism, democracy, free speech, and law(lessness) within the park. In this thesis, however, I am particularly interested in two aspects of identity construction: union and female worker identity. It fascinates me that the park specifically includes a women's monument when considering the historically male dominated manufacturing industry. It is also newsworthy that through the various changes and additions to the park, today a large portion of it is dedicated to the female workers of the strike. It is for these reasons that I chose to focus on the representations of female gender roles and the implications of those representations for current visitors. Furthermore, it interests me to see how the union attempts to maintain solidarity and argue against anti-union rhetoric while the auto industry is going through changes and Flint is decaying around the loss of union jobs.

Given my focus on the representation of union and female identity, this thesis attempts to answer two questions. First, how does SMP battle media stereotypes and function as a building ground for union solidarity, establishing itself as a counterpublic space, in a time of union disdain? Specifically, I focus on the ways in which SMP constructs a UAW member's identity as it responds to the potentially oppositional rhetorical goals of battling stereotypes and maintaining solidarity. Second, this study asks how does SMP represent female gender roles and, more specifically, what kind of agency is attributed to women as members of the UAW in this counterpublic space? By answering these two questions, my study contributes to the scholarly understanding of how commemorative artifacts and public memory work to shape group identity and inform public deliberation.

In this thesis, I argue that SMP enlists memories of the sit-down strike and its impacts on society to reinvigorate a dying community and offer visitors rhetorical resources that justify pro-union perspectives. In doing so, a counterpublic identity is created. In establishing a UAW member's identity as counterpublic, still fighting for recognition from the larger public, SMP also reinforces the worker/homemaker double bind that is prevalent as part of women workers' historical and contemporary lived experience. This double bind can inhibit female workers' agency within the counterpublic space of the UAW. In 1937 and through the 2003 representation of female gender roles, the worker/homemaker double bind worked to contain women of the UAW and relegate their actions to the private sphere, where they occupied a "counterprivate" space. Today, through the corrections and additions to the park, female workers are granted more agency, but they are reminded that their participation comes at a cost; the double bind

continues to discipline them. Ultimately, however, SMP works to educate its visitors on the progress that the UAW has attained and the social significance of the sit-down strike. Through this education and remembering, SMP advocates that a visitor to the park must work to maintain what was won in 1937 and participate in a pro-union fight by carrying on the strikers' tradition of progressive politics.

The goal of this chapter is to lay the foundation upon which I build my argument. In what follows, I first review the literature needed to explore SMP. Next, I detail the steps I took to answer my research questions. Finally, I provide a brief overview of my chapters.

MEMORY, SPACE, AND RHEOTRIC

Public Memory

Memory has been recognized as an important rhetorical canon since the classical era.⁵ The ancients were concerned with not remembering (forgetting), which was primarily associated with *memorizing* a speech; more importantly, however, the ancients were concerned with mis-remembering.⁶ Thus, recollection is a primary concern for memory. Kendall Phillips explains, "The instrumentality of recollection then lies within individuals who through their own agency engage in the process of tracing the sequence of events backward to the memory thought."⁷ Phillips bases this argument on Aristotle's contention that "recollection is like a syllogism."⁸ Phillips notes, "Aristotle conceived of rhetoric as an art of reasoning in *public* [emphasis added] but what differentiated rhetoric from more formal, philosophical forms of syllogistic reasoning was the *enthymeme* [emphasis in original]."⁹ The enthymeme is defined as "a figure of reasoning in which one or more statements of a *syllogism* (a three-pronged deductive argument) is/are left

out of the configuration.”¹⁰ Often times, this missing premise is assumed to be true and filled in by the audience based on their cultural norms and/or previous experiences. This type of recollection grounds a specific memory into a social standard that, Barbie Zelizer explains, “Exists in the world rather than in a person’s head.”¹¹ Zelizer argues, “Memory . . . is embodied in different cultural forms.”¹² Thus, to combat the concerns of misremembering, society builds monuments, memorials, museums, etc. to both remember and commemorate the past.¹³ To encompass these cultural forms, scholars of public memory have expanded their critical understanding from the most fundamental memorizing of a speech to the functionality of memory, the diverse forms in which memory can appear, and the cultural role fulfilled by the act of remembering. Contemporary memory scholarship examines the spaces and places of memory, including artifacts, museums, monuments, and memorials.

Spaces, places, and artifacts of memory can also be seen as persuasive. Phillips argues:

Rhetoric crafts and utilizes forms of public remembrance in the service of disciplining memories and shaping a framework in which experience of the past is cultivated and contained . . . Rhetorical appeals serve to frame memories within established cultural forms that, in turn, establish enthymematic connections.¹⁴

Furthermore, Phillips explains, “The artifacts that promote a shared sense of the past have an obvious persuasive capacity, and in this way, can be seen as rhetorical.”¹⁵ In memorials, the missing or assumed premise of the enthymeme relies on aspects of the “experienced world” that visitors bring with them to the park, while the artifact itself completes the other premise for the larger, persuasive argument. Therefore, when one visits a memory place, recollection of a memory becomes an active process made by the

visitor. In this sense, memory can be seen as a rhetorical act dependent on culture and shared meanings, and since individuals and communities remember the past differently, memory is often negotiated in the public sphere.

The notion of an ideal “public sphere” was developed by Jürgen Habermas,¹⁶ who envisioned it as “a body of ‘private persons’ assembled to discuss matters of ‘public concern’ or ‘common interest.’”¹⁷ For Habermas, the public sphere is constituted by communication. The public sphere “designates a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, and hence an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction.”¹⁸ Nancy Fraser explains that, for Habermas, “the discussion was to be open and accessible to all, merely private interests were to be inadmissible, inequalities of status were to be bracketed, and discussants were to deliberate as peers.”¹⁹ This limited view has its flaws, especially when applied to a diverse U.S. American context.²⁰

Fraser specifically took issue with Habermas’s idea of the public sphere and believed it was not compatible with postmodern North American culture. Fraser explains, “The problem is not only that Habermas idealizes the liberal public sphere but also that he fails to examine other, nonliberal, nonbourgeois, competing public spheres.”²¹ Specifically, Fraser explores how women traditionally gained access to public life while being excluded from the official public sphere. In the case of elite bourgeois women, this access was gained through “building a counter civil society of alternative, woman-only, voluntary associations, including philanthropic and moral-reform societies.”²² However, for the less fortunate, “Access to public life came through participation in supporting

roles in male-dominated working class protest activities. Still other women found outlets in street protests and parades.”²³ A flaw with Habermas’s notion of the public sphere rests in a male dominated, patriarchal world where true equality does not exist. Even when women have access to public life, they often are not granted official and/or equal access to Habermas’s public sphere.

Habermas’s notion of the public sphere is a singular perspective; it rests on the idea of a single public sphere. Fraser, however, puts forth the idea of a stratified society. According to Fraser, this is a society “whose basic institutional framework generates unequal social groups in structural relations of dominance and subordination.”²⁴ Fraser contends that “in stratified societies, arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the ideal of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public.”²⁵

Within stratified societies rests the “subaltern counterpublic,” which Fraser defines as “discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs.”²⁶ Under a comprehensive public, “subaltern counterpublics” would be less likely able to expose “modes of deliberation that mask domination by, in Mansbridge’s words, ‘absorbing the less powerful into a false ‘we’ that reflects the more powerful.’”²⁷ Ultimately, Fraser contends that counterpublics “emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand the discursive space.”²⁸ She emphasizes:

The point is that in stratified societies, subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment;

on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.²⁹

SMP can be seen as a material site for rhetorical negotiation of a counterpublic identity because it acts as a place of “withdrawal and regroupment” and as a training ground for “agitational activities” (striking). Although on the surface SMP seems to only commemorate the past, it is important to point out that the development of this memory place, 66 years after the strike, serves a present day purpose. Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson and Brian L. Ott explain, “Memory has been variously described as responding to needs of the present, serving the interests of the present, animating the present, serving as rhetorical resources of the present, and so forth. How we describe the relationship matters.”³⁰ Furthermore, Blair et al. argue that memory scholars share the following assumptions:

Memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties; (2) memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging; (3) memory is animated by affect; (4) memory is partial, partisan, and thus, often contested; (5) memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports; (6) memory has a history.³¹

Therefore, although memory does have a connection to the present, this connection is highly contextual and dependent on a variety of factors, including what is the most pressing need of the present. For instance, Blair et al. explain that “groups tell their pasts to themselves and others as ways of understanding, valorizing, justifying, excusing, or subverting conditions or beliefs of their current moment.”³² Another response to the present and need for public memory is that public memory can act as form of community building. It offers individuals a “symbolic connection with the group

and a sense of belonging to it.”³³ This connection, along with the changing needs of the present, continually shape and reshape a group’s collective identity.

This community aspect of public memory is especially important since memory does not and cannot represent an entire history. Therefore, *how* the memory is represented becomes increasingly important. There is simply no way to physically represent the entire history or story of an event or of a group in a single setting. As Blair et al. explain, “Rather than representing a fully developed chronicle of the social group’s past, public memory embraces events, people, objects, and places that it deems worthy of preservation, based on some kind of emotional attachment.”³⁴ Determining which memory to represent is a rhetorical choice based on present day needs and what is deemed important for guiding future decisions and actions. In making this decision and ultimately valuing one memory over another, other memories are left out or pushed to the side. This selective process does not assume that there is a clear and simple remembering/forgetting dichotomy. Rather, it points to how they become entangled and complicated between the elements of history/memory.³⁵ Once the decision of what memory to represent is made, however, Blair et al. explain that memory typically relies on “material and/or symbolic supports—language, ritual performances, communication technologies, objects, and places—that work in various ways to consummate individuals’ attachment to the group.”³⁶ It is these texts and the assumed attachment that allows individuals to remember and for memory to function, communicate, and make an enthymematic argument.

Ultimately, the partiality and selective nature of memory depends on who is communicating it to whom and for what reasons. Due to this cultural specificity and the

changing present situation, memory can change with time. It can depend on who is telling it to whom, when they are telling it, why they are telling it, and how they are telling it (this is especially the case with new developments in technology). These changes in memory themselves then present a timeline and a history of memory that can also be traced.

Space and Place

When studying public memory, the issues of space and place become especially important due to a particular memory's cultural significance, partiality, and instruction for the future. Additionally, Pierre Nora explains that "the past thrives in scores of 'lieux de memoire,' which literally translates into 'sites of memory'—physical, cultural, or ideational sites where memories settle and take on collective meanings."³⁷ As Blair et al. point out, "By bringing the visitor into contact with the significant past, the visitor may be led to understand the present as part of an enduring, stable condition."³⁸ Furthermore, Blair et al. argue:

In dealing with memory places, the signifier assumes a special importance. The signifier—the place—is itself an object of attention and desire. It is an object of attention because of its status as a place, recognizable and set apart from undifferentiated space. But it is an object of *special* attention because of its self-nomination as a site of significant memory of and for a collective. This signifier commands attention, because it announces itself as a marker of collective identity. It is an object of desire because of its claim to represent, inspire, instruct, remind, admonish, exemplify and/or offer the opportunity for affiliation and public identification.³⁹

As such, the spaces and places where monuments, museums, and memorials are built command special attention and complicate or enhance any given meaning of a text within that space. These spaces and places refer to the physical and sometimes abstract landscapes and texts that call forth particular memories.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is important to

distinguish monuments, museums, and memorials as memory places themselves, set apart, but part of, the surrounding landscape, which affects a person's identity.⁴¹

Much has been written on memorials and museums as places of public memory.⁴² While most memory places have broad social and cultural appeal, are deemed worthy of importance, and are accepted as "natural" by the larger public, research has demonstrated the ways in which memory places can function as a "counterplace." For example, in their foundational 1991 essay, Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson and Enrico Pucci, Jr. viewed the Vietnam Veterans Memorial from a postmodern perspective and redefined what can constitute a rhetorical text. In doing so, they emphasized the ways in which political messages are often "multivocal."⁴³ This brings forth the notion of the counter monument/memorial as response to a different represented memory. As Victoria Gallagher and Margaret LaWare point out, "Counter memorials may serve at least three functions: as a corrective, as a supplement, and/or as a contradiction."⁴⁴ They outline the controversy surrounding "The Fist" of Joe Louis in Detroit, Michigan and the multiple, conflicting interpretations available while constructing meaning of it and viewing the memorial as a counterplace. Furthermore, Bernard J. Armada describes Jacqueline Smith's role as a counter memorial to the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, Tennessee. He argues that Smith's protest of the museum (the act and location) offers an "alternative interpretation to the closed narrative suggested by the museum's climatic endpoint."⁴⁵ Thus, the place of her protest plays an important role in "memory's execution."⁴⁶

The few examples presented here demonstrate the complexity of recollection along with the difficulty in defining a memory text. The wide variety of texts available to

memory scholars, and the indefinite possibilities of what constitutes a text, demonstrate the exponential amount of memory places that exist in our world. One memory place that is often overlooked by academia in terms of public memory, however, is how an event is framed in newspapers. This is where most of the public memory of unions has historically been constructed.

Rhetoric about Labor

Since 1937 and the end of the strike, union membership and support from the general public continued to grow until the 1980's. Since then, support and membership has been on a steady decline.⁴⁷ More recently, many blame the UAW for the decline of General Motors. For example, a 2009 article in *USA Today* contends that “recent debate over bailout loans exposed that many Americans are skeptical of the UAW, seeing members as overpaid, underworked and to blame for much of the industry's decline.”⁴⁸ This view of the union held by the general public has made it harder for labor leaders to recruit new members and negotiate on behalf of its workers. Labor organizers charge the media with contributing to this view held by the general public, claiming that the mainstream media has a negative bias towards them.⁴⁹ Additionally, on a larger scale, Robert Bruno points out, “Labor officials may be reacting to polls like those taken by the National Opinion Research Center that have consistently ranked labor unions near or at the bottom of a list of institutions the public has a ‘great deal of confidence in.’”⁵⁰

Paul Hartman was one of the first to address the claim that media has a negative bias towards unions by looking at the framing of unions in the media.⁵¹ He concluded that “the actions of the trade unions and trade unionists are commonly presented by the media as being less legitimate than those of government and employers.”⁵² Additionally, he

found that workers were described as “low paid,” “militant,” “angry,” and “divided,” concluding that “the media not only project[s] an image of the trade unions but in doing so set[s] an ‘agenda’ in the public mind.”⁵³ This disdain for the union as described by Hartmann could have contributed to the growth and development of SMP as a counterplace.

Furthermore, William Serrin explains: “The coverage that labor and the workplace receive is not fair—and not good journalism.”⁵⁴ He points out that newspapers “are giving much less space and importance to the labor movement and the workplace than they have in the past. Many American newspapers and magazines give almost no coverage to labor.”⁵⁵ Serrin argues that to replace the lack of coverage on labor and unions, mainstream media has started reporting on stories of people in the workplace because it is more “trendy.” This lack of coverage initially suggests a negative bias towards unions due to the lack of positive stories that do get published.⁵⁶

When coverage is given, William Puette found that “mass media stereotypes portray labor unions as “protect[ing] and encourage[ing] unproductive, usually fat, lazy and insubordinate workers’ and institutionaliz[ing] conflict . . . dredg[ing] up conflict where there would otherwise be perfect harmony.”⁵⁷ Michael Parenti furthered our understanding of union stereotypes by concluding seven typical generalizations with which the news media frames stories regarding unions and strikes:

- 1) The larger struggle between capital and labor is ignored, making it possible to present labor struggles as senseless conflicts that could be solved if only the union would be willing to negotiate in good faith.
- 2) Company “offers” are emphasized, while company takebacks, employees grievances, and issues such as job security, health insurance, and safety are underplayed or ignored. As a result, workers appear irrational, greedy, and self-destructive.

- 3) While “fat” labor wages are reported, management compensation usually is not. Especially when workers are asked to make concessions, no coverage is typically given to management salaries, bonuses, and other perquisites.
- 4) The [effects of a strike] on the economy and public convenience are emphasized to the detriment on in-depth coverage on the cause(s) of the strike. Striking workers are thus portrayed as indifferent to the interests of the public’s well being.
- 5) Reports fail to consider the impact on the workers if they were to give up the strike and accept management’s terms.
- 6) Instances of union solidarity and broader public support are rarely covered, eliminating the class dimension of a strike.
- 7) Governmental agencies are cast as neutral entities upholding the public interest, yet the president, courts, and police often act to force workers back into production, protect corporate property, or guard strikebreakers.⁵⁸

Expanding these findings by looking specifically at times of conflict, Christopher Martin identified five additional frames that dominated labor stories:

- 1) The consumer is king
- 2) The process of production is none of the public’s business
- 3) The economy is driven by great business leaders and entrepreneurs
- 4) The work place is a meritocracy
- 5) Collective economic action is bad.⁵⁹

Martin concluded, “The ultimate outcome of the news media’s consumer oriented framing of labor stories is that the news is often severely critical of labor’s actions and enthusiastically supportive of capital’s actions.”⁶⁰ Martin’s conclusion suggests that the news media is more interested in selling a story than reporting neutral facts, and his study explains the media’s tendency to produce “stories that shape and reflect our culture’s *commonsense ideas about labor, management, and capital*” [emphasis added].⁶¹

Furthermore, Hayg Oshagan and Martin found that during a dispute between GM and the UAW, “The frames used to explain stories were more positive for management.”⁶² In their study, there was a high consistency among the newspaper’s framing of each story. In each of the newspapers, GM’s position was favored.

Finally, by applying a quantitative method that assessed multiple newspapers over a ten year period, Bruno verified labor's claim that it gets bad press.⁶³ Perhaps more importantly, however, Diane Schmidt found that public attitudes about labor unions are influenced by media coverage of union activities.⁶⁴ Francis Flynn supported this finding by proclaiming, "No news is good news."⁶⁵ In sum, then, research on media coverage of labor unions suggests that 1) labor news does not get reported very often, 2) when labor stories are reported, unions are framed in a negative way, centered on conflict and corruption, and 3) union framing affects public opinion. These conclusions provide an initial framework with which to begin exploring SMP as a memory place, seeking to understand how SMP perhaps responds to these generalizations and how memory of the UAW is framed there.

METHODOLOGY

In this thesis I explore SMP as an "experiential landscape." Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki outline an approach for looking at memorials as experiential landscapes "based on three interlocking principles": the diffuseness of text, the significance of the cognitive landscape, and the constitution of particular subject positions.⁶⁶

First, they argue:

memorials are better conceptualized and treated as diffuse texts than as discrete texts. "A discrete text is," according to Barry Brummett, "one with clear boundaries in time and space. A diffuse text is one with a perimeter that is not so clear, one that is mixed up with other signs." Whereas traditional objects of rhetorical study such as public speeches have relatively clear beginnings and endings, historical and cultural sites are part of the texture of larger landscapes.⁶⁷

A diffuse text assumes that a memory place exists within a larger physical space that must also be taken into consideration as part of the object of study. Viewing SMP as a diffuse text allows me to move beyond what the designers of the park may have originally intended. Instead, it allows me to focus on “how visitors experience, understand, and use actual spaces.”⁶⁸ This becomes important since the intentions of the author (sculptor or park designer) can become convoluted with the multiple interpretations available while experiencing SMP and the multiple designers involved in its creation. Second, Dickinson et al. consider the “cognitive landscape,” sometimes referred to as a “dreamscape.” They argue, “Experience of a particular place comprises not just the tangible materials available in that place, but also the full range of memorized images that persons bring with them.”⁶⁹ Cognitive landscapes also are informed by knowledge of the subject at hand. Finally, they explain, “Experiential landscapes invite visitors to assume (to occupy) particular subject positions. These subject positions, in turn, literally shape perceptions; that is, they entail certain ways of looking and exclude others.”⁷⁰

SMP is particularly well suited to be assessed as an experiential landscape because of its construction of public memory in the public sphere for a targeted, counterpublic audience. One of the most striking aspects of SMP is its distinct location. Hidden behind the UAW’s headquarters, the park is not likely to be found accidentally. The most likely way a visitor would stumble upon SMP is if they were a union member going to visit their headquarters, and even then, unless said member were to walk around to the back of the building, s/he would not see the park. With most visitors to the park

being members or friends of the UAW, they bring preconceived notions and feelings, backed by knowledge of the UAW and the importance of the strike.

Furthermore, viewing SMP as an experiential landscape requires special consideration of the audience/visitor. Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki explain: “Rhetoric’s concern with textual invitations therefore turns our attention to the *ways* material sites engage audiences in compelling historical narratives.”⁷¹ SMP is a union text made for a union audience, therefore, visitors to the park play a very crucial role in the way it is interpreted or recollected. The monuments inside the park are embedded with signals designed to frame the symbolic act of striking in ways that are specific to a union member.

The numerous monuments and artifacts located within the park also constitute SMP as a diffuse text and experiential landscape. Although there is no “correct” interpretation of the various monuments and visitors to the park are allowed the ability to make their own meaning of the memorials, the memories carried by the monuments are coded in context for preferred meanings. Consequently, Blair et al. tell critics analyzing public memorials, the “goal is not to locate *the* message but the multiple, frequently competing, messages.”⁷² Viewing SMP as an experiential landscape uncovers multiple competing messages.

In their assessment of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Blair et al. explain:

To approach the monument as an inclusive text is to recognize its peculiar character as two monuments contained in one. . .To treat them as separable is to neglect the Memorial’s character as culturally constituted and to overlook its nature as itself a political compromise.⁷³

The same is also true for SMP; it must be treated as a whole instead of looking separately at its parts in order to uncover the “multiple, frequently competing, messages” that are especially prevalent between the 2003 and 2009 monument, and between the park as a whole and the plant across the street. Due to the richness of the text, the goal here is to uncover only some of the multiple interpretations available when “(re)constructing” the park.

As previously noted, the first research question this project addresses is, “How does SMP battle media stereotypes and function as a building ground for union solidarity, establishing itself as a counterpublic space, in a time of union disdain? Or, more specifically, “How does SMP construct a UAW member’s identity?” To assess this dimension of SMP’s rhetorical function, I analyze the history of the UAW in Flint along with the growth and development of SMP. I take into account things such as where the park is located, how the park is arranged, how a visitor engages with statues, monuments, and the park as a whole, and the written text of headings and descriptions of the various achievements and artifacts located within the park that invite a certain way of looking at the strike. I also take into account specific UAW rhetoric located on their website and in their weekly magazine, *Solidarity*, which re-appears in SMP. One of the goals here is to determine how the park’s experiential landscape constructs a UAW member’s identity in response to the generalizations and stereotypes put forth by the media as established in the literature review.

My second research question asks, “How does SMP represent female gender roles and, more specifically, what kind of agency is attributed to women as members of the UAW in this counterpublic space?” In order to answer this question, I pay special

attention to the monument as it existed in 2003 and compare and contrast it with the addition of the 2009 women's monument. This analysis assesses the statues that make up the 2003 and 2009 monuments as well as looking at the memorial and the park as a whole. It also assesses the ways in which the various statues are situated in relation to each other and within the park. My analysis takes into account the narrative suggested by inscriptions on plaques located within the park, photos of the memorials and of the sit-down strike, newspaper articles, and historical texts that could impact the cognitive landscape of a visitor to SMP.

In addition to evaluating photos of SMP and news reports about its development, my overall analysis is informed by my own, first-hand experience of the park as an experiential landscape. During the developmental stages of this project, I made multiple visits to the park, most recently in March 2011. During each visit to the park, I spent time taking exhaustive notes and photographs. I also spent time being a quiet observer, either sitting in the parking lot or in the grass off to the side, carefully observing how other visitors engaged with the monuments and where they spent the most amount of their time. Furthermore, I have personal experience with this park from growing up in Flint, Michigan. I have witnessed, first-hand, the rhetoric from a union and management perspective. In various points throughout this thesis, I employ a first-hand account of my experiences with SMP as well as being cognizant of how others may experience the park differently.

To remove myself from this analysis and take an "objective" approach to studying SMP would be a disservice to others who visit the park and legitimate some views while ignoring others.⁷⁴ First, not everyone experiences memory places in the same way.

Second, Blair argues that “rhetoric of all kinds act on the whole person—body as well as mind—and often on the person situated in a community of other persons.”⁷⁵ She goes on to explain that “memorial sites, by their very existence, *create communal spaces*. Although it is possible to describe an individual’s encounter with a site, it is almost always part of a collective experience.”⁷⁶ As such, just by visiting SMP the text acts on me, and my own personal experience within the park can be seen as part of a collective experience that this study seeks to explore.⁷⁷ Furthermore, it is important for me to have visited and explored the park to have credibility in analyzing it, just as one must also read a speech in order to criticize it.⁷⁸ In doing so, however, I do not wish to take an ethnographic approach to SMP. Although that method could be used to answer similar questions to the ones I have posed here, it would also silence my critical voice on how an audience engages with a unique cultural space.⁷⁹ Instead, while exploring SMP, I am more concerned with the politics of representation within the park when viewed as an experiential landscape.⁸⁰

My methodological approach required me to pay particular attention to how the statues and monuments are situated in relation to one another and the growth and development of the park over time. I also took into account the visual and linguistic framing of the acts depicted within the park and was cognizant of how that has changed over time. I was reflexive in terms of my experiences with the park, including the physical and cognitive landscapes, and I reflected on how other visitors seemed to experience the park while I was there, taking into account the flow of traffic and how each visitor engaged with each monument.

Looking at commemorative artifacts and monuments such as SMP in terms of public memory is important for scholars because it reveals what is valued by communities. Blair et al. describe how monuments function as forms of epideictic rhetoric, explaining that “Commemorative monuments ‘instruct’ their visitors about what is to be valued in the future as well as in the past.”⁸¹ As established by the literature, memory has a rhetorical function; memory serves as an important component in forming a group’s identity, collective, and future. With an in-depth look at SMP, scholars can discover what publics choose to remember, choose to forget, and choose to commemorate about the historical struggle made by the union in 1937. Furthermore, SMP offers unique insight into how labor rhetoric is constructed and framed for a union audience, and more specifically, how memory spaces shape union identity, gender roles within the union, and the symbolic act of striking.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This thesis is organized into five chapters. In this first chapter, I have introduced my research questions, explained the theoretical and methodological framework for my study, and assessed the social and academic significance of this project. In Chapter Two, I provide necessary background information about the strike and the city of Flint, considering both the union’s and management’s perspectives. I also discuss how this strike eventually came to be memorialized by the UAW and the city of Flint.

Chapter Three and Four are the analytical sections of this project where I assess SMP as an experiential landscape and answer my research questions. Chapter Three focuses on how SMP functions as a counterpublic space by renewing a sense of community through memories of the sit-down strike. In Chapter Three, I explore how a

counterpublic space is created by battling media stereotypes and serving as a building ground for union solidarity. Together, these two functions, counter discourse and pro-union components, establish SMP as the materialization of a counterpublic identity. Chapter Four examines representations of female workers within the ever changing landscape of this counterpublic sphere. The purpose of Chapter Four is to examine how agency is constructed for women within this counterpublic space, assessing how gender identity intersects with union identity; this chapter complicates the notion of cohesiveness even within a counterpublic sphere. Chapter Four assesses the changes to the park over time that establishes women as counterpublic agents within this counterpublic space. Together, Chapters Three and Four construct a UAW counterpublic identity and examine the complex female worker component of this identity.

Finally, in Chapter Five I offer my conclusions about the ways in which SMP enlists memories of the Sit-down strike to renew a dying community and inform contemporary gender roles. In concluding my project, I review my chapters and findings, discuss the limitations and areas for future study, and argue for the importance of a comprehensive memory of labor.

NOTES

¹ “The 1936 – 37 Flint, Michigan Sit-Down Strike,” *BBC*, January 28, 2002, www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A672310 (accessed December 23, 2010).

² (Re)constructing this text presents a difficult challenge since the text is constantly changing from year to year. Furthermore, each part of the park was designed by someone different. For instance, the original monument was designed by Janice Trimpe from Detroit, Michigan. Stan Watts from Atlas Bronze in Utah designed the 2009 women’s monument. The brick wall in the women’s monument was built by local unions who donated their time.

³ See for example, Shannon Carty, “UAW Strike in ‘36-37 Changed Workers’ Lives Across USA,” *USA Today*, January 14, 2009, 6B; or see Roland S. Martin, “Unions have to make concessions,” *CNN*, February 19, 2011, http://articles.cnn.com/2011-02-19/opinion/martin.wisconsin_1_health-care-unions-government-employees?s=PM:OPINION (accessed March 3, 2011).

⁴ See for example, Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, eds., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010).

⁵ See for example, Greg Dickinson, “Memories for Sale: Nostalgia and the Construction of Identity in Old Pasadena,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, No. 1 (1997): 2-4. He gives an overview of the rhetorical history of memory by tracing rhetoric, memory, place, and identity back to Classical Greece.

⁶ See for example, Dickinson, “Memories for Sale,” 1-27, or see, Kendall R. Phillips, “The Failure of Memory: Reflections of Rhetoric and Public Remembrance,” *Western Journal of Communication* 74, No. 2 (2010): 208-223. He cites and gives an in-depth look at Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *The Sophist* and Aristotle’s *De Memoria*.

⁷ Phillips, “The Failure of Memory,” 215.

⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹⁰ “Enthymeme,” *American Rhetoric*, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/figures/enthymeme.htm> (accessed December 23, 2010).

¹¹ Barbie Zelizer, “Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies,” *Critical Studies of Mass Communication* 12, No. 2 (1999): 232.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ This societal act can be traced back to the ancients, who often times used architecture and buildings to remember a speech. An orator would place different parts of the speech in different rooms so that when it came time to recall the speech, the orator would mentally walk through the building to piece together the different parts. See Greg Dickinson, “Memories for Sale,” 1-27.

¹⁴ Phillips, “The Failure of Memory,” 217.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

¹⁶ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Berger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989)

¹⁷ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1994), 112.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 113.

²⁰ See, for example, Craig Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1994).

²¹ Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” 115.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 122.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, “Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial*, eds. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³² *Ibid.*, 7.

³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁴ Ibid., 7.

³⁵ See for example, idid., 9. See also, Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

³⁶ Blair et al., “Introduction,” 10.

³⁷ Quoted in Barbie Zelizer, “Exploring Sites of Memory,” *Journal of Communication* 49, No. 4 (2006): 202. Original source: Under the direction of Pierre Nora, ed. By Lawrence Kirtzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 1997, 1998). In this three volume work Piere Nora looks at how French memory is constructed, exploring the various ways the past and present come together.

³⁸ Blair et al., “Introduction,” 27.

³⁹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁴⁰ What I mean by this is that when I refer to Tiger Stadium, I am referring to more than just the physical stadium. I am also referring to the *idea* of Tiger Stadium, a stadium which signifies more than a baseball tradition for me, but also a family tradition. Many times places can refer to political, historical, or ethical ideas, such as, if I were to reference the White House or Rwanda. Additionally, I do not have to ever have visited the Vatican in order to be familiar with what it symbolizes – Since I have never visited the Vatican, this would be an abstract place for me.

⁴¹ To continue my Tiger Stadium example... Tiger Stadium no long exists, it is now Comerica Park. Within Comerica Park, there is a section of the stadium set apart dedicated to Tigers’ Hall of Famers and other Tiger greats. This exhibit would be out of

place if located at Yankee Stadium. As such, Yankee Stadium and nearly every other professional ball park has a place dedicated to their greats; a place within a space, a memorial within a space.

⁴² These examples are only provided to demonstrate some of the important critical claims for this specific project in regards to what constitutes a text and the idea of a counterplace. I do not mean to simplify the study of public memory, space and place, as many authors have debated the materiality and consequentiality of public memory. For additional discussion of the visual and spatial components of public memory and how scholars have complicated the notion of public memory, see for example, Bernard J. Armada, "Memorial Agon: An Interpretive Tour of the National Civil Rights Museum," *Southern Journal of Communication* 63, No. 3 (1998): 325-243; V. William Balthrop, Carole Blair, and Neil Michel, "The presence of the Present: Hijacking 'The Good War'?" *Western Journal of Communication* 74, No. 2 (2010), 170-207; Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "The AIDS Memorial Quilt and the Contemporary Culture of Public Commemoration," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, No 4 (2007): 595-626; Greg Dickinson, "Memories for Sale: Nostalgia and the Construction of Identity in Old Pasadena," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, No. 1 (1997): 1-27; Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott, eds., *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010); Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, No. 1 (2006): 27-47; Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott and Eric Aoki "Memory and Myth at the

Buffalo Bill Museum,” *Western Journal of Communication* 69, No. 2 (2005): 85-108; Victoria J. Gallagher, "Memory and Reconciliation in the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, No. 2 (1999): 303-320; Shawn J. Parry-Giles, and Trevor Parry-Giles, "Collective Memory, Political Nostalgia, and the Rhetorical Presidency: Bill Clinton's Commemoration of the March on Washington, August 28, 1998," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86, No. 4 (2000): 417-437; Brian L. Ott, ed., "Special Issue: Rhetoric and Public Memory," *Western Journal of Communication* 74, No. 2 (2010):127-221; Erin J. Rand, "Repeated Remembrance: Commemorating the AIDS Quilt and Resuscitating the Mourned Subject," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 10, No 1 (2007): 655-680; Barbie Zelizer, "Reading the Past Against the Grain: The Shape of Memory Studies," *Critical Studies of Mass Communication* 12, No. 2 (1999): 214-239; For a discussion on the broader usage of space and place, see for example, Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Karma R. Chávez, "Spatializing Gender Performativity: Ecstasy and Possibilities for Livable Life in the Tragic Case of Victoria Arellano," *Women's Studies in Communication* 33, (2010): 1-15; Greg Dickinson, "Joe's Rhetoric: Finding Authenticity at Starbucks," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, No. 4 (2002): 5-27. For a larger discussion on visual rhetoric, see for example, Wendy Atkins-Sayre, "Articulating Identity: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and the Animal/Human Divide," *Western Journal of Communication* 74, No. 3 (2010): 309-328; Kevin Michael Deluca and Anne Teresa Demo, "Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17, No. 3 (2000): 241-

261; Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁴³ Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson and Enrico Pucci, Jr., “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, No. 3 (1991): 263-288.

⁴⁴ Victoria J. Gallagher and Margaret R. LaWare, “Sparring with Public Memory: The Rhetorical Embodiment of Race, Power, and Conflict in the Monument to Joe Louis,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 105.

⁴⁵ Bernard J. Armada, “Memory’s Execution: Displacing the Dissident Body,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 217. For additional discussion on the experiential landscape see Greg Dickinson et al., “Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, No. 1 (2006): 27-47.

⁴⁶ Armada, “Memory’s Execution,” 216-234.

⁴⁷ See for example, Diane Schmidt, “Public Opinion and Media Coverage of Labor Unions,” *Journal of Labor Research* 14, No. 3 (1993): 151-164.

⁴⁸ Shannon Carty, “UAW Strike in ’36-37 Changed Workers’ Lives Across USA,” *USA Today*. January 14, 2009. Money Sec., 6B.

⁴⁹ See for example, Robert Bruno, "Evidence of Bias in the *Chicago Tribune* Coverage of Organized Labor: A Quantitative Study from 1991-2001," *Labor Studies Journal* 34, No. 3 (2009): 385-407.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁵¹ Paul Hartmann, "Industrial Relations in the News Media," *Industrial Relations Journal* 6, No. 4 (1975/6): 4-18.

⁵² Quoted in Geoff Walsh, "Trade Unions and the Media," *International Labour Review* 127, No. 2 (1988): 209.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁵⁴ William Serrin, "The Vanishing Labor Beat," in *The New Labor Press: Journalism for a Changing Union Movement*, ed. Sam Pizzigati and Fred Solowey (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1993), 15.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁶ See for example, Bruno, "Evidence of Bias," 385-407.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Christopher Martin, *Framed! Labor and the Corporate Media* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2004), 12-13. Original source: William J. Puette, *Through Jaundiced Eyes: How the Media View Organized Labor* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1992).

⁵⁸ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 12. Original source: Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 84-86.

⁵⁹ Martin, *Framed*, 8-9.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶² Hayg Oshagan and Christopher Martin, "Coverage of Labor and Management in the Willow Run Assembly Plant Shut Down," *Labor Studies Journal* 23, No. 4 (1999): 28.

⁶³ Bruno, "Evidence of Bias," 385-407.

⁶⁴ Schmidt, "Public Opinion," 151-164; See also, Paul Jarley and Sarosh Kuruvilla, "American Trade Unions and Public Approval: Can Unions Please All of the People All of the Time?" *Journal of Labor Research* 15, No. 2 (1994): 98-103.

⁶⁵ Francis Flynn, "No News Is Good News: The Relationship between Media Attention and Strike Duration," *Industrial Relations* 39, No. 1 (2000): 139-160.

⁶⁶ Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Spaces of Remembering and Forgetting: The Reverent Eye/I at the Plains Indian Museum," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 3, No. 1 (2006): 29

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 30.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum," *Western Journal of Communication* 69, No. 2 (2005): 89

⁷² Blair et al., "Public Memorializing," 608.

⁷³ Ibid., 611.

⁷⁴ As noted earlier, Blair et al. tell critics analyzing public memorials that the “goal is not to locate *the* message but the multiple, frequently competing, messages.” Blair et al., “Public Memorializing,” 608.

⁷⁵ Carole Blair, “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites as Exemplars of Rhetoric’s Materiality,” in *Rhetorical Bodies*, ed. Jack Selzer and Sharon Crowley (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 46.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 48

⁷⁷ Memory places are destinations which require a personal physical (the act of driving) and cognitive (the choice to go) act just to arrive at. As Carole Blair argues, “To make the effort to identify and reach a particular destination implies that there is something special about that place.” Carole Blair, “Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places,” *Western Journal of Communication* 65, No. 3 (2001): 275. See also, Blair, “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites,” 16-57. Once arriving at a memory place, it acts on the entire person in the most simplistic ways by regulating the flow of traffic and recalling particular memories.

⁷⁸ See Blair, “Reflections on Criticism,” 276.

⁷⁹ See Dickinson, “Memories for Sale,” footnote 24 and 25. He cites John Fiske who argues for “two, related, methods for analyzing popular culture- -ethnographic and textual. Ethnographic studies provide ‘texts’ of what users make of popular culture phenomena. Textual analysis on the other hand, focuses on a close analysis of the phenomena themselves while recognizing that ‘the signifiers exist not in the text itself, but extra textually, in the myths, countermyths and ideologies of their culture. It

recognizes that the distribution of power in society is paralleled by the distribution of meanings in texts, and that struggles for social power are paralleled by semiotic struggles for meaning.” Dickinson argues that an ethnographic approach would “force [him] to ignore the equally legitimate critical analysis of the spatial structures that encourage whatever audience response may be uncovered.”

⁸⁰ Blair poses questions such as, “To what extent *does* influence depend on conscious recognition on the part of an audience?” Blair, “Reflections on Criticism,” 277. . . She also distinguishes between “dominant” readings and “preferred” readings. In doing so, she uses the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial (The Gateway Arch) as an example where visitors’ reactions do not align with the “Park Service interpretations or with sympathetic critical readings.” Blair, “Reflections on Criticism,” 284.

⁸¹ Blair et al., “Public Memorializing,” 602.

CHAPTER TWO:

A VEHICLE CITY, THE STRIKE, AND SITDOWNERS MEMORIAL PARK

On December 30, 1936 workers at a General Motors manufacturing plant in Flint, Michigan refused to leave at the end of their shift and began initiating what Sidney Fine called, “The most significant American labor conflict in the twentieth century.”¹ This 44-day strike marked the beginning of a labor movement that was “heard around the world.”² Although the UAW was formed in 1935 by the American Federation of Labor, they were not formally recognized by General Motors until the end of this strike on February 11, 1937. In this chapter, I provide background information, explaining the rhetorical and historical context for events that ultimately would be memorialized in SMP.

A VEHICLE CITY

In 1903, Flint had a population of around 14,000 and was primarily a carriage building town. In 1908, however, under the direction of William Carpo Durant, General Motors was formed and made Flint its headquarters. By 1910, the population in Flint increased to 38,550. By 1920, Flint grew to 91,599, and by 1930 Flint had a population of 156,492. The expansion of Flint’s population corresponded to the growth and development of General Motors.³ Fine explains this important connection between the corporation, the town, and the strike. He notes:

Although the GM strike of 1936-37 involved GM plants and workers across the land, the vital center of the conflict was Flint, Michigan, the principal seat of GM's power. Flint was to the nation's leading automobile producer what Pittsburgh was to steel, Akron to rubber, and Minneapolis to milling.⁴

Factories were spread throughout the town. Buick City took up 235 acres on the city's north side and provided up to nine million square feet of floor space. The Chevrolet Plant No. 4, part of a larger Chevy complex known as "Chevy in the Hole," took up 130 acres on the city's west side. Fisher Body No. 2 stood near Chevy No. 4. Fisher Body No. 1 was located on the south side of city and was, at the time of the strike, the largest manufacturing plant in the world. On the east side of the city was AC Spark Plug. Fine explains that these plants employed 47, 247 Flint residents as of December 1936, which made up two thirds of Flint's entire workforce. As a result, "It was estimated that 80 percent of Flint's families were dependent on GM's payroll."⁵

With this population boom, the growth of an industry, and a town dependent on a company, also came a separation of social classes. Martha Grevatt explains that "housing construction didn't keep up with population growth; many autoworkers lived in tar paper shacks without indoor plumbing and others were forced to rent from GM."⁶ Fine elaborates on this scenario, describing the ways in which "public services in Flint failed to keep pace with a rapidly growing population."⁷ Furthermore, the Historical Voices website explains that during the winter of 1936, workers at General Motors "averaged about a tenth grade education, came from poor families, and consisted of many Southerners and Eastern European immigrants."⁸ Workers at GM came from different cultural backgrounds, looked physically different, and spoke different languages. The only thing they really had in common was that they all worked at GM.

GM, on the other hand, was the richest, largest, and most powerful industrial corporation in the world. As Grevatt explains,

In 1936, 43 percent of the U.S. automobile industry belonged to General Motors. Its profits for that year totaled nearly \$284 million.⁹ Its assets—including 69 plants in 35 states—were valued at \$1.5 billion.¹⁰ The company had 37 percent of the worldwide car and truck market.¹¹ GM President Alfred P. Sloan was the highest paid executive in the country.¹²

Fine goes on to explain this separation between the workers and the corporation, noting some of the serious implications. Fine states:

The establishment in Flint was dominated by GM. Its top executives and their wives, along with members of some of the old automobile era families, formed the upper crust of Flint society, and the company's influence radiated throughout the community . . . The Flint *Journal* [the city's only daily newspaper] was not inclined to print anything that might offend the most powerful business in the city and the newspaper's principal advertiser. There was no doubt where the *Journal's* sympathy would lie in any conflict between the union and the corporation.¹³

As such, this is a classic David vs. Goliath story.

THE LEAD UP

In 1914, when Henry Ford implemented the five-dollar work day for his Ford Motor Company, he noted that “a low wage business is always insecure . . .”¹⁴ Long before the GM sit-down strike was even conceived, Ford was aware of the importance of a happy worker, and pay was (is) an important factor for a happy worker. At GM, however, sit-down striker Andrew Harvilla explains in his own words that, “Pay was not equal see, we all done the same work handled the same materials but it was just, not equal . . . If you hired in today you started from the bottom. At twenty-six cents an hour on up till you got up to the top”¹⁵

Wages, however, were not the only grievance GM workers had—working conditions were also a primary concern. A common complaint from many workers was the “speed-up” process. Fine explains:

The speed-up meant different things to different automobile workers. It was the inexorable speed and the “coerced rhythms” of the assembly line, an insufficient number of relief men on the line, the production standards set for individual machines, the foreman holding a stop watch over the worker or urging more speed, the pace set by the “lead man” or straw boss on a non-line operation, and incentive pay systems that encouraged the employee to increase his output.¹⁶

One worker even noted that “the only difference he could discern between a penitentiary and the GM plant in which he worked was that the GM worker could go home at night.”¹⁷

Sit-down striker Louis Ganscos explains further:

As I look back on it now, it doesn’t seem like wages was a primary cause for the strike, working conditions, things that today a person working wouldn’t be aware of, couldn’t even understand. For example: we had no seniority, no fringe benefits what so ever and the boss, well, he was the boss, uh . . . what he said went and there was no questions and uh . . . while there were some bosses who were more humane than other, just like all people anywhere—the general characteristics of people came out, their selfishness, working for themselves . . .¹⁸

On the other hand, General Motors argued they could not afford higher wages and still be competitive in a global economy where other countries had few workers’ rights. Furthermore, as Grevatt explains, “GM would tout their claim that wages were high—\$1,500 a year. The United Auto Workers disputed those figures, citing the irregularity of the work.”¹⁹ Both sides were arguing for what they thought was ultimately good for themselves and good for society at the same time. Up until the strike, however, because GM was in a position of power, the company was able to suppress the workers’ voices and their demands for increased compensation and equitable treatment.

Despite the harsh conditions of the plant and arguably low pay, working on the line at GM was a job that many needed in depression-era Flint. These factors also made Flint a prime spot for union organization. The Historical Voices audio gallery explains:

Working on the line at General Motors in Flint was a job many men needed desperately in the 1930's, but it was also tremendously difficult. Terrible working conditions, combined with unfair and devious payroll practices, made the auto plants of Depression-era Flint into ripe locations for union organization. Strikes had been attempted in Flint in 1930 and 1934, but had been viciously broken up by company stooges and the Flint police force. In 1935 Congress passed the Wagner Act, which legalized strikes and invigorated the new Congress of Industrial Organizations under the leadership of John L. Lewis.²⁰

This act, under the New Deal of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, helped lead to the formation of the United Auto Workers in 1935 with the help of “outside agitators” (as strike opposition leaders called them), although they were not formally recognized until the end of the GM sit-down strike on February 11, 1937.²¹

For this strike to have been successful, however, much had to happen leading up to it, including some preliminary “quickie strikes.” For instance, Fine explains, “The most significant of the Fisher Body strikes in the pre-New deal era, and one that was not without some relationship to the GM sit-down strike, occurred in July, 1930, among workers in Flint Fisher Body No. 1 plant, the most important plant involved in the 1937 strike.”²² During this strike, workers walked out and staged a picket line. In doing so, the local police retaliated and used large hoses to break up the line and arrested strike leaders. Fine explains, “Several of the workers later involved in the GM sit-down strike received a demonstration in the 1930 Fisher Body strike of what a strike on the outside might mean in a city where company and municipal authorities were so closely allied.”²³

Learning from this lesson, on November 13, 1936, the UAW won their first battle with GM. This came when three workers at Fisher Body No. 1 staged a “quickie sit-down.”²⁴ As Fine explains, when three welders who participated in this sit-down returned to work

they were informed that they were to be dismissed for their behavior. The news of this decision, coupled with the apparent intention of the plant superintendent to dismiss a unionist who protested the firing of his fellow workers, led Simons [a union leader] to order a shutdown of the key body-in-white department, of which he was the steward. This resulted in the idling of seven hundred men. Hoping to secure a quick resumption of work, the plant manager, Evan J. Parker, agreed to meet a committee headed by Simons.²⁵

The outcome of this meeting reinstated the three dismissed workers and GM agreed to pay the sit-downers their regular wage for the time of inactivity. This clear cut victory for the strikers instilled confidence in workers throughout the plant and throughout Flint. Furthermore, it was the first sign of the possibility for a strong UAW in Flint. This confidence came to play a major role in the endurance workers showed in the GM sit-down strike that occurred a little over a month later.

THE STRIKE

On November 18, 1936 workers at a Fisher Body plant in Atlanta Georgia went on strike; on December 16, two plants in Kansas City went on strike; on December 28, a Fisher plant in Cleveland, Ohio went on strike; and on December 30, 1936 when workers on the night shift at the Fisher Body No. 1 plant in Flint returned from their lunch to learn that dies, tools used to stamp out body parts, were being snuck out of the plant and shipped to plants with non-union workers, the UAW decided to strike there too. However, strikes in Michigan were illegal at the time, so the UAW decided to employ a tactic known as the sit-down (the legality of this strike is still a hotly debated issue). The

theory of the sit-down was for workers to physically occupy the plant and disrupt the production process, therefore stopping the flow of money in order to gain attention from the company. If the workers only picketed outside, there was no way to prevent non-union workers or management from continuing production without them, and since the nation had just emerged from the Great Depression, it was easy for General Motors to replace workers who were unhappy with a worker who needed a job.²⁶ Furthermore, if the workers were to move outside they would have been arrested. If, on the other hand, General Motors were to physically come into the plant and remove them, GM would have been seen as the aggressor. Although the sit-down was not invented in Flint, Michigan, it was a tactic that proved to be effective elsewhere and the union was well aware of its potential from previous “quickies,” such as the one in Fisher Body No. 1 on November 13.²⁷

While taking over Fisher Body No. 1 was the ultimate goal of the UAW because it provided most of the necessary parts for other GM plants across the nation to continue their production process, the union did not stop there. The day after Fisher Body No. 1 was taken, Fisher Body No. 2. was also taken over by sit-downers. It was here in No. 2, however, that the sit-downers met their first big challenge. On January 11, 1937, in an attempt to force the strikers out of the plants, General Motors turned off all heat and hot water in an attempt to force the strikers out. In freezing temperatures, the situation then took a turn for the worse when plant guards refused to allow food inside the plant. To remedy this, the strikers then tried to get food by using a ladder through a second story window, but the ladder was soon confiscated by plant guards. When the guards finally blocked the gates into and out of the plant, police in riot gear surrounded the plant and a

riot ensued.²⁸ This night was soon remembered as the “Battle of Bulls Run” or “Battle of Running Bulls” because, as the story goes, according to an unknown striker, “I never saw cops run so fast.”²⁹

This battle has since turned into a hotly debated issue—a blame game where GM denies any involvement and where the UAW blames GM as instigator even though they are unable to prove a “definite connection” between GM and the actions of the police.

Fine explains:

The actual physical combat, as GM accurately pointed out, was between the city police and the strikers, not the company guards and the strikers; but it is difficult to believe that, in a city in which corporation and law enforcement were so closely linked, the police would have undertaken an action that could conceivably have resulted in serious damage to the corporation’s property without first consulting responsible GM officials. Although there was a substantial degree of sympathy in Flint for the GM position in the strike, “popular opinion,” as *Business Week* pointed out, blamed the corporation for having permitted the violence to develop.³⁰

At the end of it all, Fine explains, “Fourteen strikers and strike sympathizers were wounded in the attack on the plant, thirteen of them by gunshot . . . nine policeman . . . and a deputy sheriff were also injured in the affray.”³¹

The union, realizing that odds were still stacked against them, knew they had to make another bold move if this strike were to prove successful overall. After careful planning, they decided to take Chevy Plant No. 4 on February 1, 1937. However, realizing that company spies were prevalent among the sit-downers, they leaked the takeover of Chevy Plant No. 9. When General Motors caught word of another plant being occupied, they sent all plant guards and the city police to Chevy No. 9, leaving Chevy No. 4 ripe for the taking. As a result, another riot ensued at Chevy No. 9 while President

Roosevelt called on the National Guard to protect workers at Chevy No. 4 and to stop the bloodshed.³²

On February 11, 1937, after many negotiations between John L. Lewis, the representative speaking for the UAW, Michigan Governor Frank Murphy, and representatives from GM, a deal was struck between the UAW and GM, and the workers who had been occupying plants for 44-cold-days and nights walked out victorious.³³ The immediate effect of this strike was tremendous. The victory of this strike sparked waves of other strikes across the country where other, smaller corporations also gave in to their workers and granted them better working conditions, higher wages and a comprehensive contract. As Grevatt explains:

The huge wave of copycat sit-downs following the Flint showdown involved at least half a million workers from all walks of life. Some 477 sit-downs are recorded for 1937, a tenfold increase over 1936, and there were many unrecorded "quickies." There were many more in auto, including a 31-day sit-down at Chrysler, but the largest number, 80, was in the multinational and female-dominated textile industry. Workers in hospitals, restaurants, department stores, cigar factories and bakeries, and even prisoner-workers sat down. "Sitting down," a Detroit News reporter remarked, "has replaced baseball as the national pastime."³⁴

She goes on to explain,

Over 4,700 strikes occurred that year. Many labor leaders also worked with and helped form civil rights organizations of the oppressed, including the National Negro Congress, Committee for the Protection of Filipino Rights, American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, and El Congreso de los Pueblos de Habla Español (Congress of Spanish-speaking People).³⁵

As such, this strike was not just a victory for the United Auto Workers; it was a victory for working people everywhere.

OUTCOMES

Ultimately, the largest achievement of this strike was the contract which resulted and appeared in *The New York Times* on February 12, 1937. In it, General Motors agreed to 1) recognize the UAW, the union responsible for the strike, as the sole collective bargaining agent for its members, 2) not to bargain on “matters of general corporate policy” with any other group other than the UAW, 3) not to discriminate against any member of the UAW, 4) to drop charges against the sit-down strikers, 5) to return all employees to their usual work without prejudice, and 6) to resume full operations as soon as possible. The UAW also agreed to 1) call off the strike and evacuate all occupied plants, 2) refrain from intimidation or coercion in an attempt to gain new members, 3) refrain from recruiting on company property, 4) “exhaust every possibility of negotiating grievances before any other strike”, and 5) refrain from calling another strike or interfering with the production process in any way.³⁶ Additionally, each side agreed to begin collective bargaining negotiations regarding “wages, hours, production ‘speed up’ and other working conditions.”³⁷ A previous announcement stated that General Motors agreed to raise wages five cents per hour at a normal annual cost of \$25,000,000.³⁸

The results of this strike are thus two-fold. As Harley Shaiken, a labor studies professor at University of California—Berkeley points out, dignity and pride was won by the workers through a comprehensive contract and our democracy was strengthened through an independent labor movement which is necessary as part of America’s system of checks and balances.³⁹ It is also interesting to point out that this was not just a victory for the UAW; it was also a victory for General Motors who seemingly lost in the short run but ultimately won, too, in the long run. A lasting legacy of the Flint sit-down strike

is its contribution to the growth of the middle class in America. With their new contracts, workers finally had the ability to purchase what they were making and a consumer society was born, making GM even more profitable than it already was. Finally, Fine argues:

the GM strike was the beginning of a brief period in the history of the American labor movement when workers saw themselves, or at least were so seen by liberal reformers, as seeking not just to better their own condition but also to better the nation, a movement when group interest and the national interest seemed to merge, when the union was not just another organization but was a “social and moral force.” In this sense, too, the labor upheaval of the 1930’s suggests the civil-rights movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s at its height.⁴⁰

ROLE OF WOMEN

It is important to note the significant role that women played in the success of these battles and of the strike as a whole, as many agree the strike and thus the larger American labor movement would not have been possible without them.⁴¹ Grevatt explains, “Over 300 women sat down initially, but the male United Auto Workers’ leadership did not allow them to stay inside the plants. Nevertheless, women were absolutely indispensable.”⁴² It is argued this was a decision made by the UAW as a precautionary measure to protect their image, worrying that GM would exploit the presence of women in the same living quarters as men; this would discredit the UAW’s efforts in the eyes of the public.⁴³ Some women did not object to leaving the sit-in and “preferred to leave the plants to attend to their domestic responsibilities.”⁴⁴ Others, however, felt differently. Historian Nancy Gabin tells the story of one such worker, Patricia Wiseman:

Patricia Wiseman, who had been employed in the Fisher 1 plant in Flint, Michigan, for six years at the time of the GM sit-down strike, indicated her resentment at being excluded from the plant. Asserting that her proper place was with the workers inside the plant, not in the strike kitchen, Wiseman refused to

assist with food preparation and instead assumed daily picket duty outside the plant. When a male picketer taunted her for such unfeminine behavior, Wiseman reported, “you’re getting fifteen dollars a week more than I am for the same number of hours and I’ll be damned if I don’t work as hard as you do!”⁴⁵

The role that Patricia Wiseman and others assumed was crucial to the success of the strike. These brave women took the front lines against city police during the riots and when tear gas was fired into the plants, it was the women who broke the windows, with the clubs they were using to battle, allowing the gas to escape. Another key role women played throughout the strike was delivering food to workers inside the plant and providing moral support. The Historical Voices audio gallery further explains this role, stating:

In both of the major battles of the strike, women played a key role in the union's successes. From the beginning, a large number of non-working women refused to sit on the sidelines while the strike was going on. Instead, they formed the Women's Auxiliary, which visited the homes of sit-downers to convince their wives that the strike was worth the sacrifice they were experiencing. Later, a smaller group formed the Women's Emergency Brigade, which took the front lines on several occasions against the police and company "goons." Many of these women even enlisted their children in picket duty and ended up giving them an education they could not have received in Flint's schools.⁴⁶

Without the efforts of these strong women, it is very likely the men could not have succeeded. Although it was the men who sat down inside the plant, their efforts would likely have been defeated had it not been for the role women played in supporting them outside the plant.

Still, after the strike, the role of women within the UAW was uncertain. At the 1937 convention of the UAW, delegates deliberated on the role of working women within their union. Katherine Willk, challenged her fellow delegates saying:

I am speaking and demanding and pleading for the women of the labor movement . . . I notice and everyone else knows, that there has been a great error made.

There are women who have been very active in the labor movement and as we all know we haven't even a woman on the Executive Board.⁴⁷

Gabin explains, "Wilk did not demand that the UAW challenge sexual inequality in the auto industry. Rather, she emphasized the shared concerns of all auto workers regardless of sex and asked only that the union recognize and respect women for their dedication to unionism."⁴⁸ Today, this plea from Wilk does not seem like much to ask. However, Gabin explains how, historically, manufacturing and the labor movement have been represented as masculine. In her book, Gabin explores this relationship between women and the UAW to the "male dominated and male-oriented labor movement."

Within this male dominated world of labor, the UAW has been highly regarded as one of the most liberal, progressive, and accepting organizations of women in the United States. Gabin explains, "Despite the male dominance and to a certain extent the male orientation of the UAW, however, women's activism and union efforts in behalf of women have long been hallmarks of the history of women and the union."⁴⁹ For instance, the UAW's Women's Department was established in 1944; an amendment to the UAW constitution in 1962 "mandated the organization of women's committees at the local union level"; in 1966, "two UAW leaders were founders of the National Organization for Women"; in 1970, UAW vice president Olga Madar, "served as the first president of the Coalition of Labor Union Women"; this was also the year that the UAW "became the first union in the nation to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment."⁵⁰ This progressive history of the UAW contributes to an important aspect of the American feminist movement as well as the American labor movement.

Despite this progressiveness of women in the UAW, however, Gabin argues:

Like the record of organized labor generally, the UAW's record in regard to women was decidedly mixed. On the one hand, the UAW tended to marginalize women in the union hall and on the shop floor, denying them equal access to positions of leadership and power within the organization, never making gender equality a central demand of its collective-bargaining agenda, and at times asserting the interests of the male majority at the expense of women auto workers . . . On the other hand, however, the UAW acknowledged the problem of sexual discrimination in employment early in its history, institutionalized an advocate for women within the union structure in the middle 1940s, and already had made some important collective bargaining gains in the interest of gender equity by the time the civil rights and feminist movements began to legitimize the principle of equality in the labor market in the 1960s.⁵¹

Although progressive social reforms over the years have made things easier (but still not easy) for women in the workplace, today all members of the UAW face many challenges in a struggling industry.

FLINT AND GM TODAY

Throughout the 1940's and 1950's GM continued to open and build more plants in Flint while the city and company continued to grow and make profit. This growth of GM brought many jobs and a booming economy to Flint, making it one of the more attractive places to live in the United States by the 1970's. This success did not come without a cost, however. By the 1980's GM's continued success did not seem as certain with the rise in foreign automobile competition, the nation coming out of an oil crisis, and the American economy entering into a recession.⁵² As such, GM began to cut jobs nationwide, gradually moving jobs away from Flint to Mexico and Asia where workers did not demand the same wages as the UAW. With this job migration and a globalized economy came the collapse of a city.

The collapse began in the early 1980's and it is continuing today. As far as the plants that were around at the time of the sit-down strike are concerned, Fisher Body No. 1 was closed in 1987 after being repurposed multiple times and was finally demolished in 1988, although parts of it were turned into commercial space. The remaining property was left as vacant land. Fisher Body No. 2 was closed in 1970 and Chevy No. 4 in 1984, but by 1995 "Chevy in the Hole," which consisted of over 20 buildings at one time, began to disappear. Parts of it were donated to a local university, but by 2004 the last remaining building was demolished and most of it, 103 acres, was turned into a vacant concrete landscape (see Figure 1). Finally, Buick City began to close its doors in 1999 and the demolition process began. By 2006 it was completely demolished and turned into an empty parking lot (see Figure 2). At its height, it alone provided 28,000 of the 100,000 GM jobs in Flint.⁵³ There have since been talks of repurposing the vacant lots of Chevy in the Hole and Buick City, although nothing has been approved.⁵⁴



(Figure 1 – Chevy in the Hole. Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)



(Figure 2 – 235 acre empty lot which was once Buick City.
Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

The closings of these plants brought Flint notoriety, again, in 1989 with the release of Michael Moore's film *Roger and Me*, which documents the "American Dream gone awry."⁵⁵ In the Film, Moore highlights the struggles of the community. He explains:

Like a modern-day version of the "Grapes of Wrath," the situation seems hopeless—and the scenes from Flint are startling:

- 20,000 people standing in line at one location to collect federal surplus cheese and butter;
- Large sections of the city filled with abandoned homes and boarded up stores, looking more like a war zone than an American town;
- 28,000 people who have lost their homes and their life savings and have packed up and headed south in search of work;
- The social cost of 25% unemployment: record rates of suicide, spousal abuse, alcoholism, and, surpassing Miami and Detroit as the city with the highest rate of violent crime.

These are a few of the results of General Motors laying off 40,000 people in Flint in the past nine years. It is expected that GM will eliminate another 10,000 Flint jobs in the next few years. 50% of Flint's GM workforce will have been abolished by 1989, an event of unprecedented proportion in American history . . . Yet, since 1983, car sales have steadily risen and GM has posted record profits of nearly \$19 billion.⁵⁶

By 2008, the situation in Flint did not look better, although the situation for GM changed drastically. After recent years of company losses accumulating in \$172.81

billion in debt and \$82.29 billion in assets, and several restructuring attempts through 2008 and 2009, on June 1, 2009 GM announced that it would be filing chapter 11 bankruptcy.⁵⁷ As part of the bankruptcy, GM would borrow “\$30 billion of additional financial assistance from the Treasury Department and \$9.5 billion from Canada. That’s on top of about \$20 billion in taxpayer money GM already ha[d] received in the form of low-interest loans.”⁵⁸ In borrowing this money, GM agreed to restructure for “long term viability.”⁵⁹ An immediate part of this restructuring plan involved permanently closing nine plants nationwide and idling three others. Seven other plants were announced to be closed in the next year, cutting 21,000 employees in all. Additionally, GM announced that it would move forward with only four brands, Chevrolet, Cadillac, Buick, and GMC, while cutting four others, and close 2,600 dealerships.⁶⁰ On July 10, 2009 GM emerged from bankruptcy restructuring and once again went public.⁶¹ Finally, on April 21, 2010, GM repaid 8.1 billion dollars in loan money five years ahead of schedule,⁶² and on May 17, 2010 announced its first profit since 2007.⁶³ GM has continued to grow and make profit since restructuring, announcing on February 24, 2011 its highest profit since 1999,⁶⁴ and further announcing on May 5, 2011 a \$3.2 billion first quarter profit.⁶⁵

Although GM was able to restructure and seemingly come out on top, at least for now, the same cannot be said for Flint. Today, Flint is home to 105,000 residents and the only GM UAW jobs left in the area are located at Flint Assembly, a truck plant built in 1947 and located across the street from SMP, and small parts of the Flint East complex, where the AC Spark Plug building (closed in 1976) was located during the time of the strike. Together, these sites and two others just outside the city limits (five total) employ

roughly 7,800 residents in the Flint area while GM employs approximately 209,000 world-wide.⁶⁶

The significant loss of GM jobs in Flint and the nation-wide recession culminated in May 2009, when the city reached an unemployment rate of 27.3 percent.⁶⁷ After years of leading the pack (since 2006), in June 2010 it was announced that the state of Michigan had only the second worst unemployment rate in the nation at 13.6 percent.⁶⁸ In 2008, when GM's downfall started to become apparent as the nation entered a recession, Flint was named the "third most miserable city" to live in the United States.⁶⁹ Detroit topped this list. Additionally, in 2010, Flint recorded a record 66 homicides as the mayor called for a "cease fire,"⁷⁰ earning it the title of 4th most dangerous city in America, immediately behind Detroit which captured the 3rd spot.⁷¹ In 2011, however, Flint became the most violent city in American and the *New York Times* gave Flint the title "Murder town, U.S.A." as it captured the highest per-capita murder, aggravated assault, burglary, and arson rates in the country.⁷² Furthermore, Flint was named the second fastest "shrinking city" of the past decade, following only a post-Hurricane Katrina New Orleans.⁷³ Flint, however, led the nation with the largest percentage of population lost.⁷⁴ According to MSN, Flint has become the "symbol of the death of the American industrial city and the decline of the U.S auto industry."⁷⁵

With the progression and decline of a city that was deeply connected to the UAW and the auto industry, it makes sense that SMP was built in Flint, where it all began.

Beth Messner and Mark Vail further explain that the

collectively negotiated past is articulated socially through commemoration. Commemoration "involves the coordination of individual and group memories . . . [that are] the product of processes of

intense contest, struggle, and in some, instances, annihilation” . . . The relationship between past and present is dynamic and codependent. The past “guide[s] the present, but the present also is reconfiguring the past; therefore through evocation of collective memories, past and present live in constant dialogue . . . where neither can be comprehended without the other.”⁷⁶

SMP begins connecting this past and the present in a very clear way. Specifically in Flint, many union members have relatives, grandparents, and parents that lived through the strike; and for those who still live in Flint, they have lived through the decline and mass exodus of union jobs. Flint is where the union’s struggle began and is continuing today. A clearer understanding of SMP involves connecting this historically contested past to the struggles of the present.

NOTES

¹ Sidney Fine, *sit-down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-1937* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 341.

² “The 1936 – 37 Flint, Michigan Sit-Down Strike,” January 28, 2002, *BBC*, www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A672310 (accessed December 23, 2010).

³ Fine, *sit-down*, 101-102.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶ Martha Grevatt, “70 Years Ago Workers Won Flint Sit-Down Strike: 1937 Flint Sit-Down Labor Studies,” *Workers World* 1 (2007), www.workers.org/2007/us/flint-0308/ (accessed February 6, 2011).

⁷ Fine, *sit-down*, 102. He explains, “Among twenty-two cities of 100,00 to 250,000 population in 1934 Flint ranked nineteenth in the infant death rate and the death of children from diarrhea and enteritis, seventeenth in maternal deaths, in a tie for thirteenth and fourteenth place for typhoid-fever death rate, thirteenth in the diphtheria death rate, and tenth in the tuberculosis death rate.”

⁸ Historical Voices, “Organization,” *The Flint Sit-Down Strike Audio Gallery*, <http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/organization.php> (accessed February 6, 2011). The portion of the Historical Voices website devoted to the Flint Sit-Down Strike Audio Gallery was set up by Professors Neil Leighton and Laurence Goodwyn. Together, they ran The Labor History Project at the University of Michigan-Flint. The faculty members who conducted interviews included Leighton, Kenneth B. West, William Meyer, and Nan

Pendrel. One of the goals of this website is to preserve the stories of former sit-downers and for the sit-downers to be able to tell their story in their own words.

⁹ According to Inflation Calculator, today this would be equivalent to nearly 4.2 billion dollars. www.westegg.com/inflation/ (accessed February 6, 2011). In contrast, profits for 2008 totaled a loss of 30, 860 million dollars. Finance: eConsultant, "General Motors 2008 Revenue Profit 2009 Fortune 500 Rank," *Corporate Data for Revenue Profit Branding*, <http://finance.econsultant.com/general-motors-2008-revenue-profit-2009-fortune-500-rank/> (accessed February 6, 2011).

¹⁰ According to Inflation Calculator, today this would be equivalent to almost 22.2 billion dollars. www.westegg.com/inflation/ (accessed February 6, 2011).

¹¹ In 2009, General Motors owned less than 20 percent of the market share. Bill Vlasic, "Chief Says GM is on Road to Profits," *New York Times*, January 6, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/07/business/07auto.html> (accessed February 6, 2011).

¹² Grevatt, "70 Years Ago," 1.

¹³ Fine, *sit-down*, 107-108.

¹⁴ N. Gregory Mankiw, *Macroeconomics*, 5th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2003), 167.

¹⁵ Andrew Havrilla, Interview by UM Flint Labor Project, Historical Voices, "Organization," *The Flint Sit-Down Strike Audio Gallery*, April 4, 1980, <http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/organization.php> (accessed February 6, 2011).

¹⁶ Fine, *sit-down*, 55.

¹⁷ Fine, *sit-down*, 56.

¹⁸ Louis Ganscos , Interview by UM Flint Labor Project, Historical Voices, “Organization,” *The Flint Sit-Down Strike Audio Gallery*, March 5, 1980, <http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/organization.php> (accessed February 6, 2011).

¹⁹ Grevatt, “70 Years Ago,” 1. Fine further explains, emphasizing the irregularity of work and the unemployment problem. See Fine, *sit-down*, 104-105.

²⁰ Historical Voices, “Organization.”

²¹ See Fine, *sit-down*, 65. “Although they had failed to sustain an automobile workers union of their own, the Communists, by boring from within, were able to gain positions of power inside the UAW, and they were to play an important part in the GM sit-down strike. . .The prominent advisory role played by Communists after the strike had begun enabled the police and the management to charge that the whole affair was the product of Communist and foreign agitation, which presumably justified the harshest repression.”

²² *Ibid.*, 65.

²³ *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁴ “The term ‘sit-down strike’ has generally been used to embrace a variety of work stoppages ranging from the brief strike or ‘quickie,’ in which a group of workers cease their labors for a few minutes or hours for a single shift until their grievances are settled, to the ‘stay-in strike,’ in which a portion or all of the workers remain in the plant overnight and perhaps for an extended period of time. Most commonly when the term is used the reference is to the extended sit-down strike, the so-called stay-in strike.” Fine, *sit-down*, 121.

²⁵ Ibid., 116-17.

²⁶ “Instability of employment, a characteristic of the automobile industry as a whole in the 1920’s, was especially marked in Flint, where labor turnover rates in some plants sometimes reached 200 or 300 percent.” Fine, *sit-down*, 102.

²⁷ Fine explains: “The origins of the sit-down, using the term in the broadest possible sense, have in all probability gone unrecorded . . .” However, he does provide a list of known sit-downs and a brief history of them across the world. He explains, “In 1907 there was a sit-down strike of fifteen hundred workers in an engineering works in Coventry, England; and in 1919 and to a far greater extent in 1920 Italian workers, with metallurgical operatives in the van, occupied and continued production in a large number of factories . . . Sit-down strikes were staged in 1934 by coal miners in Jugoslavia, Hungary, and Poland, copper miners in Spain, and rubber workers in Salonika . . . February 14—March 21, 1936, was the first American work stoppage to really focus public attention on the sit-down tactic. It was the ‘first CIO strike.’” Furthermore, he elaborates on the importance of the November “quickie” to the success of the movement overall. See Fine, *sit-down*, 122-123.

²⁸ In his book, Sidney Fine describes this scenario in much more detail. He explains that when plant guards refused to open the gate, some of the strikers who were observing from the inside stormed forward in an attempt to force it open. Upon doing so, “The captain of the company guards phoned the Flint Police that he and his men had been ‘captured’ and that the strikers were ‘crowding the door and threatening,’ and then the

guards ingloriously took refuge in the ladies' restroom, from where they did not emerge until the next morning, after the fighting had ended." Fine, *sit-down*, 4.

²⁹ In 1937, "bulls" was a derogatory reference to police officers.

³⁰ Fine, *sit-down*, 11-12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

³² If we recall Parenti's seven typical generalizations of unions as framed by the news media that were discussed in Chapter 1 (his seventh frame having to deal with the government's tendency to favor corporations), then we can better understand the rarity and magnitude of the President intervening on the striker's behalf in this circumstance.

³³ GM refused to be in the same room as UAW elected president Homer Martin, so they sent him on a speaking tour. Lewis was president of the CIO and United Mine Workers. Other notable players in the formation of the UAW included Walter and Victor Reuther, George Addes, Wyndham Mortimer, and Henry Kraus.

³⁴ Grevatt, "70 Years Ago," 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Loius Stark, "Strikers Quit Auto Plants; Operations Resume Monday; \$25,000,000 Rise in Wages," *New York Times*, February 12, 1937, 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* This strike received national attention from the very beginning and got front page coverage from every major newspaper. Additionally, the *Flint Journal* was publishing multiple editions per day, constantly updating the terms of the strike.

³⁹ This information comes from an audio clip that played at the Sloan Museum in Flint, Michigan where there are various recordings of Shaiken speaking on the importance of the strike. The Sloan Museum primarily covers Michigan and Flint history through various galleries and exhibits. The *Flint and the American Dream* exhibit features an array of interactive displays, hands on activities, and virtual tours. During my research, I visited the Sloan to take notes on the various exhibits, collect brochures, and listen to these audio recordings.

⁴⁰ Fine, *sit-down*, 340.

⁴¹ In previous strikes—and to a large extent this one—there were few, if any, female workers inside the plants, so the issue of the role of women did not come up too much. At the time, especially in Europe, working inside the plant was seen as an elite occupation reserved largely for men. Reflecting cultural assumptions, females tended to dominate traditional female industries such as textile mills and agriculture.

⁴² Grevatt, “70 Years Ago,” 2.

⁴³ See, for example, Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935 – 1975* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁶ Historical Voices, “The Strike,” *The Flint Sit-Down Strike Audio Gallery*, <http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/strike.php> (accessed February 6, 2011).

⁴⁷ Quoted in Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement*, 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 1-2.

⁵¹ Ibid., 4.

⁵² See for example, Steve Schifferes, “The decline of Detroit,” *BBC News*, February 19, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6346299.stm> (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁵³ See Ibid.

⁵⁴ See for example, Kristin Longley, “Stimulus could bring new life to Buick City, Chevy in the Hole,” *Flint Journal*, March 2, 2009.

http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2009/03/stimulus_could_bring_new_life.html

(accessed on February 12, 2011). Also see Ron Fonger, “Other abandoned General Motors plants could follow Buick City into trust fund pool,” *Flint Journal*, May 20, 2010.

http://www.mlive.com/auto/index.ssf/2010/05/other_abandoned_general_motors.html

(accessed on February 12, 2011). The main reason this land continues to remain vacant is due to contamination and clean up costs. While most of the plants in Flint have been destroyed, there are also vacant buildings spread throughout the city. There have been attempts on GM’s behalf to repurpose these abandoned plants for production of electric car batteries. See for example, Lyle, “GM Investing \$162 Million to Increase Production of Chevy Volt’s 4-Cylinder Engine,” *GM-Volt*, November 28, 2010. <http://gm-volt.com/2010/11/28/gm-investing-162-million-to-increase-production-of-chevy-volts-4-cylinder-engine/> (accessed February 13, 2011). There have also been talks of turning

Buick City into a “state data center.” Buick City is the largest brownfield in the country. See Kristen Longley, “Mayor Dayne Walling: Buick City could be site of new data center in Flint, EPA to issue final remedy for site cleanup,” *Flint Journal*, February 19, 2010. http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2010/02/the_public_has_spoken_now_epa.html (accessed May 25, 2011). On March 15, 2011 it was announced that the City of Flint took ownership of Chevy in the Hole. They plan on turning it into a green space. See Kristen Longley, “City of Flint takes ownership of ‘Chevy in the Hole,’” *Flint Journal*, March 15, 2011. http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2011/03/city_of_flint_takes_ownership.html (accessed May 24, 2011).

⁵⁵ “Roger and Me: Synopsis” *Dog Eat Dog Films*,

<http://dogeatdog.michaelmoore.com/synopsis.html> (accessed on February 12, 2011).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ “Humbled GM files for bankruptcy protection: U.S.-led restructuring largest industrial bankruptcy in U.S. history,” *MSNBC*, June 1, 2009, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31030038/ns/business-autos/> (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ General Motors Corporation, “Restructuring Plan for Long-Term Viability,” Submitted to Senate Banking Committee and House of Representatives Financial Services Committee, December 2, 2008,

http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/gm_restructuring_plan120208.pdf

(accessed February 12, 2011).

⁶⁰ See for example, “Humbled GM files for bankruptcy,” *MSNBC*.

⁶¹ Kevin Krolicki and David Bailey, “GM exits bankruptcy,” *Reuters*, July 10, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/07/10/us-gm-idUSTRE5690JO20090710>

(accessed February 12, 2011).

⁶² David Muir and Bradley Blackburn, “General Motors Pays Back \$8 Billion to Taxpayers Ahead of Schedule,” *ABC NEWS*, April 21, 2010,

<http://abcnews.go.com/WN/general-motors-repays-81-billion-government-loans/story?id=10437944> (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁶³ Steve Schaefer, “GM Turns A Profit,” *Forbes*, May 17, 2010,

<http://www.forbes.com/2010/05/17/gm-profit-ipo-markets-equities-autos.html> (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁶⁴ See for example, “GM Announces Highest Profit since 1999,” *Stock Market Watch*, February 24, 2011, <http://thestockmarketwatch.com/stock-market-news/recent-events/gm-announces-highest-profit-since-1999/5899> (accessed May 31, 2011).

⁶⁵ See for example, “GM announces \$3.2 billion first quarter profit,” *Big Rapids Daily News*, May 5, 2011, <http://bigrapidsdailynews.com/?q=news/2011/05/05/gm-announces-32-billion-first-quarter-profit> (accessed May 31, 2011).

⁶⁶ General Motors, “GM to Add Third Shift, 750 Jobs at Flint Assembly,” *PRNewswire*, January 24, 2011,

<http://www.valleynewslive.com/Global/story.asp?S=13895840&clienttype=printable>

(accessed February 12, 2011). This number was affirmed during a tour of the park on August 17, 2011)

⁶⁷ Melissa Burden, “Flint’s unemployment rate hits 27.3 percent in May,” *Flint Journal*, July 23, 2009, http://www.mlive.com/business/mid-michigan/index.ssf/2009/07/flints_unemployment_rate_hits.html (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁶⁸ Jackie Headapohl, “Michigan no longer leads the nation in unemployment,” *Flint Journal*, June 19, 2010, http://www.mlive.com/jobs/index.ssf/2010/06/michigan_no_longer_leads_the_nation_in_u.html (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁶⁹ Kurt Badenhausen, “Worst Places: Americas Most Miserable Cities,” *Forbes*, January 30, 2008, http://www.forbes.com/2008/01/29/detroit-stockton-flint-biz-cz_kb_0130miserable.html (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁷⁰ Vanessa Evans, “Hot-button Issues Confront Michigan as it Rings in 2011,” *Yahoo News*, January 4, 2011, http://news.yahoo.com/s/ac/20110104/tr_ac/7521542_hotbutton_issues_confront_michigan_as_it_rings_in2011 (accessed February 12, 2011).

See also the City of Flint Website to learn more about the campaign.

<http://www.cityofflint.com/FlintCeaseFire.asp>

⁷¹ “Most Dangerous Cities In America (PHOTOS),” *Huffington Post*, November 22, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/11/22/most-dangerous-cities-in-n_787010.html#s188593&title=15_Little_Rock (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁷² See Charlie LeDuff, "Riding Along With the Cops in Murdertown, U.S.A." *New York Times*, April 15, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/17/magazine/mag-17YouRhere-t.html?_r=1&ref=magazine (accessed May, 31, 2011). Also see David Harris, "Flint homicides this year surpassing pace of record 2010," *Flint Journal*, May 17, 2011, http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2011/05/flint_homicides_this_year_surp.html (accessed May 31, 2011).

⁷³ Melinda Fulmer, "America's top 10 shrinking cities," *MSN*, <http://realestate.msn.com/slideshow.aspx?cp-documentid=25991046>1=35006#3> (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁷⁴ Kristin Longley, "Flint tops large U.S. cities in population decline," *Flint Journal*, June 22, 2010, http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2010/06/flint_tops_large_cities_in_nat.html (accessed February 12, 2011).

⁷⁵ Fulmer, "America's top 10 shrinking cities," *MSN*.

⁷⁶ Beth Messner and Mark Vail, "A 'City at War': Commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.," *Communication Studies* 60, No. 1 (2009): 22. For their definition of commemoration they quote John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3. For the relationship between past and present they quote Bruce E. Gronbeck, "The Rhetorics of the Past: History, Argument, and Collective Memory," in *Doing Rhetorical History: Concepts and Cases*, ed. Kathleen J. Turner (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 57.

CHAPTER THREE:

A COUNTERPUBLIC IDENTITY

With Flint slowly decaying around the loss of union jobs, building solidarity within the union becomes an essential process if the union is to continue the battle for workers rights that began in 1937. Additionally, Nancy Fraser contends that within the stratified society in which we live,

subaltern counterpublics have a dual character. On one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.¹

There seems to be no better example of a material representation of a counterpublic identity than at Sitdowners Memorial Park. With the devastation of outsourcing, loss of union jobs, high unemployment, high murder rate, a fleeting population, abandoned homes, vacant lots, and untended properties that dot the Flint landscape, one might be quick to criticize the union and its actions. At SMP, however, memories of the sit-down strike and its impacts on society are enlisted to reinvigorate a dying community and offer visitors rhetorical resources that justify pro-union perspectives. In so doing, a counterpublic identity is created.

Located in a city that was once the center of the auto industry and is the birthplace of one of the most powerful unions in the world, one of SMP's primary functions is to renew a sense of community and establish its counterpublic identity in response to anti-

union rhetoric. This community renewal ultimately depends on pro-union rhetoric. As such, SMP also offers resources for a pro-union fight that impacts the globe. In this chapter, I first briefly assess the rhetorical strategies employed on the UAW's website and in their weekly magazine, *Solidarity*. The explication of some of the broad themes in *Solidarity* provides a foundation for understanding the ways in which similar themes and strategies are deployed in SMP. Next, I explore SMP as an experiential landscape by 1) discussing how the drive in prepares a visitor for enacting a counterpublic identity, 2) analyzing how the park attempts to restore a sense of community, and 3) considering how that, in turn, prepares visitors for a pro-union fight.

UAW RHETORIC

Since 1935, the UAW has had a weekly newspaper promoting its agenda within the union. From 1935 to 1957 the publication was titled *The United Automobile Worker*; however, on December 16, 1957 it went through a name change to reflect a growing and diverse union membership which included aircraft and agricultural industries.² Today, *Solidarity* reaches an even more diverse audience and considers itself a “voice for all.”³ In speaking for “all,” the UAW is quick to point out its history of progressive politics and its tradition of standing up for the middle class in a continuing battle for workers rights.

First, the UAW emphasizes its progressive politics as a response to the claim that collective action is bad. In the “A voice for all” section on the UAW website, the UAW argues:

As impressive as it is, the UAW's success record at the bargaining table is only part of the story. From our earliest days, the UAW has been a leader in the struggle to secure economic and social justice for all people. The UAW has been actively involved in every civil rights legislative battle since the 1950s, including the campaigns to pass the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of

1965, the Fair Housing Act, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1988 and legislation to prohibit discrimination against women, the elderly and people with disabilities.

The UAW also has played a vital role in passing such landmark legislation as Medicare and Medicaid, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Employee Retirement Act and the Family and Medical Leave Act. In Washington and state capitols, the UAW is fighting for better schools for kids, secure health care and pensions for retirees, clean air and water, tougher workplace health and safety standards, stronger worker's compensation and unemployment insurance laws and fairer taxes.

The UAW's commitment to improve the lives of working men and women extends beyond our borders to encompass people around the globe. Through vigilant political involvement and coordination with world labor organizations, we continue to fight for enforcement of trade agreement provisions on human and worker rights, fair labor standards and a new approach to international trade — one that raises the quality of life for working people worldwide.⁴

Here, the UAW gives specific examples of progressive “landmark legislation,” aligning itself with movements that have become broadly accepted. Rather than directly responding to economic concerns over collective action, the UAW responds with larger moral and ethical achievements that, they claim, would not have been successful without their efforts. In doing so, the UAW aligns itself with the progress of American politics; but they do not stop there. They also argue that their impact is global, making their cause bigger than any one individual or organization.

Their website also explains that “A worker has a right” to organize and join a union.⁵ In doing so, the UAW provides a chart which describes the benefits a unionized worker enjoys over a non-unionized worker, pointing out the advantages in pay, benefits, working conditions, and job security. Thus, the UAW does not directly refute arguments made by critics of the union that workers may be overpaid; instead, they argue that workers’ salaries and the benefits they receive represent equitable compensation for their

hard work while emphasizing the importance of having a collective bargaining agent. These claims function as recruiting tools, mechanisms for promoting solidarity with fellow union members, and counterarguments against the criticisms of unions.

In the same section of the website, the UAW argues that union employees are treated with respect and receive equitable pay for their hard work, and they imply that even non-unionized private sector workers would not enjoy the limited benefits they do enjoy without the progress of the union. The website suggests that because unionized workers enjoy more benefits than non-unionized workers, non-unionized employees are not getting what they deserve. They even go as far to argue, “no union = no rights.”⁶ Furthermore, in their “quick facts” section, they contend that “the UAW assists workers who want to organize so they can bargain to improve their workplaces. Despite fierce—and often illegal—employer resistance, the UAW has helped thousands of workers organize in recent years in manufacturing, gaming, higher education and other industries.”⁷ This suggests that that UAW’s work is part of an ongoing battle for workers rights that began in 1937 and is not yet over.

The website also lays out multiple reasons why one should organize and provides a way to “take action,” suggesting that the attack on labor is an ongoing challenge. A message from the UAW president, Bob King, makes this clear. He argues:

Defending the middle class and all working families is a fight that we are determined to win. Organizing is a key element in our strategy. When we have a majority of workers in an industry, it is nearly impossible to ignore our agenda . . . This year’s legislative priorities are key essentials as we fight the status quo and demand better for our members and all working people. When you are asked to call your legislator, or cast your vote, or stand together on picket lines and at rallies, please answer the call. The right-wing attack on the middle class must end, and it’s going to take the efforts of each and every one of us to beat back inequality to win.⁸

King places his emphasis on the attack on the “middle class and all working families.” This move by King, to associate the “middle class” with the “working class” is a strategic one, broadening the UAW’s audience and attempting to constitute a larger interest group.

Historically, these terms have not been synonymous. The middle class has largely been associated with white collar professionals and typically refers to an individual’s income level. The definition of middle class is ambiguous, however, and today a large portion of society identifies as “middle class.”⁹ U.S. citizens tend to be reluctant to label themselves as “lower” or “upper” class. On the other hand, working class largely refers to the type of job someone holds. This term usually refers to manual labor or “blue-collar” work—the work of a UAW member. While the larger public tends to ignore the class dimension of unionization, the UAW highlights this dimension and attempts to associate itself with a larger public interest—that of the middle class—as many have argued there would be no middle class without the strikes and developments of the working class.¹⁰

Additionally, King makes his battle cry a political argument with his mentioning of “legislative priorities,” “vote,” and “right wing attack.” King is asking his members, working people, to take up arms and “fight” the “good war.” Ultimately, King frames this as more of a political fight than a physical one, but the references to war are clearly invoked with words such as “fight,” “attack,” “beat back,” and “win.” In 1937, the UAW fought for recognition, sometimes in a physical way. Since then, however, the fight has largely been carried out through politics.

The UAW takes active steps to remember this fight for recognition of “working people” that made their current fight for legislation possible. One way of doing this is

through their annual “White Shirt Day” on February 11, the anniversary of the success of the strike. In *Solidarity*, Herman Jenkins explains:

Men and women throughout the UAW wear white-collar attire traditionally donned by management to remember the sacrifices and victories of workers during the 1936-1937 GM Sit-Down Strike. First celebrated in 1948, White Shirt Day is the brainchild of Bert Christensen, a member of the UAW Local 598 education committee. The annual day shows the strength and solidarity of UAW members—and embodies the idea that blue-collar workers are just as valuable as management.¹¹

Again, we see the emphasis on valuing the work of the everyday man or woman with the term “blue-collar,” a reference to manual labor, and the “sacrifice” that sometimes must be made for progress. Instead of refuting the claim that collective economic action is bad, or that workers are *more* important than management, the goal of the UAW is to promote equality in the work place, both among workers and between workers and management, making an argument that workers and management are in this together. This association is further highlighted by the symbolism of wearing a white shirt. The white shirt acknowledges the valuable contributions of the “working class” and is an attempt for the UAW to align themselves with the interests of the “middle class” and “white-collar” work. Finally, by remembering the sacrifice of those in 1937, the UAW encourages members of today to “sacrifice” by answering King’s call: “When you are asked to call your legislator, or cast your vote, or stand together on picket lines and at rallies, please answer the call.” As King argues, the UAW needs to “reach back to our past to set our future.”¹²

The ultimate way of remembering this historic achievement and “reaching back to our past,” however, is by building monuments to commemorate it. In the UAW’s case, they built SMP, connecting the historically contested past to the contested present and

their current battles. Thus, the experience of SMP speaks to its visitors in many of the same ways that King, the UAW website, and *Solidarity* speaks to its members by emphasizing the ongoing battle and by acknowledging the sacrifice and struggle it takes to be victorious and progressive.

AN EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

One of the most striking aspects of SMP is its distinct location behind UAW Local Region 1-C headquarters and across the street from one of the few running plants left in Flint. As Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott explain, “Memory places are destinations; they typically require visitors to travel to them. Thus is created a unique context for understanding the past . . .”¹³ SMP is one such place.

Not visible from the main crossroads, SMP immediately distinguishes itself as a counterpublic identity, hidden from the larger public. One way someone might visit SMP is if they already knew about it by having a friend or family member in the UAW. Another way someone might visit the park is if they stumbled upon it. The most likely way a visitor would stumble upon SMP, however, is if they were a union member going to visit their headquarters, and even then, unless this member was to walk around to the back of the building, s/he would not see the park. Then, if s/he saw the park, actually visiting and engaging with the park still requires a special commitment. Each instance of visiting the park requires a visitor to take make monetary and time commitments by taking time out of their day, disrupting their daily routine, and traveling to the destination. Making this type of time commitment often requires planning and organizing. Therefore, visiting SMP is something the visitor has already thought about before even arriving there. Making the conscious decision to make these commitments

immediately sets SMP apart as something important and distinguishes it as a place worthy of commemoration and sacrifice by the visitor.¹⁴

Traveling to this destination, a visitor becomes mentally prepared for engaging with the park. SMP is located on the corner of Van Slyke Avenue and Atherton Road. Van Slyke Avenue runs north – south and parallel to the once booming truck and bus plant owned by General Motors. For those traveling down Atherton Road, the street dead ends at this gigantic manufacturing plant. The size of this plant, taking up multiple city blocks, is a still reminder of what built Flint up and, more recently, broke Flint down.¹⁵ Driving west down Atherton Road, this ominous reminder is all that can be seen as the final destination.

The unique location of the park plays an important role in its interpretation. While other areas of the city are dedicated specifically to Flint's history, this park is placed in an alternate location to further its purpose and message for a pro-union audience. Additionally, with most visitors to the park being members or friends of the UAW, they bring preconceived notions and feelings, backed by knowledge of the UAW and the importance of the strike, with them to the park. These feelings and memories are called up by the visions of the plant during the drive in and are reinforced once arriving. This drive in, through an industrial area of Flint, encourages the visitor to recall the importance of the manufacturing industry to Flint and to appreciate (or criticize) the work of the UAW, preparing them for a visit to the park. Ultimately, a visit to SMP could have far less meaning without understanding what it was and why it is. Without understanding the history of the UAW and the history of the working conditions inside the plant across the street, a visitor may have a much harder time interpreting what the park represents.

Not only are the images encountered during the drive in important to the interpretation of the park, but the name of the street that visitors must turn on to get to the park also is rhetorically significant. SMP shares a parking lot with UAW Regional 1-C headquarters, whose main entrance is most easily accessible from Atherton Road. To get to the parking lot located behind the building, you must first turn on the road that in 2004 was renamed “Sitdowners Drive.” Renaming this street was an act of commemoration in itself, priming visitors for the larger commemoration located in the park. Beth Messner and Mark Vail describe the rhetorical significance of renaming a street by following a controversy in Indiana after the renaming of a street after Martin Luther King, Jr. They explain:

These cultural texts order and sustain meaning, articulate a community’s core values and recommend which values should be perpetuated. Naming a street after King represents a community’s recognition of his struggle for racial equality and vision for the future. Unfortunately, racial discord sometimes emerges from these attempts.¹⁶

They go on to argue:

Some street names are engrained in a community’s collective culture and become politically value-laden. Consequently, street naming becomes a commemorative act in which names function as small public monuments to those values. Thus, permanently renaming an existing street after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., is much different than naming a new street after the civil rights leader. [Derek] Alderman asserts that commemorative street naming “represents an important and highly contested practice in the political and cultural geography of cities” because it “inscribes its ideological message into many texts of urban life.” Replacing an existing name on a map alters a community’s political and cultural geography by disrupting the established order. Such ruptures are deeply felt by those politically invested in this history.¹⁷

Naming a street after the sit-down strikers speaks directly to the subaltern counterpublic community and the core values they represent. In the city of Flint, this is the only street named directly after the sitdowners, and it is not routinely traveled on by the larger

public.¹⁸ Just like the park, this street is not visited accidentally. The main reason someone would choose to drive on this street is to visit either their union headquarters or SMP.¹⁹ Additionally, this street name represents the UAW's struggle to be recognized and the impact the historic strike had on the union's daily life, as a street is something the visitor cannot escape while traveling to the destination.

Furthermore, Jonathan Tilove argues that "the genius of King streets is how they honor Martin Luther King in precisely the way the national holiday cannot, by provoking passions and controversy and conflict, by stirring fervent debate about the meaning of his life and what kind of street would do him credit. They hit people . . . where they live, where they work."²⁰ Similarly, not everyone agrees that the efforts of the UAW should be positively commemorated. Thus, renaming the street on which SMP is located connects the historical past to the present everyday condition. It calls upon the values of the subaltern community, which the larger community may or may not agree with, and distinguishes the sitdowners as worthy of commemoration and remembering in a way that Labor Day cannot. Additionally, a visitor to the park has already distinguished this site as worthy of commemoration just by traveling to it. This is interesting to point out because while the park sits on private property, Sitdowners Drive is a public street. It serves as a metaphoric gateway between a union member's counterpublic identity and the larger, overarching public represented by the street.

Upon arriving at the park, visitors cannot escape the sheer magnitude of the plant across the street; a union member's public work comes with them to the park, reminding them of their counterpublic identity. Gazing south-west, the plant's smoke stacks tower

over the headquarters, constantly reminding visitors to the park of the striker's great achievement in beating the Goliath General Motors as they prepare to enter (see Figure 3).



(Figure 3 – Standing at the south entrance looking south-west.
Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

When entering Sitdowners Memorial Park from the south entrance, the most easily accessible entrance from the headquarters parking lot (although not the main entrance to the park), a large plaque rising from the ground like the head of a gravestone awaits you to the right. On it is the picture of six key figures that made SMP possible and a description of how the park came to into being (see Figure 4). This description embodies the SMP experience. It provides rules for reading the texts and experiencing the park, highlighting a counterpublic identity and a pro-union fight.²¹



(Figure 4 – 2010 Monument. Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

The description on the 2010 monument begins by explaining that in 1987, on the 50th anniversary of the Flint Sit-Down Strike, an effort was made to gather all living sitdowners at Black Lake in Cheboygan, Michigan to be interviewed and videotaped “with the goal of recording their memories of the event.” When the weekend was over, the UAW decided that this historic event needed to be permanently commemorated. After five years of struggle, “Director Ruben Burks, elected in 1989, Bettye Cunningham, and the Board of Directors continued working toward the goal of a permanent facility,” and in 1992 the Labor Museum and Learning Center of Michigan opened. The monument explains that “after several years of hard work, there was now a museum that would tell the story of the Flint Sitdowners and Women’s Emergency Brigade. A story of incredible courage.” Although SMP is not the museum being referred to in this description, this monument makes visitors aware that SMP is about the same story of “incredible

courage.” This frames a visit to the park as “incredible” while the monument goes on to foreshadow the dramatic struggle and victory that the park represents.

The monument explains that in 1998 the Labor Museum and Learning Center was sold and “there was no choice but to dismantle the exhibits and vacate the premises. Once again the search began for a permanent facility.” For those visitors to the park who remember the previous exhibit, this explains that the UAW was forced to dismantle it; they had no choice; the larger, overarching public made them do it. The monument also emphasizes that the reason for dismantling it was not because the strikers and their achievements were unworthy of commemoration or importance. Rather, it implies a continued attack on labor that carries into the present day.

The plaque goes on to explain that, four years later in 2002, director Bob Roth “visualized a park that would depict a scene from the Flint Sitdown Strike and commenced to make it a reality. He and Bettye Cunningham established the Sitdowners Memorial Committee. The area was landscaped, lights were installed, and on Labor Day September 3, 2003, a life sized monument was unveiled in a beautiful Sitdowners Park Director Duane Zuckschwerdt, elected in 2006, unveiled the Sitdowners Park arch the following Labor Day.” Then, in 2007, an interactive exhibit of Flint history and the strike was displayed at nearby Sloan Museum. Finally, after realizing the park was missing a crucial element, Zuckschwerdt and Cunningham began planning a tribute to the women of the strike, the Women’s Auxiliary, and the Women’s Emergency Brigade.

This tribute to the women of the strike materialized on Labor Day 2009. The monument explains that “sculptures depicting [women’s] actions during the 44 day strike were erected in front of an original window From Fisher Body #1. In addition, the granite

fountain and markers recognizing significant social contributions made by women were installed.” This description of the various women monuments and how they came into being, especially the reference to the “original window” from the strike, gives the park a sense of authenticity.²² It presents the park, the actions taken, and the people represented as real. This, in turn, produces a feeling of nostalgia and responsibility that visitors can carry with them throughout the rest of their visit to the park.

The description also reinforces that the continued fight for labor rights is real and ongoing by explaining that the struggle for a “beautiful sitdowners park” was finally “won” and it is something to be proud of, much like the struggle for better working conditions and equitable pay in 1937. Explaining this struggle that the UAW went through to commemorate the strike immediately distinguishes SMP as a counterpublic and as an important memory place. It also implies that the actions taken in 1937 are worthy of both remembering and continuing. Finally, the 2010 monument concludes by stating, “Thanks to the hard work of Stan Marshall, Ruben Burks, Cal Rapson, Duane Zuckschwerdt, Bob Roth, Bettye Cunningham, thousands of union and community members and company supporters we have this tribute to ordinary people who changed the world.” This closing line embodies the community renewal that SMP represents and the significant rewards for participating in a pro-union fight: changing the world.

COMMUNITY RENEWAL

Community renewal is achieved in SMP through two rhetorical themes present throughout the park. The first theme is aligning middle class and white collar interests with those of the working class and union. This makes it more likely for a visitor to see themselves as represented in the park and ultimately acknowledges a visitor’s hard work.

The second theme that renews a sense of community in SMP is naming original community members and their sacrifices. Naming in SMP establishes a sense of local belonging and symbolizes a tradition that must be carried on.

Middle Class Interests

One way SMP renews a sense of community is through the 2010 monument, which aligns the union's interests with the larger interests of the middle class. The monument emphasizes the "great fanfare" that surrounded the opening of the original Labor Museum and Learning Center, making a point to explain to the viewers of the park that although unions may or may not be appreciated today, there was once a time when remembering the struggles, achievements, and hard work of predecessors was valued by others in the larger community. This is further explained by acknowledging the "area businesses, and community organizations [who] gave generously of their funds and time" to make the park possible. This argues that not only did the sitdowners work hard, but building this park was also hard work, and the union is not alone in their struggle for valuing hard work. It reinforces to a visitor that the union is not alone in their struggle for recognition by the larger public. For a visitor, the monument acknowledges the hard work s/he does on a daily basis as a working class citizen and the park gives each visitor something to be proud of. Furthermore, the description associates the blue collar work of the working class with the white collar work of the middle class and area businesses that aligned their interests to make the park possible. This renews the sense of a larger community, conflating the interests of the white collar and blue collar workers, labor and capitalism, and encompasses a new middle class identity in the interests of the labor movement and the materialization of the park.

This description also reinforces to a visitor that this park would not have been possible without their individual support. It explains that union dues and hard work of individuals, like the ones who visit the park, helped make it all possible (it also implicitly encourages visitors to donate at any one of the donation boxes located at both entrances and to recognize the important role that union dues make, see Figure 3 for example). This is an attempt by SMP to encourage a union member or other visitor to directly identify with the interests and subjectivities represented in the park by aligning itself with a larger community and the interests of the middle class.

Naming Foundational Sacrifices

Upon entering the park, the first thing a visitor is likely to notice is the brick pathway that leads from the entrance of the park to all the other monuments inside the park. The most distinguishable aspect of this pathway is the engraved names of all the 1936-37 sitdowners. When visiting the park, a visitor's gaze will be drawn to the names on the bricks. Some may peruse each one, searching for a recognizable name. That task soon becomes overwhelming, however, given the number of bricks that comprise the pathway. For those with a personal connection to SMP or the UAW, the experience of reading the names can be a poignant one. To stop and think about each one individually could take hours and instill a sense of pride, belonging, and nostalgia in the visitor. Memory's connection to the present is powerful here, as these bricks and the names on them literally and figuratively shaped the foundation for workers today, forming a pathway through the park and into the future. These names guide a visitor along a path that renews a sense of community and lays the foundation for a counterpublic identity. Additionally, there is no logic or order to the names. Mixed in with the names of the

strikers are the names of donors and local politicians. Each helped make the park possible.²³ Upon finding the brick I was searching for, I, like so many others before me, snap a photo—placing special importance on it—remembering (see figure 5).



(Figure 5 – Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

Through naming, SMP aligns itself with WWII notions of community, patriotism and sacrifices.²⁴ John Bodnar explains:

Historically, the listing of the dead has been more central to the way local communities recall wars than to national images and memorials. Names invariably appear on markers in parish cemeteries or on plaques on town monuments and civic buildings and, by their very nature, raise questions of whether the tragic aspects of war were justified. Generally, they are placed alongside markers of tradition such as national flags or statues of heroic soldiers, which are meant to reassure publics that they were.²⁵

This naming technique in SMP, a common element in local communities' World War II monuments, is a way for the UAW to align itself with the "good war." Bodnar explains, "Many Americans would probably accept the point that tradition as a frame of remembrance has come to dominate the public memory of WWII in our times."²⁶ One reason for this is probably because it is one of the few wars that Americans were seen as

victorious in their efforts. Additionally, the ideals that Americans fought for in WWII were largely accepted and supported by the global community. Bodnar also goes on to explain, “And many might assume that [remembering WWII] is at least partly attributable to the fact that Americans in the 1940’s were part of a generation that was more willing to accept the huge sacrifices asked of them.”²⁷ These three arguments for accepting WWII frames of remembrance are strikingly similar to the way SMP remembers the sitdowners and the labor movement. First, this generation who fought in WWII is the same generation who sat down and made sacrifices for the union. Not only did this generation make a sacrifice that today’s generation may be unwilling to make, they were also successful in doing so. Finally while the larger public accepts WWII as the “good war,” the ideals and rights that sitdowners fought for in 1937 are also now largely accepted.²⁸

Bodnar also argues that the listing of names on traditional war monuments can be seen in patriotic terms. SMP uses this naming technique in a uniquely patriotic way, however; to build solidarity within the union and in reference to the continuing war on labor and attack on the middle class. Bodnar explains that “listing the names of the dead can be seen in patriotic terms. As long as [the names] remain visible, however, they sustain a critical take on the past as well because they signal a refusal to forget a sense of loss.”²⁹ Patriotism, in the most general sense of the word, refers to an individual’s love or devotion for their public, most commonly for their country. Patriotism implies a willingness to sacrifice for their public. Thus, sacrificing one’s life for their country can be seen as the ultimate patriotic act and upon doing so, the fallen becomes a hero. In SMP, the listing of names can also be seen as patriotic. Instead of love and devotion for

the overarching public, however, the listing of names in SMP symbolizes love and devotion for the labor movement and for the union, still something larger than any individual, but something that gets at the heart of SMP's counterpublic identity: their progressive politics and willingness to sacrifice for the greater good and betterment of the world.

While Bodnar explains how naming commemorates the local heroes of WWII, SMP commemorates the local heroes of the labor movement in Flint, renewing that community. A striking difference between the names of UAW sitdowners and the names of war heroes, however, is that the sitdowners lived through their ordeal. Still, however, the purpose of naming in SMP seems to perform a similar function as in war monuments. Placing these names on a brick foundation symbolizes a refusal to forget "a sense of loss," thus their hard work must be continued; sacrifice for the greater good must be continued. These names and the sacrifices each individual made represents the foundation that SMP was built on.

Furthermore, in SMP, the sit-down strike can be viewed as the essential battle that is part of an ongoing war between labor and management, between workers and employers, between the middle class and the elite. The sit-down strike was the beginning of labor's "good war." Naming in SMP symbolizes the tradition, sacrifice, and devotion that current union members must work to carry on and is a primary element in renewing a sense of community. By naming original community members, they become heroes within the counterpublic community where the legacy that began in Flint is to be carried on for the greater good.

Additionally, SMP draws on similar questions raised by the larger public as ones raised in war monuments: questions of whether the strike (or war) was justified, or more importantly, are unions justified and do they still serve a purpose today? The question is answered in SMP in various ways. Put simply, however, the answer is yes, making this part of the “good war” that must be continued. Following the pathway of names leads a visitor to markers affirming the worthiness of a pro-union fight.

PRO-UNION FIGHT

The pro-union fight that is highlighted in SMP is justified through two broad themes present in the park. The first theme is the making of history through the contract that resulted from the strike and changed the world. This theme is established through the display and framing of the original contract between the UAW and GM on the 2003 monument. The second theme justifying a pro-union perspective is “ordinary people changing the world.” This is established through the large granite globe that sits in the middle of the park and the plaques that surround it. While the contract emphasizes that this is a union text made for a union audience, the globe aligns the progressive politics of the UAW with other progressive political movements and symbolizes how they all worked together to change the world. These artifacts promote a shared sense of the past and argue for a tradition that must be carried on. Furthermore, the accomplishments embraced by the contract and globe come full circle to renew a sense of larger community and encourage a visitor to identify with the subjectivities represented in the park. By remembering and participating in this pro-union fight, SMP ultimately gives the visitor, an ordinary person, the agency to make history and change the world.

History Made: The Contract that Changed the World

By following the list of names a visitor arrives at the main attraction, the first monument that was built in 2003 before SMP became a park. Arriving at this monument confirms that the names listed on the bricks did not sacrifice in vain. This monument answers the questions posed by the list of names with a clear sense of victory for the UAW and working people, acknowledging that a sitdowner's actions (and sacrifice) was/is justified through the display and framing of the original contract between the UAW and GM.

Upon arriving at the park's central monument, a visitor reads: "Inscribed on these bricks are the names of our original 1936-1937 Sitdown-Strikers." The use of "our" affirms that this is a union text made for a union audience. It is likely to instill a sense of pride in the park viewer, especially the union member. It also implies that a current member is part of the great history that the park represents. Furthermore, the use of the term "original" implies that there have been many strikes since this great one and that there will be more; but these are the first strikers who laid the foundation and whose footsteps should be followed in.

The 2003 monument features four male workers sitting down atop a marble platform with one worker leaning against it. As a visitor walks around the marble octagon, all but three sides have an inscription on them. The front, east face of the monument reads, "1936-37 Sitdown Strike" with the description of the names and bricks underneath it and a continuing burning flame surrounded by the strikers above it. Immediately to the left and right of this marble face is void of text. To the right of the empty space, on the north face of the monument, is a dedication to past UAW presidents.

On the immediate south face of the monument, paralleling the UAW presidents, is a dedication to UAW Region 1-C Directors, beginning in 1939. Another appeal to the local nature of this strike and the creation of the monument is a dedication to the “Local Unions [who] helped make this monument a reality” on the north-west side. The most striking aspect of this monument, however, is on the west facing, back side of the monument—the UAW’s single-page constitution—a document that changed history.

The view from the main entrance on the west side of the park answers whether or not a striker’s actions is justified most concretely. The first thing a visitor sees when entering the park from here is a copy of the original agreement between the UAW and GM engraved on the base of the monument (see Figure 6). A visitor’s attention is immediately focused on this agreement. Since it is located on the back of the monument, the strikers featured in the monument are turned away from it. Not only does this have the effect of keeping the visitor’s attention focused on the agreement, but it also portrays the optimism of the workers looking forward towards a brighter future illuminated by the flame in front of them; this contract is behind them and a current union member’s job is to preserve it.

Entering from the main entrance of the park, it is clear what the SMP experience is about. The engraving on the marble face of the monument reads, “The First UAW – GM Agreement” dated February 11, 1937. It is broken down by what GM agreed to on the left and what the union agreed to on the right. Framing the contract on the monument and setting context for it, a description reads:

On February 11, 1937 we won... We had a union... Our Union, the UAW-CIO!
And we won recognition as a Union from the General Motors Corporation. We
also won representation rights for our Union members. The UAW-CIO was our

bargaining agent – for members of the Union only. The first Contract covered just one page – but it made history!



(Figure 6 – View of the 2003 monument from the main entrance of the park. Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

The use of “we” reinforces that this monument is only for union members and confirms their counterpublic identity. This idea is then emphasized when it exclaims, “for members of the Union only.” This description also emphasizes the privileges a union member enjoys over a non-unionized worker in having a bargaining agent. Furthermore, “Contract” is capitalized, making it a proper noun. This capitalization emphasizes that this contract is the first and original contract, placing a special importance on it and emphasizing to the park viewer that s/he is in the presence of history.

Engraving this agreement into the marble platform further underscores its importance and permanence for future generations. First, it is written on the platform, symbolizing that this is what the union was built on. Additionally, this act of engraving is

a tradition that dates as far back as the Ten Commandments and is a tradition later carried on in ancient Rome, where new laws would be engraved into the side of a building. If it was written in stone, then it was law. Furthermore, Thomas Kearns argues, “Law is one site to both ‘remember the future’ and to ensure that the future remembers.”³⁰ Thus, law sets a precedent for future actions. Due to the actions and sacrifice of the sitdowners, the agreement remembered on this 2003 monument thus became law, and the monument works to guarantee that current union members “remember the future.”

This special importance is further emphasized by the rope surrounding the monument, which functions like glass in museums. Like a treasured artifact, the contract and monument must be treated with care. In SMP, however, a visitor does not preserve the contract by standing and looking at it. The experience of the SMP implies that a visitor must take action by sacrificing, like the names engraved on the brick upon which the visitor stands while reading it, in order to win the ongoing war against labor and preserve what is special and was won by their predecessors.

Ordinary People Changing the World

In 2009, a large granite globe was built and added to the park as part of a tribute to the women of the UAW (see Figure 7). This globe sits on water and is surrounded by six stone benches and seven plaques describing ordinary women who changed the world: Rhonda Cornum, Rosie the Riveter, Fannie Lou Hammer, Frances Perkins, Carrie Chapman Catt, Lucy Gonzalez Parsons, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. While none of these women were members of the UAW, they all made significant contributions to the women’s movement and the labor movement. This is an attempt for the UAW to situate itself alongside other progressive political movements of the 20th century—those that are

more widely accepted by the larger over-arching public: the women's movement and civil rights movement. Furthermore, since none of these women were part of the UAW, it is an opportunity for ordinary visitors to the park to see themselves as represented in it, occupying a particular subject position. It is made clear though the experience of the park, however, that the original sitdowners and the contract that was won in 1937 changed the world. This monument encourages visitors to see themselves as part of that tradition that began in 1937 through the interactive nature of the globe, the reflective nature of the wet marble, and the stone benches that surround the monument.



(Figure 7 – 2009 Globe, part of a tribute to the women of the UAW. Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

As the large globe floats on the water, it gently spins at will. While approaching the monument, a visitor is invited to reach out and touch it. Upon touching it, the globe slowly changes direction and the ordinary visitor has the ability to change the direction of

the world. Additionally, the stone benches that surround the monument encourage a visitor to “sit-down” as they peruse the park. On these stone benches is a description of where they came from, most of the time being donated by local unions. Furthermore, the entire globe is donated by a local union’s “Active and Retired Membership.” Together, these emphasize the renewed community aspect of SMP while the benches materialize the tradition of the original sitdowners that must be carried on by modern day, ordinary visitors and active members.

Finally, as a visitor reads the emblem on the globe that states “UAW TRIBUTE TO WOMEN . . . ORDINARY PEOPLE CHANGING THE WORLD,” s/he is likely view himself or herself as part of this phrase. Although this is a tribute to women, the use of “people” implies that this about more than just the women. Although this globe may be dedicated to the women of the UAW, all people are given agency to change the world through the gender inclusive second phrase. Additionally, the phrase is in present tense, implying that change is ongoing, much like the attack on labor. The agency for all people to take part in this change is then emphasized through the “ordinary” women and their stories of hardship and success that surround the globe. Furthermore, as visitors read this emblem, their reflection stares back at them through the high gloss finish on the wet granite. Simply by visiting this monument, each visitor’s reflection makes her or him part of the ongoing change represented in the park. This monument gives visitors agency to enact change and impact the globe.

RENEWED COMMUNITY AND AGITATION

As a counterpublic, SMP has two primary functions: to renew a sense of community and to train the community for a pro-union fight. For the UAW and in SMP,

community renewal depends on this pro-union rhetoric, and this pro-union rhetoric almost certainly establishes a counterpublic identity. Although SMP is primarily a local monument, commemorating local heroes, it speaks to a national debate and a counterpublic identity. First, it promotes a feeling of solidarity in its visitors, validating their counterpublic identity. Second, it battles media stereotypes and arms its visitors with messages to take back to the larger overarching public. The description on the 2010 monument embodies this message.

The 2010 monument places a particular importance on live memory. From the beginning of its description, it acknowledges the importance of the UAW members who sat down in 1937. Realizing that the workers would not always be around to tell their story, the UAW decided to build something to commemorate their story and tell it in a permanent way for future generations. In so doing, the monument explains to the visitors of the park, “This is who we *are*.” Furthermore, it acknowledges a constant struggle for recognition, both in the work place and in the commemorative public sphere, establishing itself as a counterpublic. Finally, this plaque works to situate the UAW member as part of a larger community. It invites visitors to the park to see themselves in what the park represents. Thus, the plaque is symbolic of the larger story told in the park and offers resources for a pro-union fight.

In aligning the interests of the community, SMP works to build solidarity within the labor movement by aligning the union’s interests with the larger interests of the middle class. While the larger public tends to ignore the class dimension of a strike and argues that the union’s actions are greedy and counterproductive for economic success, the union maintains that they represent all workers and the middle class, emphasizing the

class dimension of a strike, and arguing that without their actions progress would not be made. This class dimension of unionization is emphasized through King's rhetoric and the growing diversity of UAW membership, as noted through the website's "voice for all." Furthermore, through the acknowledgement of public support in building the park on the 2010 monument and emphasizing the global history that was made as a result of the contract, the UAW and SMP attempt to align themselves on the "good" side of an ongoing war against labor and as leaders in the creation of a "global middle class."³¹

In this war against labor, the UAW frames its workers as disadvantaged, embracing the role of an embattled David doing battle with the Goliath of the auto industry. While the larger public accepts WWII as the "good war," the public does not seem to accept the ideals and rights that the union is currently fighting for as "good" (for capitalism). To combat this, the UAW aligns itself with more widely accepted movements in the 2009 globe monument and remembers the historic achievements of the 1937 sitdowners (which are now also widely accepted) in an effort to "remember the future."

One of the most important aspects of community renewal, however, is the affective relationship that visitors are likely to develop with the park, specifically with the names listed on the brick foundation. Blair et al. explain:

Memory narrates shared identities and [memory] is animated by affect . . . If the substance of public remembrance is to be truly public (or collective in any sense)—that is, shared *and* embraced as a marker of identity for that group—then two conditions seem to be in play. First, there must be a mode of sharing . . . Second, though, a memory that is shared must somehow attract a certain degree of adherence on the part of the members of the group.³²

Through the naming of original strikers and acknowledging multiple local unions who donated to help make the park possible, visitors are encouraged to develop a sense of belonging to the great achievement, to the union, and to the politics that impacted the globe. This especially rings true while considering the local nature of the strike to Flint history and the local union member who is likely to visit the park. Furthermore, this affective characteristic, unique to memory and memory places, is fundamental in influencing the future actions of a visitor. Naming the local heroes of the great strike symbolizes a refusal to forget a tradition that must be carried on.

A visitor also is also encouraged to preserve and carry on the sitdowners tradition through seeing themselves in the park. Throughout the park, a visitor is encouraged to see themselves in what the park represents through the donation boxes located at the entrances and exits, through the acknowledgement of donors who helped make the park possible (local unions and individuals), and through a visitor's reflection in the large granite globe. Furthermore, by citing specific examples of victory and remembering the contract that changed the world, a visitor is likely to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment which encourages the member to keep fighting and to keep sacrificing.

Taken as a whole, SMP is a dedication to heroic soldiers who are supposed to be just like the ordinary visitor. They were no one special; they were common, everyday workers who made a difference, and more importantly, made history. The park emphasizes a sacrifice for the greater good and a continuation of a modern day "good war" for recognition. Although this park establishes itself as the materialization of a counterpublic identity, until recently there was an important group of workers left out of this counterpublic identity. Up until this point in the SMP experience, the significant role

of UAW women in the success of the strike and in the modern day labor movement was largely overlooked. Until 2009, they were subaltern members of the UAW counterpublic.

NOTES

¹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1994), 124.

² Jenifer John, “Solidarity magazine turns 50 this year,” *Solidarity*, February 8, 2010, <http://www.uaw.org/story/solidarity-magazine-turns-50-year> (accessed March 24, 2011).

³ UAW, “About: Who We Are,” UAW, <http://www.uaw.org/node/39> (accessed March 24, 2011). The UAW currently has 710,000 active members in the automotive, aerospace and defense, heavy trucks, farm and heavy equipment, and other manufacturing industries in addition to representing a large number of technical, office, and professional workers.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ UAW, “Organize: A Worker Has a Right,” UAW, <http://www.uaw.org/node/165> (accessed March 24, 2011).

⁶ UAW, “Organize: No Union = No Rights,” UAW, <http://www.uaw.org/node/166> (accessed April 17, 2011).

⁷ UAW, “About: UAW Quick Facts,” UAW, <http://www.uaw.org/node/3108> (accessed March 24, 2011).

⁸ Bob King, “UAW 2011 Community Action Program,” UAW, <http://www.uaw.org/node/2900> (accessed March 24, 2011).

⁹ See for example, “Is there a standard, accepted definition of what constitutes the ‘middle class’? . . . No, there isn't. ‘Middle class’ means different things to different people - and politicians,” *Fact Check*, http://www.factcheck.org/askfactcheck/is_there_a_standard_accepted_definition_of.html (accessed April 12, 2011). They give examples of multiple studies on what class American’s identify with.

¹⁰ See for example, Sidney Fine, *sit-down: The General Motors Strike of 1936-1937* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), 340. Furthermore, in a speech delivered to the Center for Automotive Research Conference on August 2, 2010, King stated, “Our union began 75 years ago as a movement for social justice for all working people. In the mid-20th century, the UAW played a critical role in building the middle class in this nation. It would be a betrayal of the bold and pioneering heritage of our union if we did not engage in bold and dramatic change to address the challenges of rebuilding a global middle class for the 21st century.” See Bob King, “A UAW for the 21st Century: UAW President Bob King’s Speech to the Center for Automotive Research Conference,” *UAW*, <http://www.uaw.org/articles/uaw-21st-century> (accessed April 18, 2011). The UAW’s reference to “middle class” is also constitutive of a growing diverse membership which now includes technical, office, and professional workers. This movement to include white collar workers in the UAW and redefine “middle class” began as early as 1959. See for example, “NEW PROBLEM FOR UNIONS: The Rise of the White-Collar Worker,” *Time*, January 5, 1959, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,810844,00.html> (accessed April 28,

2011). After some structural changes within the UAW, white collar recruitment grew throughout the 1960's. See for example, Dean Snyder, *White Collar Workers and the UAW* (Urbana, Chicago, London: University of Illinois Press, 1973).

¹¹ Herman Jenkins, "GM Workers: In 1937, they had to sit down to stand up," *Solidarity*, January 31, 2011, <http://www.uaw.org/story/gm-workers-1937-they-had-sit-down-stand> (accessed March 24, 2011).

¹² Vince Piscopo, "UAW President: Reach back to our past to set our future," *UAW*, January 25, 2011, <http://www.uaw.org/articles/uaw-president-reach-back-our-past-set-our-future> (accessed March 24, 2011).

¹³ Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 26.

¹⁴ See Carole Blair, "Reflections on Criticism and Bodies: Parables from Public Places," *Western Journal of Communication* 65, No. 3 (2001): 275. Memory places are destinations which require a personal physical (the act of driving) and cognitive (the choice to go) act just to arrive at. As Carole Blair argues, "To make the effort to identify and reach a particular destination implies that there is something special about that place."

¹⁵ Melissa Burden. "Flint's Unemployment Rate Hits 27.3 percent in May." *Flint Journal*. July, 16, 2009. <http://www.mlive.com/business/mid->

michigan/index.ssf/2009/07/flints_unemployment_rate_hits.html (accessed February 12, 2011).

¹⁶ Beth Messner and Mark Vail, “A ‘City at War’: Commemorating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *Communication Studies* 60, No. 1 (2009): 22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸ In 2005 Michigan passed a resolution commemorating the major north south road that runs through flint, Dort Highway, after the sitdowners. Its commemorative name is “UAW Sit-Down Strike Memorial Highway.” Signs marking this commemoration are not easily seen, and the street was not re-named.

¹⁹ There are some houses and an apartment complex located on this street, behind the park and union headquarters. However, there is no outlet and they are off the beaten path. This is not a main street and there are no public destinations located on this road. Someone would have to make a choice to travel on it.

²⁰ Jonathan Tilove, *Along Martin Luther King: Travels on Black America’s Main Street* (New York: Random House, 2003), 21.

²¹ See Carole Blair and Neil Michel, “Commemorating in the Theme Park Zone: Reading the Astronauts Memorial,” in *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies* edited by Thomas Rosteck (New York: The Guilford Press, 1999), 59.

²² Blair et al. argue, “Related to the signifier constituted by the memory place is an expectation of and investment in “authenticity.” They go on to cite Resenzweig and Thelen, who explain, “approaching artifacts and sites on their own terms, visitors could . .

. feel that they were experiencing a moment from the past almost as it had originally been experienced.” See Blair et al. “Introduction,” 26.

²³ In addition to the appeal to donate in the 2010 monument and the donation boxes located at the entrances of the park with descriptions of the historic achievement and the role of working class men and women, on the local region 1-C website you can order a brick by donating to the park. In doing so, your name can placed next to a strikers, laying the foundation for future generations. See Norwood Jewel and Steve Dawes , “UAW Sitdown Strikers’ Memorial,” *UAW Region 1-C*, http://www.uawregion1c.org/?zone=/unionactive/view_page.cfm&page=Sitdowners2720Memorial (accessed March 26, 2011).

²⁴ The wartime tradition of naming actually goes back to American Civil War Monuments and was widespread in Europe and the US after WWI.

²⁵ John Bodnar, “Bad Dreams about the Good War: Bataan,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 141. Also see Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson and Enrico Pucci, Jr., “Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, No. 3 (1991): 263-288.

²⁶ Bodnar, “Bad Dreams,” 139.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ The larger public does not, however, accept their stance in the current battle for *more rights* . . .

²⁹ John Bodnar, “Bad Dreams,” 141.

³⁰ Thomas R. Kearns, *History, Memory, and the Law* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 13.

³¹ See for example, Bob King, “A UAW for the 21st Century: UAW President Bob King’s Speech to the Center for Automotive Research Conference,” *UAW*, <http://www.uaw.org/articles/uaw-21st-century> (accessed April 18, 2011).

³² Blair et al. “Introduction,” 13-14.

CHAPTER FOUR:
A STRATIFIED COUNTERPUBLIC

On the large granite globe that sits in the center of the park rests an emblem that reads, “UAW TRIBUTE TO WOMEN . . . ORDINARY PEOPLE CHANGING THE WORLD.” The second part of this tribute to women was an exclusive UAW women’s monument. The plaque on this women’s monument reads, “UAW TRIBUTE TO WOMEN . . . ORDINARY WOMEN CHANGING THE WORLD.” The distinction between the framing of the second phrase in these two monuments is subtle but important: the first is gender neutral while the second is gender exclusive. In 2003, when the UAW built a monument to commemorate the historic achievement of the UAW, the women of the strike were almost entirely excluded. In 2009, however, SMP added an additional monument exclusively for the women of the strike as part of their larger tribute to women. Today, the park features two separate gendered monuments and the large granite globe which brings them together, showing how each gender’s actions changed the world. Yet, before these monuments were added in 2009, the actions of UAW women were relegated to the private sphere.

An important aspect of the public sphere rests in its separation from the private sphere. However, Nancy Fraser explains that neither these terms, nor their designations, are straightforward. According to Fraser, historically, the public sphere “has been used by many feminists to refer to anything that is outside the domestic or familial sphere.”¹ This

dichotomy was furthered by Carole Pateman, who, according to Cindy L. Griffin, “critiques the liberal-patriarchal view of the public-private dichotomy, arguing that women are associated with the private and men with the public as a result of the patriarchal character of liberalism.”² Griffin also discusses the ways in which “the historical record regarding the public sphere privileges masculine experiences and a masculine perspective.”³ Drawing her inspiration from Mary O’Brien, however, Griffin states, “The public sphere is mediated at the level of physical capabilities and the social/rhetorical negotiation of those capabilities.”⁴ Griffin contends that our ideas of the public/private sphere come from an essentialist view of women and men. She explains, “Essentialism is an argument for fixed, unchanging characteristics that determine an individual’s behaviors or actions.”⁵ She then goes on to argue that “the emphasis on distinct and separate spheres leads to an emphasis on separation and alienation . . . If spheres . . . are seen as distinct, then rhetors also can be divided and separated from one another, and alienation is promoted rather than connection.”⁶ This idea is supported by Deborah L. Rotman, who explains that because of essentialism, “The model of ‘women at home’ has shaped the social relations of many peoples across time and space.”⁷ Rotman agrees, “Under the cult of domesticity, the home was defined as a private, female sphere in opposition to the public economic sphere of men.”⁸ According to Rotman, this separation ultimately leads to “defining women as family matriarchs and nurturers exclude[ing] them as agents of social change, making such activity the exclusive domain of the culture bearers (i.e., men).”⁹ However, Roman contends that “the lived experiences of women and men, however, were more dynamic than this rigid dichotomy suggests.”¹⁰

At SMP, the separation and alienation that Griffin speaks of, between men and women, public and private spheres, as well as the “lived experience” that Roman explores, is (re)presented quite literally and concretely through its 2003 monument and then again with its correction/addition of the 2009 women’s monument. While SMP can be seen as a material representation of a counterpublic identity and can function as a counterpublic space, the women of the UAW can be viewed as a subaltern group within this counterpublic. The purpose of this chapter is to address the change that SMP went through in including two separate gendered monuments and to explore the implications of those changes for women’s identity and agency within the UAW.

In this chapter, I argue that the essentialized portrayal of women in the 2003 version of SMP reinforced double binds and promoted a patriarchal view of labor as an historically masculine activity. This monument, through its domestic representations, elided women’s agency in the (counter)public sphere. When the park was expanded in 2009, however, the revised version avoids many of the essentialist arguments present in the original monument and positions women as agents in the (counter)public sphere. Nevertheless, despite these improvements, my analysis demonstrates the ways in which the women of the UAW are still challenged by the “worker/homemaker” double bind. In this chapter, I first discuss the rhetorical dynamic of the double bind which constrains and contains women. Second, I consider SMP as it was in 2003 with its singular monument. Finally, I explore the changes that were made to the park in 2009 with the addition of the women’s monument and marble globe and evaluate how those changes may affect the SMP experience.

DOUBLE BIND: DOMESTICATION AS CONTAINMENT

Throughout history, women have been placed in a multiplicity of double binds, constantly being required to perform a balancing act between aging/invisibility, silence/shame, sameness/difference, femininity/competence, and womb/brain, just to name a few.¹¹ These double binds often work to contain women and keep them out of the public sphere in a patriarchal society.¹² Within the womb/brain double bind, Kathleen Hall Jamieson discusses the bind of worker/homemaker.¹³ Jamieson explains, “The double bind faced by the working mother lies in society’s persistence in linking a woman’s identity to a man and to the role of mother and homemaker.”¹⁴ Additionally, she argues, “We are quick to see double binds hampering the mobility of those working outside the home. But the reason that the [worker/homemaker] is a double bind is because either choice carries penalties”¹⁵

Furthermore, the specific position and display of the monuments inside SMP invokes the dynamic of containment. Karrin Vasby Anderson explains, “The role of women political leaders has been constructed within a culture of ‘containment,’ a metaphor that resonated in U.S. politics and culture during the Cold War.”¹⁶ She goes on to explain,

Like other containment rhetorics, sexual containment has roots in early American discourse. Most notably, containment metaphors emerged in the debates over women’s suffrage, with opponents to suffrage arguing that women should remain cloistered in the private sphere. Not only did they object to women voting, they deemed any woman who spoke to “promiscuous” audiences composed of women and men to be “masculine, unwomanly, aggressive, and cold.”¹⁷

Even after women won the right to vote in 1920, however, these containment strategies did not disappear. Evidence of containment rhetoric can be found in contemporaneous

discourses about the strike in 1936. For instance, in the 1979 documentary, *With Babies and Banners: Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade*, Genora Johnson comments on the double bind faced by her fellow Emergency Brigade members: "She couldn't be too masculine, she couldn't be too feminine, you couldn't be too intellectual or men resented this more than anything in the world. She was in a damn, damn never-never land!"¹⁸

According to Jennifer L. Borda, however, this

film provides a critique of women's traditional roles and reveals the slippery boundaries between the public and the private by demonstrating how these activist women worked to traverse those boundaries in their own lives . . . Yet, the film does more than just demonstrate these women's ability to move between the private and public spheres, it also raises issues that challenge notions of power and gender politics, thus advocating women's inherent *right* to transcend the boundaries imposed on them.¹⁹

Nonetheless, containment strategies re-appeared in the 2003 version of the sit-down strike monument, and they remained salient in 2009 when SMP was built and the women's monument was added. In 2003, women were contained in the private sphere through an essentialized representation of UAW women workers as only homemakers. The 2009 monument acknowledges the diverse positionalities of the women who contributed to the strike, however, the monument still disciplines and contains women by memorializing the (often negative) consequences of women's participation in the strike.

Containment of the female comes in many forms, but in SMP it relies upon domesticating women and situating their roles in the private sphere. According to Kristan Poirot, "'Containment' and 'domestication' are terms that have been deployed in studies of public address to describe rhetorical strategies that in some way aim to tame a potential threat to hegemonic culture and/or the norms of the status quo."²⁰ Ultimately, containment rhetoric works to limit any alternative view of woman that a visitor to SMP

might have other than what is socially constructed as “normal.” The containment messages represented in these memories are important insofar as they have the ability to impact a UAW member’s identity and way of acting in the future.²¹ Thus, the changes to SMP function much like the famous documentary about the strike, in that, according to producer Lyn Golfarb, “We had to give working women back their history. Union women see this and say they’ve been given their roots and now they’ll continue the struggle.”²²

CONTAINMENT IN 2003

The original UAW Sit-Down Strike monument was built in 2003 before the larger park existed. Originally, it featured five male workers raised up on a marble platform and situated around a continuously burning flame. It also featured one female placed off to the side of the men on ground level and not in the same sphere as the men. This monument worked to contain women of the UAW in their essentialized, domesticated, private sphere role using three strategies: 1) the lone woman was represented in the stereotypical role of a housewife, 2) she was physically situated below the men, and 3) eventually, she was separated from the men and placed outside the ceremonial rope that encased the privileged male statues.

Most notable about this monument was the essentialized role of the woman placed off to the side. She was depicted in her domesticated, stereotypical role as the homemaker, not as a worker capable of producing social change, by carrying a picnic basket (presumably with food inside it) under her left arm and a suit case (presumably with clothes inside it) in her right hand to the male strikers located inside the plant. Furthermore, the men in the monument replicate a famous picture of the strike that was

taken inside the plant whereas the woman has no authenticity associated with her. The men are wearing traditional work clothes and caps, not dressed for the cold winter conditions. This distinguishes them as authentic workers and strikers in a scene that clearly takes place inside the plant, inside a workplace. The woman, on the other hand, is wearing a long winter jacket, much like the one a housewife would wear on her long walk to the plant during a cold Michigan winter to deliver food to her husband inside the plant. Although the coat has an Emergency Brigade armband, simply labeled EB around her left arm, it is clear that this is not a work coat; it is too nice with its fur collar. Thus, this woman is neither a worker nor a striker (see Figure 8).



(Figure 8 – 2003 statue now located in the 2009 Women’s Monument.
Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

Whereas the women in 1937 did play a significant role in the strike by bringing food to the strikers and taking care of the children while their husbands were in the plant (the role of homemaker)—the bravery of an Emergency Brigade member and the role of the picketers and workers was completely overlooked in the 2003 monument. This is significant given that the bravery of the Emergency Brigade and picketers largely contributed to the success of the strike. The subtleness of the EB armband is easily overlooked on this statue as if to say that she was a homemaker before she was an Emergency Brigade member. When viewing the monument, one's attention is immediately focused on the men of the strike; and when one notices the woman off to the side, the viewer's attention is likely to be drawn to the items she is carrying and how they cast the women of the strike in the supporting role of wife/mother supporting her husband's public, political efforts.

Additionally, Emergency Brigade member Johnson states, "The red beret woman became a symbol of a different, new type of woman, ready to sacrifice her life, as the men felt they were."²³ Here, however, the red beret vanishes in the bronze statue; the beret could be any color and there is no notion of sacrifice represented in this essentialized statue. All that is recognized is her supporting role. While she is clearly walking to the men who are striking, there is no sense of drama in this statue, no sense of urgency, and no sense of agency represented in the lone woman with her blank, emotionless face. The drama and sacrifice in this monument is clearly focused on the men and their efforts inside the plant. As we know from Chapter Two, however, much of the drama that occurred during the long strike happened on the outside of the plant, where women battled company goons and Flint police. Nevertheless, in this monument the

woman is just there, much like an afterthought, off the side and not directly part of the monument.²⁴ This limited view of a woman UAW member represented in this monument is an essentialized one and downplays the risks, as well as the rewards, that women of the UAW faced during the strike.

Furthermore, the homemaker role of a UAW woman was devalued in SMP by placing the lone woman below the men's platform and outside the memorialized space, depicting her as "just a housewife." Jamieson explains, "The phrase 'just a housewife' acknowledges the low status some attach to the traditional role."²⁵ While the men in this monument are raised up on a platform for visitors to look at and admire, the woman is represented on ground level which acknowledges the low status of her essentialized role. She is not even physically connected to the monument and is able to be moved around to multiple locations. The men, on the other hand, are grounded in space and time. Although acknowledging women (a woman) in the monument, SMP placed the political emphasis on the men of the strike while containing the woman in her private sphere performing her domestic duties, which are not on the same level or hold the same significance as the men of the strike.

Accompanying the essentialized domestic role of the woman is the issue that only one woman is represented. This further homogenizes a woman UAW member's identity. With five men of different ethnicities located in the monument, a male UAW member is likely to identify with one of the strikers represented in the monument. Furthermore, in 1937, that's what the men in the strike did—they sat down. Women, on the other hand, took up multiple roles and performed multiple duties. In this monument, however, these

multiple roles become conflated in memory, as the role of the supporting woman is reduced to being represented as “just a housewife.”

This separation and containment to the private sphere was made even clearer in 2005 when SMP added a rope to the monument at a dedication ceremony. The rope surrounding this monument acts as a physical barrier separating the woman from the men, eliding her identity as a worker and segregating her contributions to the historic strike. While the monument clearly depicts the men as striking, it also clearly depicts that the women did not; the rope is blocking her access to this form of public life, not allowing her to take part in the men’s accomplishments which are made evident through the written descriptions engraved on the monument surrounding the roped off men. These inscriptions include “The First UAW – GM Agreement,” “UAW Region 1-C Directors” (all men), and “UAW Presidents” (all men) that helped make the park possible. Thus, the female UAW member is, just a housewife, not a worker and not part of the progressive contract.²⁶

Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki explain the rhetorical significance of ropes as they are used in museums and monuments, noting that “historically, the display of artifacts in museums has been about separation, spectacle and surveillance, as visitors have ‘gazed’ at artifacts that are preserved and protected behind rope barriers and glass walls.”²⁷ At the 2005 dedication ceremony, when the traditional monument of the men was roped off for the visitors to simply stand back and look at with reverence, guest speakers, most notably Michigan’s Lieutenant Governor, spoke about the importance of the strike. All the while, the woman was excluded by this rope and from the accomplishment that the men had achieved. At the dedication ceremony, she became part

of the crowd and blended in with the rest of the visitors while they all “gazed” up (literally since they were on ground level and facing the men) at the magnificent accomplishment the men had achieved.

The type of “surveillance” that Dickinson et al. speak of in regards to the historical display of artifacts was the case for the representation and display of the men in the strike; it was not, however, the case for the way the lone woman was represented and displayed. Instead of being roped off with the rest of the monument, the woman was left out; she was separate, alienated, and essentialized. She was contained and had no agency. She played no more of an important role in the strike than the visitors to the park on that day who admired the strikers’ accomplishments. This rope has since become a permanent part of the 2003 monument (see Figure 9). Interestingly enough, the lone woman has since been moved to the 2009 “woman’s monument.”



(Figure 9 – 2003 monument. Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

AGENCY IN 2009

The marginalization of the woman's statue in 2003 seemed evident even to the park's curators.²⁸ Perhaps in response to this, a separate women's monument was built and dedicated on Labor Day 2009. Although this monument avoids essentialist representations and positions women as agents, capable of producing social change and making valuable contributions to the UAW, it also demonstrates the double bind that UAW women are placed in through 1) the use of space within the park and 2) the lack of a cohesive message within the monument.

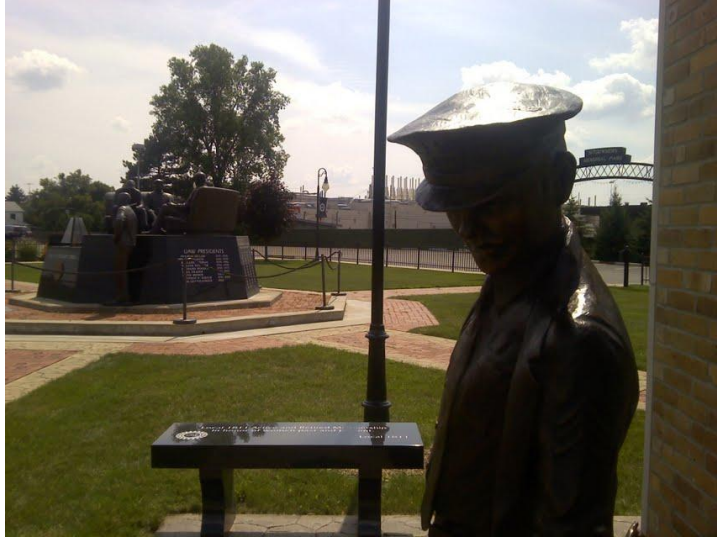
For those traveling to SMP today, the woman who was originally included as a separate part of the men's monument has been moved to her permanent home as a key player in the scene that the women's monument depicts. This allows for two totally separate gendered monuments which tell a different story in a visitor's experience of the park. While the men's monument presents a cohesive message and represents the men as working together to sign the agreement, the women featured in this monument are acting separately and seemingly unsystematically to support the men. In addition to the essentialized woman, the 2009 women's monument also features a woman breaking a window with a long club to release the tear-gas that had been fired inside the plant, a police officer dragging a beaten woman along the ground, and the statue of a small boy holding a picket sign which reads, "MY DADDY STRIKES FOR US LITTLE TYKES – ON TO VICTORY" (see Figure 10). Despite the lack of a cohesive message between these statues, this monument features a sense of authenticity similar to the men's monument. For instance, the statue of the boy with the sign is the representation of one of the most famous pictures that has circulated since the strike.²⁹ Furthermore, the window

frames and bricks that make up the wall that serves as the back drop for the unfolding scene that the monument depicts are taken from the remains of the Fisher Body No. 1 plant where the strike occurred.³⁰ The most distinctive feature of this monument, however, is its interactive nature.



(Figure 10 – 2009 Women’s Monument.
Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

When standing in front of the 2009 women’s monument, there is a plaque that sits directly in the middle of the brick wall, between two broken out windows. This plaque sets the scene for the monument. It reads “UAW TRIBUTE TO WOMEN: ORDINARY WOMEN CHANGING THE WORLD.” Above the plaque hangs an old-fashioned street lamp, inviting a visitor to come read it even in the dimmest light. As I walk into the monument to read the fine print on the plaque, I am transported to another place; I become part of the scene as the statues surround me and a police officer aggressively stares at me directly to my left (see Figure 11).



(Figure 11 – Standing in the 2009 Women’s Monument, within reading distance of the plaque. Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

The plaque describes the significant role that “ordinary” women played in the success of the strike, acknowledging their valuable contributions and the hardships they faced. As I read through the description, I become acutely aware of my identity and the use of space within this monument. On this hot July day, I feel a sense of discomfort from the sweat dripping down my face and from the close proximity of the policeman. As an ordinary man visiting this park, I know that the women represented in this monument endured so much more.

The location of this plaque, not roped off but inviting, is an important rhetorical element of the 2009 monument; it draws the visitors in. Unlike the traditional men’s monument which is exclusively roped off as if to tell visitors to stand back, look at, and admire the men and their accomplishments, the women’s monument features a distinct interactive environment. Dickinson et. al. explain, “Increasingly, however, museums seeking to foster ‘lived experience’ with artifacts have featured fully immersive, interactive environments.”³¹ Similarly, this women’s monument invites visitors to not just

gaze at the women in monument, but also to interact with them. Visitors can walk around within the women's monument, engage with it, touch it, and become part of the scene. Here, visitors have the ability to pose with the different statues, physically placing themselves within the visual landscape of the monument and interacting with the drama that unfolds in the monument. This can impact the way a visitor remembers the park and the achievements of the women. If a visitor decides to take a picture within the monument, the experience would necessarily be remembered differently than one in which a visitor is pictured standing in front of a monument that is roped off. When positioned within the monument there is a higher chance for identification between the visitor and what the monument represents. Ultimately, they would be more likely to see themselves in what the monument represents when they look back at the pictures to remember.

The interaction involved while experiencing this monument, however, does not place the women's achievements on the same level of the men's, who are roped off in order to preserve what was won. This lack of preservation and visitor interaction with the monument fosters the "lived experience" that Dickinson et al. explain. The lived experience is then furthered and made real, or authentic, through the bricks that make up the monument, coming from the actual location of the strike. The lived experience that this monument fosters and makes real is the dynamic interplay of public and private spheres that Rotman explains and the double bind that women are placed in on a daily basis as a members of the UAW. The double bind in SMP is realized through the separation and location of the women's monument, the visual references to the

domesticated roles of UAW women, and the acknowledgement of the consequences and rewards for breaking those roles.

First, this monument is separate from the men's achievements. There are no UAW men in this monument, which makes sense because it is a tribute to the "ordinary women" of the UAW, but why did they have to make two separate monuments for one counterpublic identity? Furthermore, why did they move the woman who was originally part of the men's monument to this separate space? This separation and alienation, promoted by the functionality of the women's monument makes the men's monument seem more important. Visually, the monument suggests that the accomplishments of the "ordinary women" are subordinate to those of the male workers, who are authoritatively positioned above the women in a roped off space to the southwest (see Figure 11). However, the addition of this women's monument more accurately affirms that the men situated on their marble throne could not be there without the actions and sacrifices of the women in this monument. The accomplishments of the women are acknowledged verbally, more than visually, through the plaque that sits in the center of the wall and through the second part of the dedication to UAW women—the large granite globe. The problem still remains, however, that this new monument is other; it is separated by the rope that still remains to protect the men and their Contract.

This separation between the two monuments and essentialist notions of women only being a part of the private sphere is furthered by the view when entering the park through the main entrance. While entering, the women in the women's monument are not visible. All that can be seen is the wall blocking them and the men raised up on their pedestal. Furthermore, the second part of the UAW dedication to women, the granite

globe, is shielded by the men's monument.³² It is as if the women are shielded from the public view, the public sphere, and remain hidden behind the wall and the accomplishments of the men (see Figure 12).³³



(Figure 12 – View from the main entrance of the park, no women visible.
Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

Second, while this new monument more accurately (re)presents the various non-essentialist roles that women played in the strike, there are still many nuances of the private sphere and the domesticated role of women within this monument. Thus, this monument is polysemous; it both reinforces *and* contradicts essentialist notions of women's roles. For instance, the view from the entrance of the park, the statue of the woman with a picnic basket, and the statue of the child picketer are all references to the essentialized, domesticated, supporting role of a woman in the private sphere; whereas the statue of the woman breaking a window with a club is an empowering statue which represents her role in the public sphere. However, the lone child located here presents an especially interesting dynamic to the women's monument. First, the young boy's picket reads, "MY DADDY STRIKES . . ." While this is an accurate representation of the

picture that has circulated, it diminishes the fact that women also played a role in the strike; the women just assumed different roles from the men (as represented in the monument). However, the child is an overt reference to the childbearing role of a traditional homemaker. The child invokes traditional conceptions of the family—with the father working and the mother supporting the father’s efforts. Furthermore, the child seems to be abandoned. There is no clue as to who the mother is while all the women in the monument are busy striking (working). Jamieson tells us that “historically, the childless woman was assumed to be defective, either an asexual spinster or a lesbian. The childless married woman was presumed to be so power-driven and selfish that she deliberately sacrificed her childbearing role for her profession.”³⁴ Thus, the position of the female workers located in this monument in relation to the abandoned child depicts the penalty a woman may face for choosing work over the home. While the men in the park are only viewed as workers, the representations of women in this monument remind women of the UAW that the double bind is prevalent and that either choice carries a penalty.

The small boy in this monument also calls attention to the pedagogical nature of the monument and of the park overall. According to the Historical Voices audio gallery, “Many of [the Emergency Brigade] women even enlisted their children in picket duty and ended up giving them an education they could not have received in Flint's schools.”³⁵ Here a reference to education, an historically female dominated profession, is invoked in the women’s monument.³⁶ The women located in this monument are giving the young boy an education on what it means to be a striker and a UAW member. This education symbolizes the striker’s tradition that must be carried on for future generations, much like

the continuous burning flame in the men's monument. The women's monument symbolizes the passing of this torch.

Finally, one of the most powerful statues in this monument is that of a woman being beaten by a policeman (see Figure 13). On one visit to the park, I witnessed a little girl asking her mom what the woman did wrong. "Why is she being dragged away?" she asked. Depicting a policeman in this scene is an interesting rhetorical move because the woman must have done something wrong in order to endure such consequences from a sanctioned authority figure. Furthermore, there is no visual explanation of what the woman did wrong, just as there is no visual explanation of why another woman is breaking the window. In each of these cases we are taught from a young age on how to behave in public—don't break a window and listen to authority figures. Not following these rules carries penalties. Visually in this monument, the visitor is left to fill in the blanks and answer those questions, judging the woman's actions.



(Figure 13 – 2009 Woman's Monument, woman being dragged away. Photo taken by Aaron Keel, all rights reserved.)

If one goes a bit farther in exploring this monument, however, these questions are answered when a visitor reads the plaque. The narrative on the plaque competes with the visual narrative suggested through experience of the monument. All that we know by looking at this monument is that this woman who is being punished did something wrong. We also know that she broke her stereotypical role or else she wouldn't be facing a penalty. Additionally, when looking at the statue of the beaten woman by itself, it appears as though the women's Emergency Brigade was not successful against the police and that the woman did something wrong, especially when compared to the men who are raised up and roped off. The woman in this monument appears powerless and as a victim (of unjust police action but a victim nonetheless). When looking at the monument as a whole, however, taking into account the essentialized woman, the plaque on the wall, and the woman breaking the window, this statue with the policeman depicts the dangers of trying to escape the double bind and serves as a hostile reminder of what might happen if a woman is to stand up to authority and enter the public sphere. On the other hand, the narrative described on the plaque enforces the necessity of the women's actions, the bravery they displayed through acting, and the rewards they received for breaking the law. While the visual narrative suggests that the women's actions were only breaking the law, the plaque describes that these actions were justified and that UAW women were actually correct in doing so—the women were agents of social change.

While the women of the UAW did (do) go through much hardship, as depicted in the statue with the policeman, they were also very successful in their actions and in breaking their stereotypical role. The most empowering representation of UAW women

located within this monument is the statue of the woman breaking the window. This statue shows the action that women took by breaking their stereotypical role and “making a difference in the world.” This statue is empowering because it depicts one of the most crucial roles that women played during the Battle of Bulls Run and demonstrates how their actions contributed to the success of the strike. Furthermore, this statue of a woman with a club fulfills the cliché metaphor of “breaking the glass [window].” It gives a new meaning to the essentialized woman who was originally included in the 2003 monument and brings to light the polysemous nature of the monument. Placing these statues near each other (domestication and empowerment), along with the written description of the various ways women contributed to the strike on the plaque, instills a sense that this domestic role was just as important to the success of the strike as any other role. In this monument, the two statues complement each other instead of being something separate. Placing them together in this monument provides a more comprehensive memory of a woman UAW member’s identity. According to this monument, each role is important to the success of the overall movement and each role is important in enacting social change.

This empowering statue of the woman with a club explicitly grants UAW women agency to make a difference in the public sphere. The other statues that surround it, however, are references to domestication and punishment. Taken as a whole, the various roles represented in this monument elucidate its polysemous message comprised of essentialist and non-essentialist views. They also more clearly represent the symbol of the red beret: “a different, new type of woman, ready to sacrifice her life, as the men felt they were.”³⁷ Finally, this monument serves as a constant reminder of the price that is

paid as well as the rewards that can be won by women for breaking their stereotypical role by putting on a red beret, trying to escape the double bind that is prevalent in society.

A CHANGING PERCEPTION OF WOMEN

If we recall the UAW's record in regard to women from Chapter Two, then we can better understand the changes and developments to SMP from 2003 to the present day. Nancy Gabin argues:

Like the record of organized labor generally, the UAW's record in regard to women was decidedly mixed. On the one hand, the UAW tended to marginalize women in the union hall and on the shop floor, denying them equal access to positions of leadership and power within the organization, never making gender equality a central demand of its collective-bargaining agenda, and at times asserting the interests of the male majority at the expense of women auto workers . . . On the other hand, however, the UAW acknowledged the problem of sexual discrimination in employment early in its history, institutionalized an advocate for women within the union structure in the middle 1940s, and already had made some important collective bargaining gains in the interest of gender equity by the time the civil rights and feminist movements began to legitimize the principle of equality in the labor market in the 1960s.³⁸

On one hand, the 2003 monument represented the inequality of the UAW. The monument became a material representation of the discriminatory action taken by the UAW in 1937—the women were excluded from the monument in much the same way that they were sidelined during the strike itself. It marginalized their involvement and relegated their actions to the floor while the men were raised up. In turn, this denied UAW women equal access to the public sphere and distinguished them as a subaltern group within a counterpublic identity. On the other hand, the 2009 monument represents the second view of women in the UAW as described by Gabin. This tribute to women recognizes the important gains that women have made and positions them as agents capable of enacting social change.

For a visitor to the park in 2003, the essentialized representation of women's role in the strike alienated UAW women as a subaltern member of a counterpublic; even the counterpublic became stratified in this instance. This monument granted women no agency in the public sphere. By moving the domesticated woman from the 2003 monument to the 2009 monument, however, SMP avoids the essentialist argument and the text becomes polysemous—that is, it both reinforces and contradicts essentialist notions of women's roles. Through the quantifiable number of (re)presentations, showing women in various roles from domesticated to aggressive, the 2009 monument enacts a multiplicity of identities. This monument also positions women as agents capable of enacting of social change. However, even in the 2009 monument, UAW women do not escape the double bind that is mirrored in many women's lived experience.

In SMP, the double bind of worker/homemaker is apparent by the way the women's monument is situated in relation to the original monument and with the multiple, often conflicting scenes depicted by the statues in the 2009 monument: references to essentialized domesticated roles (statue of woman with picnic basket and statue of the small child), empowerment (statue of woman breaking window), and the consequences (statue of woman being dragged and statue of abandoned child), as well as the rewards (written description on plaque) for challenging the double bind.

Additionally, the penalties of the worker/homemaker double bind are represented in both the 2003 and the 2009 women's monument. In the 2003 monument women were depicted as "just a housewife." Then, in 2009, women are reminded of the sometimes physical consequences for violating their traditional role as homemaker through the statue of a woman being beaten. Women are also reminded of the personal consequences

of abandoning a child. The juxtaposition of the woman being beaten with the empowering statue of the woman breaking a window reminds UAW women of the dangers, as well as the rewards, for stepping into the public sphere. It is also important to acknowledge that this monument represents the bravery of the women as well as the brutality of the police officers. However, by not visually showcasing that the bravery of these women was successful, by placing them on ground level where a visitor can interact with them, and by blocking their view from the outside world, women are still not granted the same agency as men in the public sphere; they still do not escape the double bind.

Clearly the men in the park played a significant role, as noted in the 2003 monument. However, the entire rest of the park is now dedicated to the women of the strike. These various representations grant women agency and the motivation to carry on the strikers' work, but it also calls attention to the difficulty in doing so. If it wasn't difficult, the park probably wouldn't have commemorated them; society doesn't commemorate the things that are easy. This hyper-correction ultimately deems the UAW woman's role as abnormal. By pointing out the various roles that women played in multiple places and in multiple ways, a visitor is forced to acknowledge that these are extraordinary women, not "ordinary." If these women's actions were ordinary, there would be no repercussions for their behavior and we would not be commemorating them. Similarly, there would not have been a hyper-correction between 2003 and 2009, especially when compared to how the men are represented in the park—they are taken for granted; the men are normal. Ultimately, however, the park grants the ordinary women visitors agency and the ability to become extraordinary by seeing themselves and the

struggles they face on a daily basis as represented in the park. According to Borda, memories such as the ones enlisted here serve “as a reminder to women of today that the work of the ‘rebel girls’ is not to be forgotten because, in many ways, it has only just begun.”³⁹

NOTES

¹ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1994), 110.

² Cindy L. Griffin, “The Essentialist Roots of the Public Sphere: A Feminist Critique,” *Western Journal of Communication* 601, No. 1 (1996): 22. Griffin offers a brief summary of Carole Pateman, “Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy,” in *Feminism and Equality*, edited by A. Phillips (New York: New York University Press, 1987)

³ Griffin, “Essentialist Roots,” 22, offers a brief summary of L.J. Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) and Joan Landis, *Women and the Public Sphere in the age of French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988).

⁴ Griffin, “Essentialist Roots,” 24, draws inspiration for her article from Mary O’Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

⁵ Griffin, “Essentialist Roots,” 22. Griffin’s analysis is more concerned with the biological and sexual differences between men and women and how that relates to the public/private sphere. However, in her conclusion she invites authors to take up other forms of essentialism. I argue that depicting a woman only as a homemaker is essentializing.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

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- ⁷ Deborah L. Rotman, "Separate Spheres? Beyond the Dichotomies of Domesticity," *Current Anthropology* 46, No. 4 (2006): 666.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ See, for example, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- ¹² See, for example, Ibid., or Karrin Vasby Anderson, "'Rhymes With Rich': 'Bitch' as a Tool of Containment in Contemporary American Politics," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 2, No. 4 (1999), 599-623.
- ¹³ See also, Tonn, Mari Boor, "Militant Motherhood: Labor's Mary Harris 'Mother' Jones," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82, No. 1 (1996), 1-21.
- ¹⁴ Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*, 61.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., 66.
- ¹⁶ Anderson, "Rhymes With Rich," 600.
- ¹⁷ Ibid., 601.
- ¹⁸ Genora Johnson quoted in Jennifer L. Borda, "Feminist Critique and Cinematic Counterhistory In the Documentaty *With Babies and Banners*," *Women's Studies in Communication* 28, No. 2 (2005): 171. Quote came from Genora Johnson and members of the women's Emergency Brigade, *With Babies and Banners*, documentary, directed by Lorraine Gray (1978; New Day Films, 1979). The film was nominated for an Oscar in 1979.

¹⁹ Borda, "Feminist Critique," 177.

²⁰ Kristan Poirot, "Domesticating the Liberated Woman: Containment Rhetorics of Second Wave Radical/Lesbian Feminism," *Women's Studies in Communication* 32, No. 3 (2009): 265. See also Anderson, "Rhymes With Rich," and John M. Murphy, "Domesticating Dissent: The Kennedy's and the Freedom Rides," *Communication Monographs* 59, No. 1 (1992) 61-78.

²¹ Speaking on the consequentiality of rhetorical spaces, Greg Dickinson explains, "Spaces provide the material/rhetorical resources of which, and through which, we create our bodies and ourselves. Our collective and individual subjectivities are always at stake, and they are always at stake even in, perhaps especially in, the mundane and banal practices of the everyday. Greg Dickinson, "Joe's Rhetoric: Finding Authenticity at Starbucks," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 32, No. 4 (2002): 6.

²² Golfarb in Borda, "Feminist Critique," 157. Original newspaper article could not be found. Eileen Ogintz, "The Strike that Made History," *Chicago Tribune*, October 19, 1978.

²³ Johnson quoted in Borda, "Feminist Critique," 177-178.

²⁴ A Google search produces images, most of which are dated prior to 2009, that are framed in a way that excludes the woman from the picture.

²⁵ Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*, 68.

²⁶ It should be note that there are names of UAW women located on the bricks within the roped off area, but there are no women engraved into the marble base that the strikers sit on. Unlike the writing on the base, one has to take time to stop and read these

bricks; the names are not noticeable at a glance. Perhaps to balance this, there are many women named as part of the globe monument. The difference still remains, however; those women were not UAW.

²⁷ Greg Dickinson, Brian L. Ott, and Eric Aoki, "Memory and Myth at the Buffalo Bill Museum," *Western Journal of Communication* 69, No. 2 (2005): 91. They draw their inspiration from Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics*, (New York: Routledge, 1995), 59–86.

²⁸ Although I found no authorial intent for the park design, upon the women's monument completion, Flint's Pauline Polsgrove, an original sit-downer who is now 91, said: "It's great . . . They should have had it years ago, not now when they are all gone." Another sit-downer present at the dedication ceremony described this new monument as "accurate." Quoted in Lorri Lea, "Memorial Honors Women of 1937 Strike," *Flint Journal*, September 7, 2009, http://www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2009/09/memorial_honors_the_women_of_1.html (accessed May 5, 2011).

²⁹ See for example, Kristin Longley, "Strikers forged union history. 44-day standoff changed working conditions forever," *Flint Journal*, July 11, 2008, http://www.mlive.com/flintjournal/business/index.ssf/2008/07/strikers_forged_union_history.html (accessed April 21, 2011). This article includes a picture of the boy featured in the 2009 monument as well as the picture that men's monument was modeled off of. Additionally, the last time I visited the Sloan Museum in Flint I received a pamphlet on the strike with the picture of this boy on the front.

³⁰ There is a description on the side of the monument citing this authenticity. It describes the significance of the wall and acknowledges the volunteers who donated their time to build this monument

³¹ Dickinson et al. "Memory and Myth," 91.

³² This experience is different while entering from the most common entrance.

³³ It should be noted that the men are faced the same direction as the women, they all face east towards the flags and towards the globe that sits in the center of the park. The difference, however, is that in the men's monument the men remain visible and the emphasis is on the contract, while in the women's monument all that can be seen is the brick wall.

³⁴ Jamieson, *Beyond the Double Bind*, 69.

³⁵ Historical Voices, "The Strike," *The Flint Sit-Down Strike Audio Gallery*, <http://www.historicalvoices.org/flint/strike.php> (accessed February 6, 2011).

³⁶ The Feminization of education began in the 1840's. See for example, "Only a Teacher: Teaching Timeline," PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/timeline.html> (accessed May 9, 2011). Additionally, In 2007-2008, 76% of public school teachers were female. See "Fast Facts," *National Center for Education Statistics*, <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=28> (accessed May 9, 2011).

³⁷ Johnson quoted in Borda, "Feminist Critique," 177-178.

³⁸ Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935 – 1975* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), 4.

³⁹ Borda, "Feminist Critique," 180.

CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

As I write this, the battle for workers' rights that began in 1937 is still not over. When I began this project, I had no idea that by the end of it I would find myself right in the middle of a reinvigorated public debate over the role of unions in America. As I began researching this topic, workers' rights seemed to be an issue only found in history books and memories of the labor movement seemed to be fading from the public's view. Today, however, as I finish this project, memories surrounding the labor movement are still fading from public view but controversies surrounding labor and unions seem to be on the front of everyone's mind; perhaps this is because of fading public memory—or public forgetting.

The public debate surrounding unions was resurrected on February 16, 2011 in Wisconsin when controversial anti-union legislation made it through the committee process and was approved for debate on the floor of the State Assembly.¹ The legislation proposed in Wisconsin essentially ended all collective bargaining for public sector employees and required them to pay more towards their pensions and health insurance costs. Police and firefighters were exempted.² Soon after it was introduced, 14 Democratic lawmakers fled the state to prevent a final vote until a compromise could be reached and the issue gained international attention.³ The main controversy surrounding this measure centered on the right of an employee to collectively bargain, the key victory

of the 1936-37 sit-down strike. On one side of the debate, Wisconsin Education Association Council President Mary Bell said at a press conference on the Capitol Square, "This is not about protecting our pay and our benefits . . . It is about protecting our right to collectively bargain."⁴ The unions in Wisconsin were ultimately willing to make financial concessions, but they resisted having to relinquish their ability to collectively bargain. Conversely, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker rejected any kind of political compromise and argued that ending collective bargaining was essential to balancing the state's budget.⁵ The legislation was eventually passed and signed into law on March 11, 2011, justified by the need to reduce the state's budget deficit.⁶

The events in Wisconsin sparked attention both nationally and internationally, and other states soon joined the effort to end public sector unions. For instance, in Indiana legislation was introduced that, according Thomas M. Burton of the *Wall Street Journal*,

would allow workers at unionized companies to refrain from being part of the union and paying union dues. In the view of many corporations and the Republicans in the Indiana Legislature, this bill [was] a matter of personal freedom and a chance to boost jobs in the state. But in the view of the Democrats and many union leaders, it [was] an attack on the existence and financial clout of unions.⁷

This legislation was eventually dropped on February 24, 2011 after Democratic lawmakers employed tactics used by their Wisconsin colleagues and fled the state to avoid a final vote.

In Ohio, anti-union legislation was eventually passed on March 30, 2011. According to Steven Greenhouse of the *New York Times*, of the many things the bill was allowed to do, "The bill would bar public employees from striking and would prohibit binding arbitration for police officers and firefighters. It would allow bargaining over

wages, but not health coverage and pensions and would allow public-employee unions to bargain only when the public employer chose to do so.”⁸ Upon passing, “Republicans applauded the bill, saying Ohio’s deficit-plagued state and local governments could no longer afford the costs that public-sector unions extracted in collective bargaining.”⁹ Furthermore, House Speaker William G. Batchelder, argued: “Today, this House has taken an unprecedented step toward public policy that respects all Ohioans, especially our taxpayers and our hard-working middle class.”¹⁰ He added, the bill “protects the collective bargaining rights of Ohioans while also giving local governments an additional tool in the toolbox as they balance their budgets.”¹¹ However, Greenhouse explains, “Democrats criticized the legislation, saying it effectively eviscerated public employees’ bargaining rights and would make it harder for them to stay in the middle class.”¹² Furthermore, James Brudney, a labor law professor at Ohio State University, argued that “the bill effectively crippled collective bargaining.”¹³ He stated,

There’s a kind of mask or illusion element in this . . . the essence of collective bargaining is when you can’t agree on terms of a contract, you have a dispute resolution mechanism, by strikes or perhaps binding arbitration. Here, you have none of that. That’s not collective bargaining. I’d call it collective begging. It’s a conversation that ends whenever an employer decides that it ends.¹⁴

Furthermore, in Michigan a resolution was adopted that granted new far-reaching powers to Emergency Financial Managers; among these powers was the ability to terminate union contracts in “financially distressed municipalities and school districts.”¹⁵ When teachers threatened to strike over this measure, on March 30, 2011 (the same day the anti-union bill passed in Ohio) the legislature took up a measure that imposed harsher penalties on strikers (striking in Michigan was already illegal); part of these new penalties included the ability to revoke teaching licenses.¹⁶

Finally, on March 23, 2011, Maine Republican Governor Paul LePage ordered the removal of a 36-foot-tall mural in the lobby of the Department of Labor. According to National Public Radio (NPR), “The mural depicts events in the state's labor history, from the first time unionists were allowed to vote anonymously to a 1973 strike that sought better working conditions for women.”¹⁷ NPR explained that “LePage told Maine Public Broadcasting Network that he wanted to remove the mural because it represents only one side in the struggle between management and labor and he ‘doesn't think that's fair.’”¹⁸ In addition, LePage also ordered the “renaming [of] several department conference rooms that carry the names of pro-labor icons such as Cesar Chavez . . . LePage spokesman Dan Demeritt says the mural and the conference room names are not in keeping with the department's pro-business goals and some business owners complained.”¹⁹

Today, the impacts of the 1936-37 sit-down strike, as well as the achievements of the larger labor movement, seem far from public memory as Republican governors are choosing to balance their budgets by taking away a right that was won nearly a century ago and by physically removing evidence or commemoration of labor's success from public view. To combat this political movement, SMP enlists memories of the sit-down strike to reinvigorate a community and offer visitors rhetorical resources that justify pro-union perspectives. In so doing, a counterpublic identity is created and the historically contested past connects with the contested present. I will now review each chapter of my thesis, address its major findings, discuss the limitations and areas for future research, and offer a few concluding thoughts.

REVIEW OF CHAPTERS AND FINDINGS

In Chapter One I laid out the theoretical and methodological framework for this project. In doing so, I explained the cultural importance of memory and memory places. Furthermore, I also explicated this project's academic and social significance—exploring how identity is created and future actions are encouraged through the recollection of specific memories. Ultimately, this thesis set out to answer two research questions. First, how does SMP battle media stereotypes and function as a building ground for union solidarity, establishing itself as a counterpublic space, in a time of union disdain? Or more specifically, how does SMP construct a UAW member's identity? Second, how does SMP represent female gender roles and, more specifically, what kind of agency is attributed to women as members of the UAW in this counterpublic space? The first question was answered in Chapter Three and the latter was answered in Chapter Four. Chapter Two provided historical context necessary to understanding the strike and the rhetorical functions of SMP.

In Chapter Two I began by explaining the growth and development of General Motors and how that growth and development correlated to the growth of Flint and a city that was dependent on an industry. After explaining this important connection between the city and the industry, I explained the historic sit-down strike that was the foundation for this thesis. In doing so, I covered the causes of the strike, how the strike played out over the 44-days, and its outcomes. I specifically focused on the roles of Flint women and the Emergency Brigade in the strike, as these roles came to be important for of how the community remembers the strike at SMP. Finally, I detailed the decay of the auto

industry in Michigan and the collapse of Flint. This section established Flint and the UAW as a dying community in need of community renewal.

In Chapter Three I argued that SMP enlists memories of the sit-down strike in order to reinvigorate a dying community and offers visitors rhetorical resources that justify pro-union perspectives. In so doing, I believe that a counterpublic identity is created. To support this argument, I briefly examined the UAW website, speeches from UAW President Bob King, and excerpts from their weekly magazine *Solidarity*. The themes explicated here provided a foundation for understanding similar themes deployed in SMP. Upon exploring SMP as an experiential landscape, I uncovered appeals to middle class interests and attempts to assert a new middle class identity. That dimension of SMP, then, aligns the interests of the UAW with the broader interests of the middle class, and informs the current UAW member that his or her work is part of the history represented in the park. Additionally, I found appeals to WWII notions of community, patriotism, and sacrifice. I believe that naming these foundational sacrifices, as well as references to the local unions who helped make the park possible, produces an affective relationship between the park and its visitors. The affective relationship produced here is crucial to narrating a shared identity and influencing the future actions of a park visitor.

Not only does the UAW align itself with the interests of the middle class, however, it also aligns itself with other progressive political movements of the 20th century. For example, the 2009 Globe monument invokes progressive movements that are more widely accepted by the larger over-arching public: the women's movement and civil rights movement. Additionally, in the 2003 monument, SMP presents a copy of the original contract, engraved in stone for future generations, and showcasing how it

changed the world. These two rhetorical artifacts work together to justify a pro-union fight. Furthermore, SMP presents the UAW member as an “ordinary person” capable of producing this change and participating in this pro-union fight. This is most clearly presented in the 2009 Globe, by the names on the bricks, and through the description on the 2010 plaque.

Taken as a whole, SMP is a dedication to heroic soldiers who are supposed to be just like the ordinary visitor. They were no one special; they were common, everyday workers who made a difference, and more importantly, made history. The park functions enthymematically to encourage visitors to the park to identify with what the park represents. This enthymematic connection encourages contemporary workers to keep sacrificing, keep fighting, and carry on the sit-downers’ tradition of participating in a pro-union fight. These two rhetorical strategies, community renewal and pro-union perspectives, ultimately generate a counterpublic identity by providing a space of “withdrawal and regroupment” and functioning as a “training ground for agitational activities directed toward wider publics.”²⁰

Chapter Four focuses on the problematic nature of the park’s gendered narrative. In establishing itself as a counterpublic space, SMP ultimately left women UAW workers out of the counterpublic identity, containing the women’s contributions within what might be called a “counterprivate” sphere. Thus, in 2003, UAW women were subaltern members within a subaltern counterpublic that itself became stratified. Women were essentialized, represented as “just” housewives, and situated physically below the men, who themselves were placed on a literal pedestal. This containment was exacerbated in

2005 when a rope barrier was erected, physically separating the women's effort from the men's historic achievement.

Eventually, those in charge of SMP addressed the problematic nature of the original 2003 monument, moving the woman located outside the rope barrier to a new women's monument. The new monument to women's participation in the sit-down strike was notably polysemous, suggesting a range of possible interpretations that have different implications for gendered identities and female political agency. In the women's monument, women are presented as both powerful and powerless, as workers and as mothers, as attentive to a child's welfare and inattentive, as supportive and as trailblazers. The multiple interpretations available while reading this monument reinforces the worker/homemaker double bind that has affected women both historically and contemporarily. Furthermore, through its multiple representations of Emergency Brigade roles, the women's monument both reinforces *and* contradicts essentialist notions of women's roles that were prevalent in the 2003 monument. Perhaps most importantly, however, it presents women as capable of producing change and participating in the pro-union fight highlighted in Chapter Three. This is important insofar as the memories of these roles have the ability to influence future actions of current UAW members. Thus, positioning women as agents in 1937 and allowing women to see themselves in the park is essential to including women in the current labor movement. Even in the 2009 monument, however, women are reminded that their participation does not come without a cost and that their work is not "normal" compared to the men of the park.

In reviewing my chapters and concluding this project, this thesis contributes to the assumptions shared by memory scholars:

Memory is activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties; (2) memory narrates shared identities, constructing senses of communal belonging; (3) memory is animated by affect; (4) memory is partial, partisan, and thus, often contested; (5) memory relies on material and/or symbolic supports; (6) memory has a history.²¹

First, memory is always enacted in the present. Although SMP is mainly about the struggles of the union in 1937, memory connects the contested past to the contested present in important ways. SMP ultimately lives in constant dialogue between the past and the present and holds the ability to guide future actions and ways of thinking about labor. If SMP wasn't about the present its narrative would unfold in past tense: "This is how we did it," or, "This is who we were." Instead, as I have argued in this thesis, SMP serves a pragmatic, practical, present-day purpose to furthering the UAW agenda.

Second, by uncovering some of the strategies and themes deployed in SMP, we have learned something about how the union works to maintain solidarity and how memory has the ability to impact identity. While most of the public memory surrounding labor has been constructed in newspapers, this thesis ultimately provides insight into how the UAW talks about itself, attempting to align interests and build a middle class identity. SMP also encourages visitors to see themselves as represented in the park, thus a diverse number of representations is essential to establishing a larger sense of belonging.

Third, the affective relationship a visitor develops with the park is especially important for establishing a communal sense of belonging and continuing a pro-union fight. Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott suggest that

what Aristotle called *philia*, and what we might label affiliation, is by definition the principal affective modality of public memory. Surely, affiliation may be produced in multiple ways, but it is definitive because it projects both the collective as well as people's modes of attachment or sense of belonging to it—their particular markers of identity and self-recognition. We are not suggesting

that affiliation is simply an ideological effect, but that it produces, mediates, and sustains emotional connection.²²

In SMP affiliation is developed through the list of names on the bricks, the references to authenticity in the 2003 and 2009 monuments, and finally through the local nature of the park to its visitors. This allows for the memories presented in the park to resonate with a visitor and for the visitor to occupy a particular subject position within the park—that of a pro-union bias. This embodied subject position is ultimately “felt” and “legitimated rhetorically” through affective attachments.²³ It is through these emotional attachments that the park and the messages within it come to matter and intensify for its visitors.

Fourth, this project highlights the significance of counter memorials. Victoria Gallagher and Margaret LaWare remind us that “counter memorials may serve at least three functions: as a corrective, as a supplement, and/or as a contradiction.”²⁴ SMP is ultimately a union text made for a union audience. As we can see in the case with Maine, memory of the labor movement is not entirely accepted by larger public. Furthermore, as stated on the 2010 plaque, the UAW was forced to search for years for a spot to remember the sit-down strike. Eventually, SMP was built on private property for a counterpublic audience. I would argue that SMP fulfills all three functions of a counter memorial, depending on a visitor’s reading of the park and the statues within it. First, the actual park could be viewed as a counter memorial from plant across the street or from the memory of unions formulated by the larger public in newspapers. Furthermore, many of the statues within the park, specifically the 2003 and 2009 gendered monuments, work to compliment or contradict each other. Either way, the movement of the woman from one memorial to another seemed to function as a corrective.

Fifth, SMP ensures that the great UAW-GM sit-down strike will be remembered for future generations. With only a few remaining sitdowners left to tell their story, building monuments and erecting concrete symbols becomes increasingly important for establishing a sense of permanence.²⁵ Furthermore, Pierre Nora reminds us that “the past thrives in scores of ‘lieux de memoire,’ which literally translates into ‘sites of memory’—physical, cultural, or ideational sites where memories settle and take on collective meanings,”²⁶ and as Blair et al., point out, “By bringing the visitor into contact with the significant past, the visitor may be led to understand the present as part of an enduring, stable condition.”²⁷ SMP is one such memory place where the strikers’ story is told in a permanent way, as it guides in the process of recollection and the visitor comes into contact with the significant past.

Finally, Blair et al. ask, “What renders messages—memories or other kinds of contents—believable, persuasive, or even compelling to particular audiences at particular times in particular circumstances?”²⁸ The answer, just as the question, is highly contextual and complex. However, this project provides insights to memory’s contextual connections to the present and how memories can change over time depending on the needs and resources of a community, presenting a history of memory itself. As my thesis demonstrates, through changes to the park over time the experiential landscape and meaning making apparatus is altered. Each time a new monument is added, a different story is told—even if only from a different perspective. This brings to light a better understanding of the remembering/forgetting dichotomy and how that gets entangled between the elements of history and memory, especially when considering the women’s monument. Within memory studies, Blair et al., argue for an approach to thinking about

the remembering/forgetting dichotomy as conditions of “accumulation” or “additivity” that I would like to advocate here.²⁹ They explain,

We do not mean to suggest that memories are never suppressed or that every memory content has the same status. But it is more plausible (and ultimately more useful) to suggest that even seemingly contradictory contents can be held in public memory simultaneously and that the relationships among memories vary.³⁰

In the dedication to women within SMP, then, each monument and each statue within each monument, either corrects, compliments, or contradicts the other—allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the present situation. This also allows for visitors to the park to establish their own unique relationship with the memories represented (or not represented). As Blair et al. explain, and this thesis supports, “Yes, memory has ‘a’ history; it no doubt has *many* histories, depending upon cultural resources, mnemonic contents, infrastructural capacities, affective deployments, and so forth.”³¹

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The powerful debate surrounding present day labor issues presents a pragmatic conclusion to this project. The timing of this project did not allow me to fully explore the national debate surrounding public sector unions. In fact, this study is primarily concerned with memory of the UAW, one of the largest private sector unions. While there is undoubtedly overlap between public and private sector unions, future studies could look at the rhetoric specifically surrounding public sector unions. It would be interesting to uncover the rhetorical strategies of both union and anti-union perspectives here—especially within teachers’ unions as school districts are faced with the need to reform their educational systems.³²

Additionally, SMP is only one place where memories of the sit-down strike are recollected in Flint and the sit-down strike is only one event in the UAW's long history. Thus, this study presents one snap-shot of a much larger picture. Other studies could examine a more comprehensive memory of the UAW and how recollection of those memories has changed overtime. Other studies could also examine other memory locations of the sit-down strike. For instance, spread throughout the city of Flint are "Historic Markers." Each marker is placed at the exact physical location of where major events of the strike played out and each marker describes what happened at that location and its impacts on the city. Many of these markers are now placed on abandoned property. Furthermore, there is a large interactive exhibit of the sit-down strike located at the nearby Sloan Museum. It would be interesting to uncover the pedagogical and political implications here in an overtly public venue. It is also worthy to note that when most people think of GM, Detroit comes to mind. The local nature of SMP was both a strength and weakness of this project. Future studies could examine public memory of GM and/or the UAW in places like Detroit. Additionally, in this thesis, I only closely examined a union text made for a union audience. Future studies could examine the sit-down strike from the perspectives of management and/or the public at large.

It is also essential to make clear that the UAW embraces a much more diverse membership than just GM workers. In Flint, GM was the main auto-manufacturer and the strike between the UAW and GM was the quintessential event in the formation of the UAW. Future studies could examine the rhetorical strategies of how the UAW embraces workers in other companies such as Ford and Chrysler and how memory of the sit-down strike could possibly play in to that. Do UAW members in other industries remember and

talk about themselves differently? This would be an especially interesting question to consider since Ford did not go through the same financial difficulty as GM and Chrysler. Furthermore, in the late 1950's and throughout the 1960's, the UAW worked to embrace many white-collar workers in non-manufacturing industries. It would be fascinating to see the rhetorical strategies behind that identity transformation, especially considering the loss of manufacturing jobs coupled with the recent growth of computer technology and technical skills. This identity transformation seems to correlate with the UAW and SMP's embracing of a middle class identity, but how will it translate to the UAW's new goal of creating a "global middle class?"³³ Will the UAW begin to remember differently to adapt with the times? The UAW has already tried to embrace workers in U.S. based Toyota plants.³⁴ How will memory play into the UAW's future recruitment strategies? What other rhetorical strategies will the UAW use to recruit new workers and build a "global middle class?" What do they even mean by "global middle class?"

With the auto industry continually going through changes and GM on the rebound as I complete this project, it will be interesting to see how the UAW's rhetorical strategies may change to adapt with the times, if at all. It will also be interesting to see if any new additions are made to SMP in the coming years, perhaps in response to these changes. If additions are made, what will they be? This is important considering that each addition or change to the park alters the experiential landscape and has the ability to affect an overall reading of it. As such, I was not able to experience the park as it existed in 2003. I was forced to evaluate the original men's monument from various pictures found online. However, the movement of the lone woman in the 2003 monument and the creation of the 2009 women's monument clearly altered the experience of the park.

Future studies could examine other changes to the park that are likely to happen over time.

Finally, while considering the stratification of the counterpublic, I only examined the representation of female gender roles, ultimately leaving out the representation of men in the park. This was done mainly for pragmatic reasons, because of the space allotted in this thesis and because of the changes to the park over time. Undoubtedly, analyzing only one side of gender roles is problematic, but today most of the space within the park dedicated to the female workers. In SMP, the men seem to be taken for granted and are easily overlooked as the entire park is dedicated almost solely to the women—the men’s work is viewed as normal, and working is essentially a masculine act. The representation of femininity vs. masculinity raises another set of rhetorical questions and dilemmas. While the double bind explored in this thesis addresses the rhetorical consequentiality of this for the women, future studies could examine the rhetorical implications of essentialized gender roles on the male worker identity. Is there a double-bind for UAW men? Are men allowed to be homemakers? There is assuredly historical precedence of masculinity and femininity that must be taken into account when we talk about remembering gender roles, but we must be willing to ask ourselves what the best way of remembering is as we try to move forward.³⁵

IMPLICATIONS AND FINAL THOUGHTS

The findings presented in this thesis go beyond the scope of this study and carry material implications for our everyday lives. How communities remember matters and the decisions that are made based on those memories carry consequences. As we reflect

on the great sit-down strike, SMP, union identity, and gender roles within the union, we must ask ourselves what the best way of remembering is as we try to move forward.

Ultimately, SMP both educates and advocates—that is, it has pedagogical and political purposes. First, it battles media stereotypes by educating its visitors, saying, “This is who we are: middle class, working, ordinary people who have a hard time getting recognized.” It accomplishes this through the recollection of the sit-down strike and its outcomes, reminding visitors of the UAW’s historic achievement in 1937. The park emphasizes just how far the union has come in gaining rights for its workers and working people everywhere. Second, SMP suggests that the battle for workers’ rights is a political one which is not yet over. Furthermore, the park encourages its visitors to participate in this fight.

Although in 1937 the UAW fought for recognition both rhetorically and physically, the contemporary battle for workers’ rights has largely been carried out through politics. Across the nation, the public is blaming the UAW and other unions for GM’s “bailout,” the death of a city, and budget crises in places like Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. Furthermore, the success of the labor movement and its impacts on society are routinely overlooked, purposefully forgotten, and/or explicitly denied by the broader public. While some may argue that SMP presents only one side of the story and is nothing more than political propaganda, one must also remember that publicly forgetting these achievements is also overtly political and carries material consequences.³⁶

This highlights a conservative nature of memory. While the UAW may view itself as a progressive entity, they are essentially playing defense in their current battle.

Remembering in SMP, then, seems to function in a conservative rather than progressive way. Memory, as is the case within SMP, works to maintain an identity, while public forgetting, as seen in the larger public, works to erase that identity in an effort to re-define and start over. Thus, memory is not always progressive—memory largely works to maintain while forgetting can work to start anew.

The difference between (counter)public remembering, as in SMP, and public forgetting (as in Maine), however, is that those in institutional positions of power hold the ability to enact change while the counterpublic must fight simply to maintain its voice, retain a seat at the bargaining table, and keep what was won in 1937. As such, the contemporary union members are encouraged to sacrifice by calling their representatives at the local, state, and national levels, volunteer, donate, campaign, and most importantly—remember. The problem seems to remain, however, that the union is remembering the past to justify the present when the conditions are different. What we can take away from this, then, is that politicians and the larger public must be careful in what they choose to remember and choose to forget about the great sit-down strike and the rights that were won as society moves forward (or backwards) with legislation.³⁷

What we have learned here, then, goes beyond the scope of this study and beyond the boundaries of SMP. SMP is a park about real people and real struggles. It engages and embodies the personal and political consequences and rewards for participating in a pro-union fight. How we remember those struggles matters as we try to move forward. Thus, for those not explicitly interested in my specific text, this thesis hopefully brought to light some of the important issues surrounding the materiality of space and labor rhetoric as well as the political consequences of remembering and forgetting.

As we try to move forward, my hope is for the public to not completely forget, but instead to embrace a fuller archive of memories and move forward in a way that is ultimately more inclusive. In the meantime, SMP serves as reminder of the sacrifices it took for workers to enjoy the privileges that so many hold today and provides the union with a material space for the enactment of a counterpublic identity and hope for a brighter future.

NOTES

¹ See for example, “Wisconsin Union Bill Passes State Assembly,” *AP/Huffington Post*, March 10, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/10/wisconsin-union-bill-pass_n_834268.html (accessed April 30, 2011), or see Scott Bauer and Todd Richmond, “Thousands Protest Wisconsin Anti-union Bill,” *MSNBC*, February 17, 2011, http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/41624142/ns/politics-more_politics/ (accessed April 30, 2011).

² See “Wisconsin Union Bill Passes State Assembly.” According to the article, “The measure forbids most government workers from collectively bargaining for wage increases beyond the rate of inflation unless approved by referendum. It also requires public workers to pay more toward their pensions and double their health insurance contribution, a combination equivalent to an 8 percent pay cut for the average worker. Police and firefighters are exempt.”

³ See for example, “14 Wisconsin Lawmakers Flee State to Block Anti-Union Bill,” *Japan Today*, February 18, 2011, <http://www.japantoday.com/category/world/view/14-wisconsin-lawmakers-flee-state-to-block-anti-union-bill> (accessed April 30, 2011).

⁴ Quoted in Bauer and Richmond, “Thousands Protest.”

⁵ See for example, Ryan J. Foley, “Scott Walker Rejects Compromise Proposal as Protests Continue,” *AP/Huffington Post*, February 21, 2011,

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/21/scott-walker-wisconsin-budget-protests_n_826021.html (accessed April 30, 2011).

⁶ As I write this, the debate is still not over. Once the measure was passed, numerous lawsuits were filed challenging the legality of the legislation because of how the measure was passed and then published. Additionally, there have numerous recall attempts on behalf of both parties. Democrats are attempting to recall the Republicans who pushed the measure through without the presence of the 14 Democrat Senators and then published the law after a judge ordered them not to. Republicans are attempting to recall the 14 senators who fled the state.

⁷ Thomas M Burton, “Indiana Drops Union Bill, but Democrats Stay Out of State,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 24, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703842004576162911431447084.html> (accessed April 30, 2011).

⁸ Steven Greenhouse, “Ohio Lawmakers Pass Anti-Union Bill,” *New York Times*, March 30, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/31/us/31ohio.html> (accessed April 30, 2011).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Quoted in Ibid.

¹¹ Quoted in Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁴ Quoted in Ibid.

¹⁵ Karen Bouffard, “Financial Manager Bill Passes Michigan Senate,” *Detroit News*, March 10, 2011, <http://detnews.com/article/20110310/POLITICS02/103100375/Financial-manager-bill-passes-Michigan-Senate#ixzz1Kx3E7VtK> (accessed April 30, 2011).

¹⁶ See for example, Catherine Jun, “Tougher Teacher No-Strike Law Pushed: Bill Would Allow State to Revoke Licenses if Union OKs Walkout,” *Detroit News*, March 30, 2011, <http://detnews.com/article/20110330/POLITICS02/103300362/Tougher-teacher-no-strike-law-pushed#ixzz1Kx50t7R1> (accessed April 30, 2011).

¹⁷ “Maine Governor Moves Mural Depicting State’s Labor History,” *NPR*, March 28, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2011/03/28/134927412/maine-governor-moves-mural-depicting-states-labor-history> (accessed April 30, 2011).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ “Maine Gov Rips Pro-Union Murals off the Wall,” *Fox Nation*, March 23, 2011, <http://nation.foxnews.com/culture/2011/03/23/maine-gov-rips-pro-union-murals-wall> (accessed April 30, 2011).

²⁰ Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1994), 124.

²¹ Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, “Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial*, eds. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 6.

²² Ibid., 16.

²³ Ibid., 17.

²⁴ Victoria J. Gallagher and Margaret R. LaWare, “Sparring with Public Memory: The Rhetorical Embodiment of Race, Power, and Conflict in the Monument to Joe Louis,” in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorial*, ed. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 105.

²⁵ As I complete this thesis, there are still 13 original, living strikers who are honored every labor day with a ceremony at SMP.

²⁶ Quoted in Barbie Zelizer, “Exploring Sites of Memory,” *Journal of Communication* 49, No. 4 (2006): 202. Original source: Under the direction of Pierre Nora, ed. By Lawrence Kirtzman, translated by Arthur Goldhammer, *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, 1997, 1998). In this three volume work Pierre Nora looks at how French memory is constructed, exploring the various ways the past and present come together.

²⁷ Blair et al., “Introduction,” 27.

²⁸ Ibid., 15.

²⁹ Ibid., 19

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 22.

³²See Valerie Strauss, “Rhee’s New Campaign is Not about the Kids,” *Washington Post*, February 23, 2011, <http://voices.washingtonpost.com/answer-sheet/michelle-rhee/rhees-new-initiative-not-all-a.html> (accessed May 2, 2011).

³³ In a speech delivered to the Center for Automotive Research Conference on August 2, 2010, King stated, “Our union began 75 years ago as a movement for social justice for all working people. In the mid-20th century, the UAW played a critical role in building the middle class in this nation. It would be a betrayal of the bold and pioneering heritage of our union if we did not engage in bold and dramatic change to address the challenges of rebuilding a global middle class for the 21st century.” See Bob King, “A UAW for the 21st Century: UAW President Bob King’s Speech to the Center for Automotive Research Conference,” *UAW*, <http://www.uaw.org/articles/uaw-21st-century> (accessed April 18, 2011).

³⁴ See for example, Nick Bunkley, “U.A.W. Chief is Taking on Toyota Plants,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/23/business/global/23uaw.html> (accessed May 5, 2011).

³⁵For an additional discussion on the female gender roles associated with the sit-down strike see, Jennifer L. Borda, “Feminist Critique and Cinematic Counterhistory In the Documentaty *With Babies and Banners*,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 28, No. 2 (2005): 157-182. She “analyzes how the documentary *With Babies and Banners* employs strategies of realism to counter the dominant history of the 1936 General Motors Sitdown Strike. By visually depicting women strikers’ memories, this film challenges contemporary ideologies with regard to women and labor through an act of historical revisionism. [She] argue[s] that this film not only creates a counterhistory, but also

demonstrates women's capacity to transgress gender politics that often constrain and oppress them." (abstract)

³⁶ For instance, if we say, "let's forget ____." By that very saying, we are remembering. Nonetheless, regardless of what's going on between remembering and forgetting, selections are being made, however explicit or ambiguous they are. By public forgetting, what we are really saying is, "We are not going to let these memories affect us anymore. Let's not do ____, or be ____. Let's start over." See Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

³⁷ Kairos, or timing, is a primary element of public forgetting. See *Ibid.*, 177-178. Thus, public forgetting, just as public remembering, can also be seen as circumstantial and dependent on the times.