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# Shaping Graphic History: Primary Sources and Closure in Showdown! Making Modern Unions

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Résumé de l'article

Cette note de recherche qui examine l'histoire graphique de Showdown! Making Modern Unions s'appuie sur des études récentes sur l'utilisation pédagogique de la bande dessinée en considérant les outils et les possibilités que ce média ouvre aux historiens professionnels en matière de traitement des sources primaires. Nous suggérons que les histoires graphiques permettent des stratégies d'utilisation de sources primaires qui améliorent et popularisent réellement la manière dont les historiens peuvent utiliser efficacement les preuves, notamment en termes de conscience critique d'une base élargie de lecteurs. En utilisant le concept de fermeture de la théorie de la bande dessinée, nous montrons que l'histoire graphique est unique pour permettre aux historiens et aux lecteurs de s'engager activement avec des sources primaires et d'en tirer un sens impossible dans d'autres formes d'écriture historique. Des exemples de Showdown! sont utilisés pour montrer la profondeur et l'ampleur de ces possibilités méthodologiques.

# Shaping Graphic History: Primary Sources and Closure in *Showdown! Making Modern Unions*

## Rob Kristofferson and Simon Orpana

THE RECENTLY RELEASED *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* is a graphic history documenting the successful wave of strikes in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1946 that, together with similar struggles elsewhere, led to the establishment of legalized systems of collective bargaining and the refashioning of the social order more generally to better accommodate the well-being of the Canadian working class in the decades following World War II.[1] This article builds on recent scholarship about graphic history by considering the tools and possibilities this medium opens up to professional historians regarding the use of primary sources. We suggest that far from offering "history-lite" ways of engaging the public in the professional historical enterprise, graphic histories enable strategies for using primary sources that actually enhance and popularize the ways historians can effectively use evidence, particularly with an eye toward helping build the critical consciousness of an expanded base of readers. The strategies made possible through the graphic history medium can thus complement other, more traditional forms of historical research and writing.

## Labour on the Map: The Workers' City Project

*SHOWDOWN!* HAS ITS ORIGINS in the recent revamp of the Workers' City Project (WCP), undertaken by the authors in partnership with the Workers'

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1.  Rob Kristofferson and Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016). We initially considered including a scholarly introduction or epilogue in the book, but decided that because it is designed to engage a wide, popular audience, academic reflection on the process and possibilities we encountered assembling the graphic history were best pursued in a venue *outside* the book itself.

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Arts and Heritage Centre (WAHC) in Hamilton. The original iteration of the WCP was produced in 1994–95 as the first programming initiative of the WAHC and included a set of three illustrated booklets, each offering a themed walking/driving tour of an aspect of Hamilton's rich labour history. Two of the tour booklets were accompanied by an audio cassette tape of workers' voices gleaned from the extensive audio archive assembled by the project team of over 40 oral history interviews.[2] While the project was somewhat "multimedia" in its day, technologies emergent in intervening decades have rendered the WCP's paper booklet/audio cassette format less attractive to contemporary users. We recognized that this outmoded format was hindering wider consumption, and a project team was formed to consider new ways of presenting this diverse assemblage of materials documenting the working past of Hamiltonians to the public more generally.

The first stage of updating the project was to develop a free interactive software application available through the WAHC website for use on tablets, smartphones, and other media devices. Called *Workers' City*, the application (app) contains a broad array of media, including oral histories, historic photographs, archival images, and text descriptions, all of which considerably expand the content provided in the three original walking tours, as well as adding two additional tours.[3] While this expanded version of *Workers' City* offered users much more information in an updated platform, the project team recognized that it still represented only part of the vast amount of primary source data collected. Particularly, the team felt that the many stories that interviewees had shared about their experiences of living through the pivotal

3. The software and website can be accessed at http://www.workerscity.ca/. Three tours – of the city's downtown, north end, and east end – chronicle Hamilton's rich labour history. Two further tours document the major rounds of industrialization that gripped the city in the 19th and 20th centuries. At each point of interest, users can read a short description of the site and better appreciate its historic context with access to a range of old photographs, maps, and other archival material. At a number of sites, participants can listen to audio accounts from Hamiltonians who once worked in a factory, lived in a neighbourhood, or participated in a social movement. These audio segments have been digitized from the large collection of workers' oral histories collected as part of the original project. For example, tour participants can stand in front of the historic Westinghouse plant on Sanford Avenue North while listening to digital audio of the women and men who worked there in the 1930s and 1940s. In these recordings, interviewees recount their working conditions, the vibrant workplace culture they constructed, the struggles they faced, and the movements they forged out of those struggles. In all, over 100 sites significant to the industrial and working past of the city have been incorporated into the software application, more than doubling the number of sites included in the original WCP tour package from 1995.

strikes of 1946 required better representation through a separate phase of the project.

The massive wave of strikes that gripped the city in 1946 was part of a North America–wide push by hundreds of thousands of workers to have their unions recognized and to establish fairness and dignity in their workplaces in the immediate post–World War II period. During that year, over a million workers in the United States threw down their tools. These actions approached the proportions of a general strike in a number of cities across that country, as strikes against multiple local employers combined with significant mobilization of working-class communities. Canadian workers also shut down whole industrial sectors, including rubber, forestry, and steel.

Due to the city's position as a major industrial centre, Hamilton's workers were pivotal in these events. In the summer of 1946, workers hoisted picket signs at Westinghouse, Firestone, and the *Hamilton Spectator* newspaper. But it was the struggle of Hamilton steelworkers against the giant Steel Company of Canada (Stelco) that became a linchpin battle in this national struggle. With the support of major sections of Hamilton's vast working-class community, striking steelworkers emerged victorious. This important victory paved the way in the months and years that followed for workers to organize into fledgling industrial unions. Together with their unions, these workers were able to win what were for most their first peacetime contracts. Such agreements represented a major step forward for Canadian working people in the form of union recognition, wage improvements, grievance systems, and a host of other measures.[4]

By the early 1950s these victories had not only cemented industrial unionism as the pre-eminent form of workers' organization in Canadian workplaces, but pushed federal and provincial governments to enact meaningful labour relations legislation, at the centre of which were collective bargaining rights. While such legislation continues to form the legal matrix of labour relations

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4.  For accounts of the 1946 Stelco Strike, see Bill Freeman, *1005: Political Life of a Union* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 1985); William Kilburn, *The Elements Combined: A History of the Steel Company of Canada* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Company, 1960); Wayne Roberts, ed., *Baptism of a Union: Stelco Strike of 1946* (Hamilton: Labour Studies Programme, 1981); Robert Storey, "Workers, Unions and Steel: The Reshaping of the Hamilton Working Class, 1935–1948," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1981; Craig Heron, Shea Hoffmitz, Wayne Roberts & Robert Storey, *All That Our Hands Have Done: A Pictorial History of Hamilton Workers* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1981); United Steelworkers of America, Local 1005, *It Started with a Whisper: A History of the 1946 Strike* (Canada: W. L. Griffin Printing, 1996). For a discussion of some of the limits of the postwar compromise, see Don Wells, "Origins of Canada's Wagner Model of Industrial Relations: The United Auto Workers in Canada and the Suppression of 'Rank and File' Unionism, 1936–1953," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 20 (Spring 1995): 193–226; Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1996), 75–84; Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), Chap. 6; Judy Fudge & Eric Tucker, *Labour before the Law: The Regulation of Workers' Collective Action in Canada, 1900–1948* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001), esp. Chaps. 11 and 12.

in the country today, aspects of this legacy have been steadily and significantly eroded by the ravages of neoliberalism since as early as the 1970s.[5] More locally, the purchase of Stelco by US Steel in 2007 and then Bedrock Industries in 2016, and the subsequent substantial diminishment of its workforce, combined with company attacks on pensions and pension benefits, have put United Steelworkers (usw) Local 1005 – the union local central to the victories of 1946 – on the defensive and its membership down to a few hundred from its historic highs of well over 10,000.[6] Set against the larger backdrop of the deindustrialization of the city, the question for us became how best to move beyond traditional histories that, while useful, might not be as accessible to the next generation of activists or the public more generally in their understanding of the legacy of these struggles.

## Graphic History as Public History

For the second phase of the *Workers' City* revamp we chose a "graphic novel" format, which has in recent decades been put to use by a variety of authors/artists as an accessible and engaging way of addressing social issues. Comics are a wide-ranging medium that took shape primarily in 20th-century popular culture in such familiar forms as superhero, romance, and other comic books, but also in comic strips, manga, editorial cartoons, gag cartoons, and a number of other forms. The graphic narrative form's more intense growth in more recent decades has also made it the object of serious academic study. The burgeoning new field of comics studies has been bolstered by conferences, dedicated journals, edited collections, and monographs.[7]

Numerous graphic treatments have been produced that focus on changes in daily life, social, political and economic issues, direct action, and other issues.[8]

5. See Leo Panitch and Donald Swartz, *From Consent to Coercion: The Assault on Trade Union Freedoms* (Aurora, Ontario: Garamond, 2003).

6. D. W. Livingstone, Dorothy E. Smith & Warren Smith, *Manufacturing Meltdown: Reshaping Steel Work* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood, 2011), 29.

7. For an introduction to comics and comics studies, see Jeet Heer & Kent Worchester, eds., *A Comics Studies Reader* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009); Randy Duncan, Matthew J. Smith & Paul Levitz, *The Power of Comics: History, Form and Culture* (New York: Continuum, 2009); Douglas Wolk, *Reading Comics: How Graphic Novels Work and What They Mean* (New York: De Capo Press, 2007); Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1996). For an excellent contextual discussion of the comics medium, see also Sean Carleton, "Drawn to Change: Comics and Critical Consciousness," *Labour/Le Travail* 73 (Spring 2014): 151n1.

8. Examples of graphic treatments of changes in daily life include Raymond Briggs, *Ethel and Ernest* (New York: Pantheon, 1998); Will Eisner, *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories* (New York: DC Comics, 1978). Treatments of a variety of social, political, economic, and environmental issues include Kate Evans, *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* (London: Verso, 2017); Peter Bagge, *Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2013); Joe Sacco, *Palestine* (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 1994); Chris Hedges & Joe Sacco, *Days of*

For authors seeking to examine the "social" in social history, the suitability of such media to mobilize knowledge to a broader public audience has been increasingly realized. Scholars recognize that graphic history is a particularly effective way of presenting "alternative views of culture, history and human life in general in accessible ways" to audiences ranging from pre-adolescents to adults, while also cultivating literacy skills in multiple media.[9] Comics' hybridity – its mixture of text with images – offers historians not only relatively underexplored ground on which to test the limits of historiography by exploring novel ways to engage with the representation of historical events, but also innovative pedagogical tools for the history classroom.[10] Dubbed "graphic histories," this form of public history is well suited to the mobilization of knowledge to broad public audiences. Indeed, a wide variety of works have been produced in recent years that focus on important people and pivotal events in history.[11] However, the full potential of using this medium as a form of historical writing and presentation has yet to be fully realized.

Some of the most engaging graphic histories have been produced by progressive authors/artists interested in issues of labour history and social justice history more generally. The forms these have taken vary and include

*Destruction, Days of Revolt* (New York: Knopf, 2012); Alex Ross & Paul Dini, *Superman: Peace on Earth* (New York: DC Comics, 1999); J. Figuero & K. Albert, *Hope and Deliverance (The Project)* (New York: Paradox, 1998). For a more in-depth discussion of many of these works, see Gretchen E. Schwarz, "Graphic Novels for Multiple Literacies," *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 46 (November 2002): 262–265. An excellent example of a graphic treatment of direct action is Gord Hill, *The Anti-Capitalist Resistance Comic Book* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012).

9.  Schwarz, "Graphic Novels," 264. See also Ian Gordon, "Let Us Not Call Them Graphic Novels: Comic Books as Biography and History," *Radical History Review* 106 (Winter 2010): 185–192.

10.  See, for example, Hugo Frey & Benjamin Noyes, "Editorial: History in the Graphic Novel," *Rethinking History* 6, 3 (2002): 255–260; Alicia C. Decker & Mauricio Castro, "Teaching History with Comic Books: A Case Study of Violence, War, and the Graphic Novel," *The History Teacher* 45 (February 2012): 169–182.

11.  Examples include Ho Che Anderson, *King: A Comics Biography of Martin Luther King Jr.* (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2005); Kyle Baker, *Nat Turner* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2008); Chester Brown, *Louis Riel: A Comic-Strip Biography* (Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2003); Michael Crowley & Dan Goldman, *08: A Graphic Diary of the Campaign Trail* (New York: Three Rivers, 2009); Emmanuel Guibert, *Alan's War: The Memoirs of G.I. Alan Cope* (New York: First Second Books, 2008); Jim Ottaviani & Janine Johnson, *Fallout: J. Robert Oppenheimer, Leo Szilard, and the Political Science of the Atomic Bomb* (New York: G.T. Labs, 2013); Harvey Pekar, Diana Schutz & David Collier, *Unsung Hero: The Story of Robert McNeill* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 2003); Sacco, *Palestine*; Joe Sacco, *Safe Area Gorzade: The War in Eastern Bosnia* (Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2000); Jonathan Fetter-Vorm, *Trinity: A Graphic History of the First Atomic Bomb* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2002).

biography,[12] histories of radical thought,[13] histories of the experience of racialized and Indigenous peoples,[14] and even a historical survey.[15] And, of most relevance to the present discussion, a number of graphic histories have appeared in recent years that focus on workers and their movements.[16] This has been most strongly apparent in the Canadian context through the pioneering work of the Graphic History Collective (GHC).[17] Such graphic histories put social justice theory and method into practice. Working from the premise that art is political, graphic histories help give voice to the communities they represent through a medium that is both accessible and engaging to the broader public.[18]

## Considerations of Closure and Primary Sources

As a complement to other historical forms, graphic histories offer historians important new tools through which we can practice – and reflect upon

12.  Biographical works include Sharon Rudahl, *Dangerous Woman: The Graphic Biography of Emma Goldman* (New York: New Press, 2007); Spain Rodriguez, *Che: A Graphic History* (London: Verso, 2008); Kate Evans, *Red Rosa: A Graphic Biography of Rosa Luxemburg* (London: Verso, 2015); Willow Dawson, *Hyena in Petticoats: The Story of Suffragette Nellie McClung* (Toronto: Puffin, 2011).

13.  Widely acknowledged as the foundational example is Rius, *Marx for Beginners* (New York: Pantheon, 1979). A more recent example can be found in Brad Evans & Sean Michael Wilson, *Portraits of Violence: An Illustrated History of Radical Thinking*, illustrated by Carl Thompson, Robert Brown, Mike Medaglia & Chris Mackenzie (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2017).

14.  See, for example, David Wong, *Escape to Gold Mountain: A Graphic History of the Chinese in North America* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2012); Roland Laird, *Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans* (New York: Sterling, 2009); Andrew Helfer & Randy Duburke, *Malcolm X: Graphic Biography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2006); Gord Hill, *The 500 Years of Resistance Comic Book* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2010); Brown, *Louis Riel*.

15.  Howard Zinn, Mike Konopacki & Paul Buhle, *A People's History of the American Empire: A Graphic Adaptation* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008).

16.  Examples include Paul Buhle and Nicole Schulman, eds., *Wobblies! A Graphic History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (London: Verso, 2005); Harvey Pekar, *Studs Terkel's* Working: *A Graphic Adaptation*, ed. Paul Buhle (New York: New Press, 2009); Laura Ellyn, *Ginger Goodwin: A Workers' Friend* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016); Michael Demson, *Masks of Anarchy: The Story of a Radical Poem, from Percy Shelley to the Triangle Factory Fire* (London: Verso, 2013).

17.  Founded in 2008, the GHC has produced two graphic histories: *May Day: A Graphic History of Protest* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012) and the award-winning *Drawn to Change: Graphic Histories of Working-Class Struggle* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016). More recently, the GHC has broadened the scope of its graphic endeavours through the expansion of its online offerings, including the *Remember | Resist | Redraw* radical history poster project; the *Little Red Colouring Book*; and a reproduction of the Corrective Collective's *She Named It Canada because That's What It Was Named* feminist comic.

18.  Carleton, "Drawn to Change," 151–177; Schwarz, "Graphic Novels"; Gordon, "Let Us Not Call Them Graphic Novels."

– our profession. In a recent article, historian and GHC member Sean Carleton argues that while academics have made some progress in engaging with the potentialities of the graphic medium, "their relationship to comics remains uncertain."[19] He notes something of a slow, steady acceptance of comics by academics, particularly in exploring their pedagogical possibilities and in their use as vehicles of social critique. He also shows how a number of academics have begun to engage in the production of graphic history. Pushing further the bounds of understanding around the use of comics for socially engaged scholarship, Carleton offers a signal contribution by marrying Paulo Freire's idea of "conscientization" with the concept of "closure." Conscientization is similar to "critical consciousness" and describes, in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the process by which people are empowered to "perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against oppressive elements of reality."[20] Carleton argues that the formal qualities of comics, particularly an incompleteness that requires active engagement from readers to "fill in the blanks," can turn readers into empowered partners in the meaning-making process, a position that lends itself to the kind of active, critical consciousness Freire describes.[21] Following such research, we can conclude that while graphic histories have recently received scholarly attention for their pedagogical use in the classroom, for making history accessible to the general public, and for their use as critical texts, considerably less attention has been paid to methodological questions historians may grapple with in their *production* of such texts. To make some headway in that regard, we shall further articulate how our approaches to using the foundational methodology of historical research – primary sources – in *Showdown!* reinforces Carleton's insights about the critical and social potential of graphic histories.

If primary sources are foundational to historical writing, their role in the production of graphic history is heightened by the visual and narrative strategies made possible by the comics medium, especially in regard to the productive tensions that comics foster in bringing together images and words via specific narrative devices, conventions, and innovations. W. J. T. Mitchell draws attention to the division of labour between images and words across various media, noting that while images are often deployed to anchor or illustrate the meanings that a written text introduces, more self-reflexive and experimental techniques such as those used by some graphic narratives are able to problematize and complicate the way text and images relate to one another.[22] Furthermore, due to what Hillary L. Chute describes as the

19.  Carleton, "Drawn to Change," 160.

20.  Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury, 1970), 19, as cited in Carleton, "Drawn to Change," 153.

21.  Carleton, "Drawn to Change," 153–154.

22.  W. J. T. Mitchell, "Beyond Comparison," in Heer and Worcester, eds., *Comics Studies Reader*, 116–117.

emphatically artificial nature of the comics medium, in which the processes and apparatuses of representation are almost necessarily made visible in the text itself—in the form of the frames, gutters, page layouts, speech balloons, and other devices that draw attention to the composite and constructed nature of the narrative—comics are particularly useful for exploring what John Tagg calls the "real representational practices that go on in a society, and the concrete institutions and apparatuses within which they take place."[23] The histories of social movements such as the one we set out to explore with *Showdown!* likewise unfold within concrete institutions such as government, policing, industry, and community and via apparatuses of representation such as mass media, worker-produced art, union halls, and picket lines. By using the graphic and textual vocabularies of comics, we sought to highlight the heterogeneous modes of discourse and representation that attended the 1946 Stelco strike and the struggles to advance industrial unionism in Canada. We did this by making a wide array of primary sources related to the event available in the pages of our graphic narrative, but also by framing these resources in ways that highlight how the primary sources were embedded in larger contexts, institutions, and histories. The representational idioms of comics allowed us to present these materials in a manner that expands on their treatment in more traditional historical writing.

In most historical writing, the historian's secondary interpretation serves as a mediating lens obscuring the reader's direct view of primary source material. In some cases, however, historical writing can and does make use of reproductions of select primary sources, such as photographs, maps, diaries, and other original documents, which are usually included as supplements to the narrative produced by the historian's own engagement with primary sources. In contrast, the graphic format of comics provides an opportunity for a much greater and more integrated use of both direct reproductions and artistic representations of primary sources. Even where primary sources are not immediately represented, the particular requirements of telling a story with pictures can make the author's reliance upon primary sources more apparent to a reader, providing a different kind of engagement with the history-making process than more traditional formats might generally allow.

Despite the ability of comics to visibly incorporate primary source material, many of the graphic histories produced in the past couple of decades are solidly secondary accounts. William Boerman-Cornell has recently described the exciting tools graphic histories offer for integrating primary sources into the narrative. First, he notes that while traditional history textbooks utilize a standard narration that runs through the chapter (primary text flow), many also incorporate images, captions, charts, and, importantly, primary sources

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23. Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 17; John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 3.

in sidebar boxes (secondary text flows). The unfortunate disadvantage of this arrangement, he argues, is that the reader reads "either the primary flow or the secondary, but not both."[24] Graphic histories offer a solution to this problem: the medium allows materials that historians often include in secondary text flows to be easily embedded in the primary flow, thereby providing a unified narrative easily tracked by the reader. Second, Boerman-Cornell argues that graphic histories have the "potential to embed primary sources (such as letters, documents, eyewitness accounts) into the narrative so that they are more salient to readers and thus more likely to be read." However, he finds only a few examples of authors doing this and concludes that the opportunities to do such still represent a "largely unrealized potential."[25]

Boerman-Cornell bases his study on a sample of twenty graphic histories produced between 1985 and 2010, for which he counts the frequency (or instances) with which "sourcing" appears in the pages of each. From this examination he calculates the density (one instance per X pages) of sourcing found in each work. A mean density of 25.5 was found across all works, meaning just one instance of sourcing per 25.5 pages. Only five of the twenty works sampled showed a density of less than 10. While most authors surveyed were not academic historians, notable in Boerman-Cornell's findings was *A People's History of American Empire*, by Howard Zinn, Mike Konopacki, and Paul Buhle. This book had a density score of 2.0 (once every two pages), the second highest of all the works surveyed.[26] Zinn, Konopacki, and Buhle offer a wide-ranging survey of American imperialism from the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee through to the policies of the Bush regime in the wake of the September 11 attacks. Throughout, the authors incorporate a host of primary source documents into the narrative, including historical photographs, reproductions of newspaper articles and headlines, and archival materials. Inspired by *A People's History of American Empire* and other examples that utilize this approach, we set out to explore in *Showdown!* the extent and uses to which primary source material could be effectively integrated into a graphic history. In terms of density, our work has a score of 0.85, meaning that instances of primary source use appear on average more frequently than once per page. This makes *Showdown!* one of the most densely populated graphic histories, in terms of primary source materials, to appear in recent years.

Our decision to experiment with how intensively primary source material can be usefully integrated into the graphic history narrative in *Showdown!* was

24.  William Boerman-Cornell, "Using Graphic Historical Novels in High School History Classes: Potential for Contextualization, Sourcing, and Corroborating," *The History Teacher* 48 (February 2015): 209.

25.  Boerman-Cornell, "Using Graphic Historical Novels," 219–220.

26.  Howard Zinn, Mike Konopacki & Paul Buhle, *A People's History of American Empire* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008); Boerman-Cornell, "Using Graphic Historical Novels," 219–220, 224.

additionally informed by our desire to push the bounds of comics theory as it has been put into practice, particularly the concept of "closure." In important ways, graphic histories require more from their readers than do traditional textual histories. As a mixture of text and images, they require multiple literacies on the part of the reader. Further, because graphic history is a form of sequential art in which a series of panels containing a combination of image and text are presented on or across pages, readers are required to synthesize disparate graphic and textual elements, "filling in the blanks" across space, time, causality, and meaning as they move through the graphic narrative. At its most basic, explains comic theorist Scott McCloud, closure can be understood as the "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole." He continues, "Every act committed to paper by the comics artist is aided and abetted by a silent accomplice. … An equal partner in crime known as the reader."[27] It is in the nature of comics, adds Carleton, that they are "deliberately incomplete and require readers to extract meaning from the implied relationships between partial sequences of words and images."[28] For Carleton, comics' ability to turn the reader into such an active participant, when applied to challenging themes and subjects, can help stimulate critical consciousness and inspire further social action. In particular, the "gutter" – that strip of blank space between panels – necessitates and stimulates acts of synthesis on the part of the reader. It is in the judgements made there, argues McCloud, that "the audience is a willing and conscious collaborator and closure is the agent of change, time and motion."[29] While McCloud is speaking about the formal qualities of comics here, Carleton's emphasis on social action gives the ideas of "change, time and motion" an added valence that allows us to imagine how comics might be used to encourage readers to situate themselves as actively contributing to processes of historical and social change.[30]

27. Scott McCloud., *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 63, 68. See also Wolk, *Reading Comics.* On closure as it relates to graphic histories, see Carleton, "Drawn to Change," 161–165. For a related discussion, see Alyson E. King, "Cartooning History: Canada's Stories in Graphic Novels," *The History Teacher* 45 (February 2012): 202–212. For a critique of McCloud's theory of closure, see Kai Mikkonen, *The Narratology of Comic Art* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 38–45.

28. Carleton, "Drawn to Change," 162.

29. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 65.

30. Writing about the unique ways in which graphic narratives can represent war and trauma, Hillary Chute likewise remarks upon the work done by the gutter as a *"constitutive* absence" that, more than just eliciting acts of closure from the reader, can also engage with those aspects of historical and social reality that resist direct representation, constituting "a psychic order outside the realm of symbolization." For Chute, it is precisely the gaps and breaks in comics narratives that allow for productive tension between presence and absence, text and image, motion and stasis, and variations in temporality and reader attention. This makes comics a particularly "recursive" form, one whose inherent incompleteness can intervene in dominant narratives and the power structures they support in ways that can lead to expanded, critical understandings of historic events and collective memory. Chute, *Disaster Drawn*, 35–38.

Traditional history is most typically comprised of the historian mediating their experience with a primary source to the reader through their own secondary, interpretive textual statements. In some cases, primary sources are inserted into a sidebar, but, as mentioned above, the competition of primary and secondary text flows on the traditional written page often compromises the impact of each on the reader. Alyson King explains that "textbooks tend to speak in the omniscient third-person, which gives the reader the impression of 'truth' with no sense of the process of writing history."[31] In contrast, graphic history's unique formal possibilities not only invite readers to participate in the process of writing history; the medium *necessitates* that readers synthesize the material and project themselves into the narrative for the text to make sense at all. This dynamic of closure makes graphic history a unique, if underutilized, medium for historians, one in which both the historian and the reader can become actively engaged with and derive meaning from primary sources (or at least representations of them) in a way not possible in other forms of historical writing.[32] If this is true, then a reader's engagement with primary sources in graphic histories might provide an opportunity to actually intensify the kinds of activist learning that Carleton has identified in this medium.

We attempted to mobilize activist pedagogy in *Showdown!* by seriously considering the manner in which the 1946 Stelco strike comprised a collective event – the work of many hands and communities – and the consequence of many, prior decades of hardship, struggle, and organizing. Such a story, we felt, should not be told by a single voice, whether that of the historian or of a fictional, composite character who could lead readers through events as they unfold. Instead, we relied upon a polyphony of voices gleaned from oral histories, as well as the unique modes of representation offered by graphic narrative for presenting these voices. In terms of evoking critical, social, and historical consciousness in readers, the necessarily incomplete nature of graphic narratives—as signified directly in the text by the constitutive gutters, gaps, and juxtapositions that structure it—situates readers of *Showdown!* as playing an active role in constituting the meaning of this historic event. Because of the need to make sense of the diverse materials and voices assembled in a graphic narrative, the reader herself becomes implicated in the still-unfolding history presented and has an opportunity to see it as part of her own legacy, rather than merely as a distant event with only a remote relationship to current circumstances.

But while many discussions of closure have focused on creations of meaning in the "gutter" as the reader moves from panel to panel, closure – in the expanded, social-political sense articulated by Carleton – can also occur

31.  King, "Cartooning History," 212.

32.  We are careful not to overdraw this observation, as we recognize it is still the historian and the illustrator who work together to choose the primary source and where and how to position it in the text and image flow of the narrative.

within a single panel or image. McCloud explains that even the simple image of a line-drawn face – a circle containing two dots for eyes and a curved pencil-line smile – is an invitation to interpretation by the reader. Of such an image, he explains, "There is no life here except that which you give to it."[33] We would add that artistic representations of primary sources in graphic history can function similarly. The act of re-creating historical scenes using cartoon drawings modelled from photos does more than merely reproduce primary sources in a simplified form. In light of McCloud's theory of closure, the mediation provided by the act of translating these photographic images into hand-drawn cartoons provides an opportunity for readers to identify with these materials with a different intensity than that produced by reprinted photographs. There is a richness of information contained in a photograph, but it is this very density of signification that can actually reinforce the historical and existential distance between a reader and the event and/or person thus depicted.

In contrast, McCloud identifies cartoons as offering "a form of amplification through simplification," whereby the abstraction from an original referent offered by a cartoon allows for both a greater focus on "specific details" and a form of "universality" by which it becomes easier for readers to identify with people and objects.[34] The simplification and stylization that necessarily occurs when a person or scene is redrawn as part of a graphic sequence can thus help bridge some of the historical distance that the direct reproduction of photos can reinforce. Furthermore, the temporality of the act of drawing itself—the time it takes an artist to render a drawing from a historic source—actually extends the sliver of time caught by a photograph to the longer duration that it takes to make the drawing. It is the coupling of the simplification of the image (producing gaps requiring active imagination on the part of the reader) and the translation of the image via the attentive hand of the artist that provides an opportunity for intensified identification from readers. In *Showdown!*, we included artistic renderings of hundreds of historical photos as a means of telling the story of the 1946 strike and the rise of industrial unionism in Canada. This artistic treatment of primary sources not only provides a window into how the workers' world of Hamilton looked in the mid-20th century, but simultaneously allows for a degree of reader identification with this world in a manner that more traditional historical writing might have difficulty evoking.

## Oral Histories in *Showdown!*

It was the innovations we saw in the comics that played with one particular primary source – worker interviews and oral histories – that initially drew our interest to primary-source use in graphic history. The powerful technique of combining comics with oral history was perhaps first illustrated

33. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 59.

34. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 30-42.

in Art Spiegelman's Pulitzer Prize–winning *Maus*, which, while one of the first works in the graphic novel genre, is still perhaps the best example of this combination.[35] In *Maus*, Spiegelman chronicles his family's intergenerational trauma by documenting the experiences of his father, Vladek, a Polish Jew who experienced the Holocaust first-hand as a prisoner in Aushwitz, Gross-Rosen, and then Dachau. Oral history interviewing is used throughout; as Speigelman explains, "essentially the root source of the whole thing is my father's conversations with me. … Sixty percent of those are on tape and the rest of it's during phone conversations or while I was at his house without a tape recorder, taking notes."[36] Shortly after its publication, historian Joshua Brown touted *Maus* as "an important historical work that offers historians, and oral historians in particular, a unique approach to narrative construction and interpretation."[37] While some comic authors have adapted this narrative approach to autobiographical works,[38] historians do not seem to have built much on these foundations in recent years.

Rather, attempts to transform workers' interviews into graphic expression have progressed in the field of journalism. Harvey Pekar and Paul Buhle's 2009 graphic adaptation of radio broadcaster Studs Terkel's 1974 book *Working*, produced by Pekar and an all-star team of other comics artists, is one important example of the extent to which oral histories can be enlivened through this medium.[39] A more recent one is journalist Chris Hedges and artist Joe Sacco's highly acclaimed *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, based on a series of interviews the authors undertook with working people residing in the "sacrifice zones" of carnage wrought by a rampant neoliberal capitalism that has laid waste to communities across the United States, from the Pine Ridge Lakota reservation in South Dakota to the tomato fields of Florida.[40] However, the graphic illustration in this book, while highly impactful, appears on relatively few pages of a book comprised mostly of traditional text. In *Showdown!*, we decided to build on this modest base to further explore the possibilities that

35.  Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (New York: Pantheon, 1991).

36.  Interview with Art Spiegelman cited in Joshua Brown, "Of Mice and Memory," *Oral History Review* 16 (Spring 1988): 93.

37.  Brown, "Of Mice and Memory," 91. Rosemary Hathaway has more recently argued that *Maus* might better be understood as a form of postmodern ethnography than as oral history. Hathaway, "Reading Art Spiegelman's *Maus* as Postmodern Ethnography," *Journal of Folklore Research* 48 (September–December 2011): 249–276.

38.  See, for example, Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (New York: Pantheon, 2003); Harvey Pekar, *American Splendor* (Milwaukie, Oregon: Dark Horse Comics, 1986); Alison Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2007).

39.  Pekar, *Studs Terkel's* Working.

40.  Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (New York: Nation Books, 2012).

integrating graphic history with oral history might hold for historians more specifically.

Kristofferson has written about methodological considerations of oral history as a component of workers' public history elsewhere,[41] but recent work further confirms the suitability of this approach for the graphic treatments of workers' public history. Freund, Llewellyn, and Reilly have recently noted that part of the inclusive framework for thinking about oral history is the method's democratizing power, particularly its advocacy function in "disseminating knowledge and raising awareness about past and present injustices and inequalities."[42] While oral history scholarship has been enriched in recent decades by its consideration of cultural scripts, memory, and subjectivity, Joan Sangster also notes that "many historians continue to see oral history as a method that is distinct because of the nature of the human interaction involved – a method that draws out new, often marginalized perspectives of working class knowledge-holders, reveals themes hidden from other kinds of textual sources, and is animated by political questions."[43] Such undertakings as the Montreal Life Stories project have shown the myriad ways oral history can be adapted to forms that move beyond its mere collection and presentation in academic histories to include, among other things, digital stories available online, films, art and museum exhibitions, audio-based walks, and radio programming.[44] Such considerations reinforce the democratizing and advocacy elements of oral history by highlighting the method's ability to offer stories of "working class agency distinct from the history of those exerting class and political power."[45]

As public history practitioners from academia seeking to engage in a community history surrounded by an especially rich vein of community stories in the form of oral history, we sought to preserve the shared authority Kristofferson had so carefully established with community members willing to contribute their oral histories to the first iteration of the WCP.[46] Thus, we conceptualized

41.  Kristofferson, "The Past."

42.  Alexander Freund, Kristina R. Llewellyn & Nolan Reilly, introduction in Kristina R. Llewellyn, Alexander Freund & Nolan Reilly, eds., *The Canadian Oral History Reader* (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 5.

43.  Joan Sangster, "Reflections on the Politics and Praxis of Working-Class Oral Histories," in Llewellyn, Freund & Reilly, eds., *Canadian Oral History Reader*, 134.

44.  Stacey Zembrzycki & Steven High, "'When I Was Your Age': Bearing Witness in Holocaust Education in Montreal," in Llewellyn, Freund & Reilly, eds., *Canadian Oral History Reader*, 239–265.

45.  Sangster, "Reflections," 129.

46.  Kristofferson, "The Past," 188. Over 25 years ago, Staughton Lynd noted that we need to get beyond a situation "in which one group of people (workers) experiences history, and another group of people (professional historians) interprets the experience for them." Lynd, "Oral History from Below," *Oral History Review* 21 (Spring 1993): 8. The concept of shared

the current project as a relationship between the narratives we might produce as professional historians and those woven through the oral testimony of the history-makers whose stories we sought to represent. Questions of audience were one of our main concerns. Primary funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council gave us freedom as professional historians from pressures to adapt narratives to maintain funding.[47] But a desire to produce a work of public history that would be genuinely meaningful to both those rooted in the communities it represented and the general public, along with a commitment to the ethics of shared authority, meant we had to carefully monitor how we reconciled our role as professional historians with the voices of the history-makers who entrusted us with their stories.[48]

On the one hand, preserving the authority of our oral history interviewees seemed acutely important. Survey research undertaken by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen has shown that, rather than being uninterested in the past, Americans are actually highly engaged with it, though perhaps not on the same terms as a so-called professional historian. Rosenzweig and Thelen found that while "audiences actively and critically relate to the past," they "preferred to make their own histories" and to craft "their own narratives" primarily from the "experiential or firsthand," particularly their families and immediate communities.[49] Such personal narratives connect more deeply and immediately with audiences – a feat hard to achieve in academic history writing. We realized that having oral histories play a central framing role in the overall narrative (detailed below) would increase audience engagement. As a social justice history, such engagement might also inform building movements in the present.

On the other hand, we also recognized the positive role we could play in upholding our side of the shared authority. In her oral history work with the Baltimore Neighbourhood Heritage Project, Linda Shopes found that residents

authority was originally expressed by Michael Frisch in *A Shared Authority: Essay on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990). For more recent discussions, see Michael Frisch, "From a Shared Authority to the Digital Kitchen, and Back," in Bill Adair, Benjamin Filene & Laura Koloski, eds., *Letting Go? Sharing Historical Authority in a User-Generated World* (Philadelphia: Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, 2011), 126–138; Thomas Cauvin, *Public History: A Textbook of Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 216–221.

47. This freedom is enjoyed less frequently by public history projects. For a discussion of the negative effects of the decline of National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funding for public history projects in the United States, see Roy Rosenzweig & David Thelen, "The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life," in Hilda Kean & Paul Martin, eds., *The Public History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2013), 30–55.

48. For an interesting recent discussion on balance in public history, see Iain J. M. Robertson, "Heritage from Below: Class, Social Protest and Resistance," in B. Graham and P. Howard, eds., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Heritage and Identity* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 143–158.

49. Rosenzweig & Thelen, "Presence of the Past," 44–45.

tended to avoid any information critical of their neighbourhood and favoured a "booster spirit," both practices being sharply antithetical to the approach of the academic historian.[50] Rosenzweig, too, has noted that history-makers "may sometimes underestimate the structures of power" and, given their personal and immediate orientation, are often ill-suited to "readily take account of categories like capitalism and the state."[51] Part of our job, then, became situating oral history narratives within the larger story of a transitional period in the history of Canadian capitalism, as well as addressing how that period relates to the one we are living in now. Accomplishing this required a delicate balance and also meant drawing limits where triumphalism and nostalgia tended to lace the oral history narratives with which we were working. Our discussion of corroboration (below) can be considered in this light, but so too can such measures as our tempering the introduction of the "panacea" of legalized collective bargaining with the loss of direct action methods. The balance we ultimately achieved was informed most squarely by Rosenzweig's call that "by providing context and comparison and offering structural explanations, history professionals can turn the differences between themselves and popular historymakers into assets rather than barriers."[52]

Many of the core stories that comprise *Showdown!* are constructed around oral history testimony from workers intimately involved in the events portrayed in the narrative. The interviews themselves were conducted in the mid-1990s as part of the first iteration of the WCP and are now available online as part of that project's second phase that took place in 2015 and 2016.[53] To make the voice of workers as direct and present to readers as possible, we placed illustrated cameos of the workers themselves on the page, with their oral testimony presented in a series of proximate text balloons. Figure 1 provides an example: Near the top of the page is a cameo of former Stelco sheet mill worker and USW 1005 activist Jake Isbister. In words gleaned directly from his oral testimony, Isbister recounts the abusive treatment that workers, especially those who were newcomers from southern and eastern Europe, endured from the foremen at Stelco in the years leading up to World War II. Lower on the page, Louis Fiori – who had recently arrived in Hamilton from Italy when he got a job helping to re-line the brick furnaces at the steel company – recounts the nature of the ethnically segmented labour market as it existed at Stelco before the union was recognized. Taken together on this page, Isbister's and Fiori's testimonials reinforce each other to illustrate the kinds of discrimination

50. Linda Shopes, "Oral History and Community Involvement: The Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project," in Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier & Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 257.

51. Rosenzweig & Thelen, "Presence of the Past," 50.

52. Rosenzweig & Thelen, "Presence of the Past," 51.

53. See "Audio Index," Workers' City, accessed 15 August 2018, http://workerscity.ca/about/audio/.

**Figure 1.**
Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 26.

faced by racialized workers and the lack of recourse available to workers to address these injustices.

More than just representing and indexing these voices, the streamlined, comics treatment of the cameo portraits make these workers into figures with whom readers can identify in the process of "breathing life" into the simplified drawings and synthesizing the diverse strands of narrative that comprise the text. In total, over the book's 105 core graphic pages, we provide 47 such cameos with associated text sequences. The result is a central strand of narrative driven in large part by the voices of workers who had experienced these events first-hand. It is our hope that their voices shape the overall narrative of the book in much the same way that their voices – along with the voices of the many they struggled beside – shaped the historical events they recount.

## Using Other Primary Sources in *Showdown!*

Oral histories provide a central component of the book. To help further increase the readers' experience of engagement, we bolstered oral history testimony and our own secondary bridging narrative with a wide array of artistically rendered primary source material (and less numerous examples of directly reproduced images) throughout the book. These sources are ones typically found in more formal academic histories and include photographs, original labour art, newspaper accounts, transcripts of radio broadcasts, and a wide array of archival materials. Working alongside the oral histories and bridging narrative, these sources reinforce the experiences and actions thus described, offering various "artifacts" whose presence on the page incites readers to new acts of closure. The inclusion of such elements requires readers to engage in a variety of reading strategies to "make sense" of them—to supply closure, in McCloud's terminology—in the construction of a larger narrative.

One such strategy involves the reader's engagement with historically specific images. Wherever possible, illustrations were based on actual photographs of the events, places, and people portrayed. We are fortunate that the large amount of previous work done on workers' public history projects in Hamilton has resulted in an assemblage of photo collections that document many of the events and experiences we portray.[54] The scene in *Showdown!* of the strike of United Electrical, Radio & Machine Workers of America (UE) Local 504 against Canadian Westinghouse in Hamilton, for example, is based on a photo from the collection of the School of Labour Studies, McMaster University (see Figure 2). In the act of translating this photograph of protesting workers standing in a

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54. Especially rich is the photo collection of the School of Labour Studies at McMaster University, much of which was collected in the early 1980s to help compile Heron et al, *All That Our Hands Have Done*. Other important sources of photographic images include the Workers' Arts and Heritage Centre photo collection (much of it gathered in the first iteration of the WCP), the William Ready Archives at McMaster University, and the Local History Collection of the Hamilton Public Library (Central Branch).
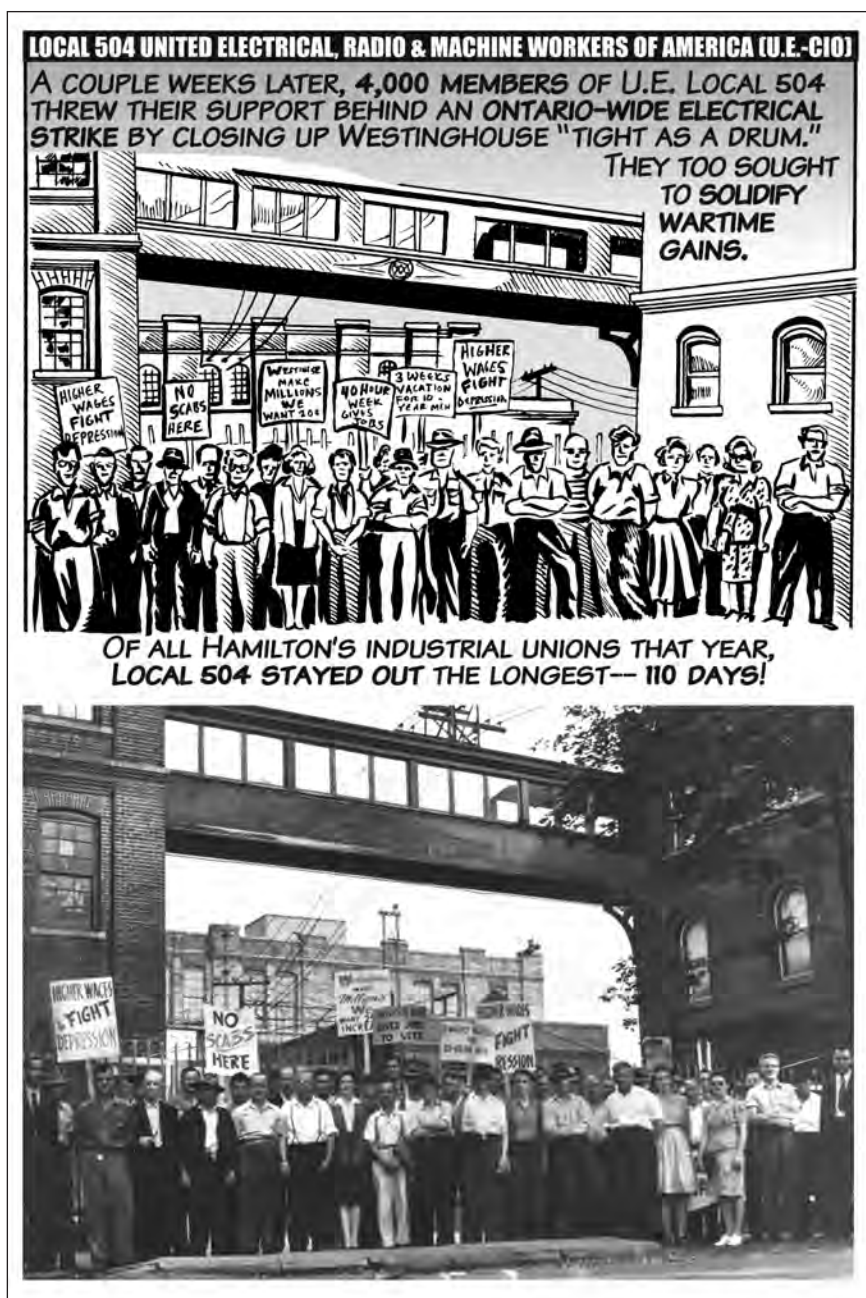
**Figure 2.**
(Top) Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 44; (bottom) Photo of Westinghouse Workers from the School of Labour Studies Photo Collection, McMaster University, Hamilton. Used with permission.

line in front of Westinghouse factory buildings into a cartoon drawing, much detail was removed and the resulting published image is greatly simplified. As already mentioned, McCloud posits this "stripping down" of comic art as a gain rather than a loss, in that it allows authors to "amplify ... meaning in a way that realistic art can't."[55] In the case of the Westinghouse image, the artistic rendition highlights the firm, dignified resolve of the workers through carefully reproducing the stance and gestures of the figures. The stark use of black and white to register the legs of the workers, and their close positioning in a continuous line, reinforces the collective struggle of many individuals unified by a common cause. Further, the carefully transcribed signage emphasizes the articulation of voice made through collective action. It is the simplification of this scene, via the art of comics, that allows readers to focus on and identify with these elements, thus collapsing some of the distance of history and context that might otherwise separate a viewer from the same scene viewed via the original black-and-white photograph. Almost every page of the book bases its imagery, at least in part, on historic photographs. The artistic treatment of these images encourages the kinds of identification and closure just described.

We recognize that *Showdown!*, as a work aimed at representing workers' collective struggle, is in keeping with a long tradition of labour art created to influence positive social change. In the book's foreword, historian and comics aficionado Paul Buhle situates *Showdown!* within this tradition of labour and radical comics and popular art produced – for well over a century now – to represent struggle and inspire change. These practices date back to the popular art of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine* of the 1870s, the "ash can" art in *The Masses*, the comic art of Ernest Riebe's satirical "Mr. Block," and the poster art of Ben Shahn, among others.[56] From our book's initial conception, it was our hope to build *Showdown!* with an eye toward these foundations.

With this lineage in mind, and in an effort to push our use of historical imagery further, we found it important to bring the reader's attention to the rich history of art made to support labour and social justice movements, especially that which was visually available to those involved in the events recounted in the book. At various points throughout the book we included reproductions of art produced by those involved in the struggle we document, ranging

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55. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 30.

56. See Paul Buhle, "Foreword," in Kristofferson & Orpana, *Showdown!* Riebe's "Mr. Block" is often acknowledged as the first widely read labour-centred comic strip. Other early examples include Giacomo G. Patri's *White Collar* combination book series, cartoon panels, and colouring books published by the United Transportation Union in the 1960s which featured Cliff Merritt, a fictional spokesperson whose adventures explored the role of a railroad and transportation worker. See Patri, *White Collar: A Novel in Linocuts* (San Francisco: Pisani, 1940). For an interesting and more recent example of a union's use of comics, see the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1245's *First Day* comic, which chronicles the history of Local 1245 to new members.

**Figure 3.**
(Top) Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 21; (bottom) Kristofferson & Orpana, Showdown!, 91.

from reproductions of picket signs to reprinted mimeographed cartoons – produced by Hamilton locals involved in the strike – that appeared in union publications. We also included imagery that appeared in political pamphlets produced by the labour-friendly Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). The work of Westinghouse worker and labour artist Murray Thomson receives particular pride of place.[57] A direct reproduction of his linocut design for the masthead of the UE Local 504 newsletter, the *Union Light*, and sections of the actual newsletter are set amid a full page on which an oral history excerpt from Communist Party member and union organizer Bert McClure recounts the printing of that publication (see Figure 3). Thomson also applied his artistic talents to the creation of effigy cut-outs worn by unionists heading up the pivotal Labour Day parade close to the end of the strike. One page of the book details Thomson's effigies of Stelco president Hugh Hilton, strike-opposing Hamilton controller Nora-Frances Henderson, Prime Minister Mackenzie King, and federal labour minister Humphrey Mitchell as they have been memorialized in one of the most iconic photographs of the strike. A large banner held aloft directly behind the marchers offers a graphic of the word "Labor" emblazoned on the muscled forearm of a worker with sleeve rolled up, surrounded by the slogan "Labor Will Knock Him Out! C.I.O." An adaptation of this parade scene is also featured on the front cover of *Showdown!*, a further homage to Thomson. The integration of such representations of visual imagery produced by artists allied with the strikers of 1946 provides readers with further evidence on which to form their own understandings of the strike. This narrative strategy also aligns the graphic production of *Showdown!* with the tradition of political labour art in general, celebrating and validating the art of workers whose creative production constituted a form of agency that asserted their dignity and voice as *people*, over and above their socially sanctioned role as factory workers.

A second reading strategy used in *Showdown!* concerns our inclusion of numerous accounts of the strike gleaned from various media reports. As usual, newspapers were a particularly rich source. Appearing as either reproduced headlines with mastheads or as reproductions of key quotes from news articles, these reports flesh out the narrative and provide important information to the reader. Furthermore, in line with Benedict Anderson's insights into the ways in which the rise of print media supplied the conditions for modern subjects to reimagine community and belonging,[58] our representation of newspaper coverage of the 1946 Stelco strike gestures beyond the narrative of the text to interpolate readers into the community of workers created by the events depicted. Figure 4 details the aftermath of the first significant, violent

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57. We are grateful to the family of Murray Thomson for pointing out the misspelling of his name in *Showdown!* and will correct this error in future printings of the book.

58. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

confrontation between striking workers and Stelco, in the early morning of July 16, 1946. In the top panel of Figure 4-A, a husband and wife are listening to the radio and reading newspaper coverage the day after the event. The radio is broadcasting a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation news report of the incident, part of which is transcribed at the top of the page.[59] Just below this pair, the middle of the page provides a re-creation of the *Hamilton Spectator* newspaper the husband is ostensibly reading in the frame above. The reader's attention is drawn to the headline, "VIOLENCE FLARES AT STELCO," and the accompanying photograph of the scene of the confrontation the morning following the event.[60] Portraits are then provided, at the bottom of the page, of two strikers who were injured in the fighting.[61] The sequence is continued in the top panel of the flanking page (Figure 4-B), which reproduces the newspaper image in a drawing, along with a quote from the story. The composition of this sequence presents readers with heterogeneous "scenes" and "artifacts" that elicit closure on a number of levels. It should be noted that this treatment immediately follows a dramatic recounting, by Jake Isbister, of the violent exchange between strikers and strikebreakers attempting to force their way into the plant with supplies.[62]

When a reader turns the page from this gripping scene of physical struggle, the composed, middle-class couple shown consuming print and radio media at the top of Figure 4-A provides a frame that gives readers a new perspective on the troubling violence just recounted, placing it within the larger context of the local and national communities who would have heard about this event from a distance, in the news. Like readers of *Showdown!*, the seated couple are removed spectators of the events just depicted, and a bridge is thus constructed between the mediation that occurred on July 17, 1946, and the mediation provided by the book itself, interpolating the reader as more immediate spectator of the events portrayed. Following this change of scene and framing, attention is refocused on the palpable effects of the July 16 exchange, in the form of the physical injuries sustained by two of the strikers, Harold Naylor and William Chechun; the contrast between their wounded visages and the bemused couple taking in the news reinforces the human stakes of the stories related by the media outlets and the class dynamic that both necessitated and structured these events. We then return, at the top of Figure 4-B, to the scene of the aftermath of the violence itself, now stationed with a line

59. As detailed further below, *Showdown!* frequently draws from transcripts of the numerous radio broadcasts related to the strike, accessed at the William Ready Division of Archives and Research Collections at McMaster University.

60. This story and image were not the actual cover story of the *Spectator* that day – an artistic liberty we duly note in the endnotes to this page of the text.
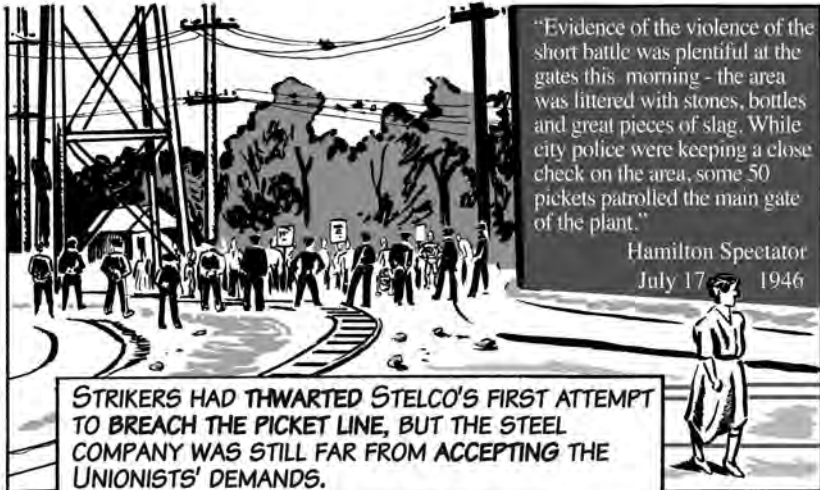
61. These portraits were taken from the USW Local 1005 publication *Steel Shots*, no. 3 (April 1976).

62. Kristofferson & Orpana, *Showdown!*, 58–59.

**Figures 4-A and 4-B.**
Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 60–61.

"Evidence of the violence of the short battle was plentiful at the gates this morning - the area was littered with stones, bottles and great pieces of slag. While city police were keeping a close check on the area, some 50 pickets patrolled the main gate of the plant."

Hamilton Spectator
July 17    1946

STRIKERS HAD **THWARTED** STELCO'S FIRST ATTEMPT TO **BREACH THE PICKET LINE**, BUT THE STEEL COMPANY WAS STILL FAR FROM **ACCEPTING** THE UNIONISTS' DEMANDS.

WORKERS HAD THE STEADFAST SUPPORT OF HAMILTON'S MAYOR, SAM LAWRENCE.

IN A HASTILY ASSEMBLED CENTENNIAL LABOUR PARADE, UP TO 10,000 STRIKING TYPESETTERS, ELECTRICAL, RUBBER, AND STEEL WORKERS WERE LED THROUGH HAMILTON'S STREETS BY LAWRENCE, WHO STATED...

I'M A LABOUR MAN FIRST AND CHIEF MAGISTRATE SECOND.

Strike for JOB Security

MEANWHILE, BOSSES TRIED TO KEEP PRODUCTION ROLLING AT THE CITY'S ONLY REMAINING HOLDOUT -- STELCO.

of police officers. By re-creating the photograph provided in miniature on the flanking page, a "zoom in" effect is produced that further reframes the narrative, immersing readers once again into the immediate terrain and temporality of the strike. This shift in focus, accomplished through the gap supplied by the gutter between the pages in Figures 4-A and 4-B, redoubles the closure already affected by the shift in frame supplied by the media representations of the opposite page.

The above examples highlight how closure, defined here as opportunities for readers to identify with and "complete" the narrative depicted, is mobilized by the unique quality of comics, as emphasized by McCloud, to depict time spatially.[63] In contrast to film, which produces an illusion of passing time via numerous subsequent still images, comics offer the unique quality of graphically representing time through the juxtaposition of images in space. It is largely the work of the gutter, already mentioned, along with the frame (the rectangles and other shapes that enclose panels) that makes this spatial representation of time possible, for gutters keep the distinct moments of time represented in a comic separate, thus activating the process of closure in the mind of the reader. *Showdown!* uses this quality to full advantage by allowing for not just the representation of historical events developing over a span of years, months, and days, but also opportunities to both signal and bridge the historical distance that separates a contemporary reader from the events depicted. These strategies attempt to inculcate the reader in the events portrayed, encouraging identification with the struggle of workers from generations past and lending these events an immediacy that, we hope, makes them present to readers as part of the living legacy of 20th-century workers' movements.

Another strategy for engagement with primary sources is the inclusion of transcripts of radio broadcasts played during the strike. Marked graphically with jagged lines surrounding their enclosed text bubbles, these snippets of broadcasters' and strike leaders' speeches are another means of inserting voices of the past into the graphic narrative. In some cases, these allow the further insertion of workers' voices into the story. As the narrative portrays the run-up to the strike, for example, we include snippets from the "Voice of Steel," a daily radio bulletin put out by the usw and broadcast on the local station CHML. As Figure 5 demonstrates, this technique encourages readers to consider how men, women, and children received such information and developed an orientation to the struggle, as individuals embedded in working communities rather than just workers associated with a particular workplace. The appeal to striking steelworkers' wives, urging them to encourage their husbands to attend the crucial union meeting at the Playhouse Theatre where the vote was finally taken to go on strike, also makes plain to readers how

63. McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 100.

**Figure 5.**
Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 47.

union leadership mobilized gender-based appeals in a bid to strengthen solidarity in their struggle.[64]

In addition to photographs, original labour art, newspaper accounts, and transcripts of radio broadcasts, representations or reproductions of a wide variety of other archival materials are interspersed throughout the narrative. Fortunately, the archival record around the strike is rich, with much of the most important and graphically appealing information residing at the William Ready Archives at McMaster University, which holds the archives of USW 1005 (including the fonds of Tom McClure, president of Local 1005 immediately before the strike and an important organizer with the Communist Party of Canada), UE 504, Westinghouse Canada, and the fonds of J. N. (Pat) Kelly, public relations adviser to Stelco during the strike. Rich collections at the McMaster School of Labour Studies, the Workers' Arts and Heritage Centre, and the Special Collections at the Hamilton Public Library provided further materials. From these archives and others, we were able to insert into the narrative representations or reproductions of a wide range of archival materials from such sources as city promotional publications, advertisements, union-produced pamphlets, leaflets, meeting notices, newsletters, dues cards, strike ballots, telegrams, and personal communications. The *Union Light* newsletter (see Figure 3) produced by UE 504 is one example of how such materials culled from archives could be reproduced and visually inserted into the narrative in a way that facilitates first-hand reader engagement.

## Primary Sources, the Fourth Wall, and Corroboration

Our heavy use of archival materials also opened up room for us to experiment with "meta-narrative" moments of reflection on the book's use of primary sources. This is particularly evident in a ten-page supplement to a section called "Community Support Was Key to the Struggle." This section builds up to an illustration of striking steelworker Johnny Shipperbottom sitting in front of a donation box in the strike Welfare Committee headquarters. The box is bursting full of cash and in-kind contributions to the strike from other unions and from a wide array of local small business people. The image breaks with a strictly naturalistic representation: vouchers symbolizing the kinds of support supplied by the community are depicted hovering above the donation box. The next page opens with an illustration of author Simon Orpana holding a direct reproduction of the photograph on which the

64. This appeal to gender is reinforced again on page 54, where the unique ability of comics to depict time spatially allows for a graphic representation of the way in which the medium of radio, broadcast simultaneously across large geographic areas, galvanizes collective identities for diverse subjects by producing a shared context. As this page progresses to show us several scenes – such as a woman in her kitchen, an aged couple keeping shop, and a scene at the picketed gates to Stelco – the "Voice of Steel" broadcast provides a thread of continuity, signalling the importance of the events unfolding at Stelco to the larger community.

**Figure 6.**
Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 77.

scene was based, which, he explains, he located in the McMaster University Archives. Addressing the audience directly, Orpana proceeds to explain to the reader how the book itself came together as a product of archival research, oral history interviewing, and other historical research. At the bottom of the page the reader is presented with an illustration of a leather-bound photo album atop a reading room table at the William Ready Archives at McMaster University (Figure 6). The overlaying text relays our excitement at finding this "old, crumbling photo album that details the everyday life of the picket line and strike" while perusing the fonds of Tom McClure. The following pages offer further background on McClure, as well as a direct reproduction of a leaflet for his election to the Stelco Works Council and his picket card from the 1946 strike, along with an illustrated reproduction of a photograph of him with other Stelco "old-timers" organizing a reunion of sheet mill workers some decades later. A full-page reproduction of the front cover of the McClure album comprises the next page and marks the beginning of a seven-page inset to the narrative illustrated to appear as a "photo album" inset to the book. Upon opening the "photo album," the reader is then presented with a series of pages containing illustrated reproductions of McClure's original photos drawn by guest artist Matt McInnes (Figures 7-A and 7-B). In other words, the reader is invited to engage, so to speak, in the experience of going into the archives.

This narrative device, where characters from the diegesis of the book directly address the reader, has its origins in theatre and film. Known as "breaking the fourth wall," this conceit has also been used selectively in comics. The fourth wall is broken when the world of the story successfully extends outward into the reader's world. In our case, this happens in the sequence that begins with Orpana addressing the audience directly about the primary sources and processes that went into making the book and then inviting the reader to engage in a virtual trip to the archives by perusing the McClure photo album. The fourth wall is most commonly broken in narratives to pull the reader *in* to the world of the story.[65] In the case of the sequence in *Showdown!*, however, it is notable that it is not just that the story world extends *outward* into the reader's own temporal and spatial reality, but that the reader's reality is itself the space where the actual archive exists. Readers consider both how they engage with the book they are reading and how they might engage with archival spaces in the world in which they live. The breaking of the fourth wall enables a self-reflexivity on the part of the reader – a meta-moment – in which attention is drawn not just to archival materials as they are portrayed but to the processes that preserve and make them available. In our case, too, breaking the fourth wall enables an imaginative experience on the reader's part that can be understood as a particular type of closure. To connect back to Carleton's point about

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65. Steve Braund, "The Itinerant Illustration: Creating Storyworlds in the Reader's Space," *Journal of Illustration* 2 (December 2015): 267–285.

**Figure 7-A.**
Rob Kristofferson and Simon Orpana. *Showdown! Making Modern Unions*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 81. Illustrations by Matt McInnes.

**Figure 7-B.**
Rob Kristofferson and Simon Orpana. *Showdown! Making Modern Unions*. (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 82. Illustrations by Matt McInnes.

closure and conscientization, such a device both models and encourages the reader's engagement with archival spaces.

Another notable approach we employed with a number of the primary sources mentioned above was to integrate conflicting sources into the narrative; this facilitates the active engagement of the reader through the process of corroboration, the employment of intertextual links to encourage the reader to compare accounts against each other.[66] Samuel Wineburg views corroboration as one important "sense-making activity" used by readers and writers of history to help "resolve contradictions, see patterns, and make distinctions among different kinds of evidence."[67] By encouraging the reader to assess the validity of arguments, corroboration encourages critical thinking, a necessary component in the development of historical consciousness. According to Alyson King, the ability of graphic history to offer "multiple viewpoints about events and incomplete narratives" makes it a medium particularly suited to the development of historical literacy and critical thinking on the part of the reader.[68]

Boerman-Cornell, in his assessment of graphic histories published between 1985 and 2010, found corroboration was used sparingly and in only a minority of works he considered. He concluded that opportunities to do so were taken up far less often than were other history-specific strategies relating to historical "sense-making activities" identified by Wineburg.[69] In contrast, *Showdown!* purposely deploys corroboration numerous times throughout the narrative. One example is our representation of a crucial city council debate over whether to bring police reinforcements to the city to ensure safe passage back and forth through the Stelco picket line (Figures 8-A and 8-B). During that debate, anti-union city councillor Nora-France Henderson claimed picketers were "preventing their fellow working man and woman the right to work by brutal hoodlum tactics." The graphic sequence begins with a cameo of Henderson hovering above a scene of a family huddled around their living room radio. Jagged-edge text bubbles extending from the radio contain excerpts from the surviving transcripts of Henderson's original radio broadcast urging the convening of an emergency city council session to bring in extra police "to deal with mob rule" that was "striking at the very heart of

66. Boerman-Cornell, "Using Historical Graphic Novels," 211.

67. Samuel S. Wineburg, "Historical Problem Solving: A Study in Cognitive Processes Used in the Evaluation of Documentary and Pictorial Evidence," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 83 (March 1991): 77.

68. King, "Cartooning History," 214.

69. Boerman-Cornell, "Using Historical Graphic Novels," 220. Wineburg identifies three historical "sense-making" heuristics: "a) corroboration, the act of comparing documents with one another; b) sourcing, the act of looking first to the source of the document before reading the text; and c) contextualization, the act of situating a document in a concrete temporal and spatial context." Wineburg, "Historical Problem-Solving," 77.

**Figures 8-A and 8-B.**
Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 98–99.

democracy." The scene then shifts to the council meeting. Visually, the reader understands that while a largely pro-business audience occupied the council chamber, city hall was surrounded outside by more than 2,000 strike supporters. Available reports make it clear that the strike supporters' cheering and singing could easily be heard in the council chamber, its windows open on the hot August evening.[70] Out of the same reports we constructed a visual and text narrative in which text bubbles containing excerpts from Henderson's anti-strike speech to council are interspersed with text bubbles floating in from outside that contain the lyrics to "Solidarity Forever" being sung by strike supporters. This juxtaposed imagery, all derived from available sources, allows the reader to capture the charged character of the original moment and to ponder the possible dynamics in the room and outside the building in the context of the original words spoken. While the historian still plays some mediating role, readers are enabled to more directly engage and draw their own conclusions than is possible in other forms of historical writing. In the next scene of the sequence, pro-labour mayor Sam Lawrence attempts to undercut Henderson's position by proclaiming that "we have no evidence at present that the law has *not* been enforced." In visual terms he makes this statement in front of the pro-business audience, who are shown laughing and jeering his words. This use of character non-agreement in graphic histories (where characters are shown to agree or disagree with a narrative element through facial expression, actions, and so on) has been identified as a key device to facilitate reader corroboration.[71]

Using sources that are at variance with others in the general narrative is another such tactic. In one six-page section of the book, for example, we provide a "Guided Tour of Stelco" during the strike (Figure 9). This account was based largely on a reminiscence that sheet mill worker Jake Isbister, active on the picket line throughout the strike, printed in the USW Local 1005's *Steel Shots* newsletter in April 1976. However, after Jake and his friend are caught by company security and led through the still-operating plant to witness the daily activities of its strikebreaking workers, the narrative then also incorporates sources that counter Isbister's account, including a reproduction of a scab-produced "Slag Mountain Lodge" logo, illustrated representations of photos from social events in the plant during the strike, and a direct reproduction of the front cover of the *Stelco Billet*, a newsletter produced daily in the plant by the self-proclaimed "Loyal Order of Scabs." These are just two examples of many in the book that encourage the reader to participate in corroborating evidence from different and sometimes conflicting sources and to formulate

70. John M. McMenemy draws from these reports to provide a sketch of the city council meeting in "Lion in a Den of Daniels: A Study of Sam Lawrence, Labour in Politics," MA thesis, McMaster University, 1965.

71. Boerman-Cornell, "Using Historical Graphic Novels," 215.

**Figure 9.**
Rob Kristofferson & Simon Orpana, *Showdown! Making Modern Unions* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016), 64.

their own conclusions.[72] Corroboration thus also provokes acts of closure that further encourage readers to "make sense of their own identity and the world around them."[73]

## Conclusion

THE EVENTS DEPICTED IN *Showdown!* were part of a nations-wide, collective effort on the part of workers and their communities to shape a better world for themselves in the post–World War II era. These efforts helped crystallize not just better economic and legal protections for workers, but new sensibilities, cultures, and institutions, like industrial unionism, by which workers who were structurally relegated to largely silent, exploitative toil found new voice and agency. In making *Showdown!*, we intentionally explored the limits of the formal characteristics of graphic narrative in the service of not just representing but *reproducing* for new generations and audiences the kind of community-supported activist consciousness that informed the events depicted. Our use of multiple strategies of closure—between panels, within panels, between past and present, between differing historical accounts, and among the rich array of primary materials and voices represented in the book—creates a narrative space into which readers are not just invited, but are *required* to project themselves via the numerous gaps and gutters that sew together the heterogeneous elements of *Showdown!* The narrative strategies we have attempted to draw attention to here underscore the diverse ways in which graphic history can be used to represent past struggles to encourage our imagining and working toward a better, more egalitarian future.

72. For a couple of further examples, see the sequence constructed around the account of a pitched battle that broke out when the company tried to move refrigerated rail cars into the plant (Kristofferson & Orpana, *Showdown!*, 58–61) and the reproduction of the advertisement put out by company president Hugh Hilton that declares "Law or Anarchy" (p. 100).

73. King, "Cartooning History," 216.