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Organizing a wildcat: the United States postal strike of 1970

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ABSTRACT

This article, part of a larger work in progress, uses archives, key secondary sources, and oral histories from participants in the 1970 United States postal wildcat strike for better pay and working conditions to argue that this was a monumental event both unique and representative of the times. It was a rank-and-file effort that began in New York City – with a history of labor militancy – and rapidly spread across the country. The strike defied federal statute outlawing federal employee strikes, and also union leaders who opposed striking. A spike in 1960s hiring of blacks, veterans, women, and young people, combined with established labor unity tradition, a nationwide workplace and long-simmering frustrations produced the strike. But its dual character (both spontaneous and organized by local union officials and activists) allowed it to grow and maintain for eight days with no central coordination. Besides winning a living wage, the strike triggered the transformation of the US Post Office Department into the US Postal Service (USPS) with full collective bargaining rights for postal unions representing its employees. Moreover, it brought rank-and-file politics into postal unions while contributing to the increased strength of postal unions, public union organizing, and the labor movement in general.

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'It was an historic event. It did not come about without warning. It was just that nobody seemed to believe it would ever really happen.' William J. 'Bill' Usery, Jr., Assistant Secretary of Labor for Labor-Management Relations (May 1970).¹

William Roth still recalls pulling the lever in one of the six voting booths set up by the Honest Ballot Association (HBA) at the Manhattan Center on 311 West 34th Street. It was Tuesday night, 17 March 1970. The huge annual St. Patrick's Day parade held in New York City that day had come and gone, although many wooden police barricades still remained on the streets. It was quarter to nine, and he had just gotten off work half an hour earlier at the Fort George Post Office. Roth was assigned to a collection route picking up outgoing mail from collection boxes and then driving it to a local mail distribution facility. But now he was taking part in an extraordinary event along with almost four thousand other letter carriers at the Manhattan Center. They were all members of New York Branch 36 (serving the Bronx and Manhattan) of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC). This was the largest branch in the NALC, with over eight thousand members. That night they were about to do something no postal workers or any other federal government workers had done in United States history.

They would vote to go on strike at midnight, soon to be joined by over two hundred thousand other postal workers for eight days across the United States. According to Tom Germano, postal labor historian and a strike leader with Branch 36, there were so many Branch 36 members waiting to vote that night in Manhattan that about a thousand got discouraged with the long lines and left without voting.² Roth, however, was able to cast his ballot:

And I'll never forget when I pushed that lever and I decided either we stand or we fall, and if we fall, I'm gonna fall fightin' for something that we need to do ... Voting yes on the 1970 postal strike was the best thing I ever did. Because, even though we had to put with the idiots in management ... the important thing was I let them know who I was. And I wasn't afraid.³

That week, between one-quarter and one-third of all United States postal workers struck the federal government – with not a single postal worker fired as a result.⁴ Not only was this a 'wildcat' strike (one that is called without official union authorization), it was the largest wildcat strike in United States labor history and the first national one. Furthermore, it was illegal for federal workers to strike the government. Fines, jail terms, termination, and loss of union collective bargaining rights could have resulted. This was also effectively a general strike. Almost all crafts struck: carriers, clerks, mail handlers, maintenance workers, special delivery messengers, and motor vehicle operators. All or virtually all were union members, as the post office at the time was 88% unionized, including 97% of letter carriers.⁵ Nonetheless, it must be remembered that this was a strike by union members, not by the unions. That made it a strike in defiance of national postal union leadership. It was driven by the rank-and-file. It was also fundamentally democratic. And while the strike gave rise to new local leaders, in addition to the many cases where it was led by local union officials, it remained leaderless at the national level, which became both its strongest and weakest point.

Rank-and-file leadership was often exercised by those with little or no practice in daily union affairs. Strikers' only communication was telephone, word of mouth, or news reports on radio, television, and in newspapers. Postal workers who went on strike across the country voted in union halls, bars, veterans' halls, in post office break areas (known as 'swing rooms'), or on the workroom floor. In some cases, they simply walked out without even taking a vote. These local strike actions often took place after heated discussion and debates that lasted anywhere from a few hours to several days. Sometimes it was spontaneous. It was coordination by inspiration. Few had experience in striking. There was nothing routine about spending union funds to buy poster board and write the word 'Strike!' There was no assumption that this dispute would be resolved by negotiation without management retaliation. Everyone I spoke to reported feeling concern for their future. On the one hand, they thought they had nothing to lose, while at the same time they knew they had a lot to risk.

The personal accounts that I have recorded or received from about a hundred postal strike veterans run along similar lines to the sentiments expressed by William Roth. These are men and women who are today in their 60s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, and almost all retired, although all still belong to their respective unions. Too many strikers have passed on without leaving their stories, but we also have some of those recorded in various union and university archives. Nearly half a century later, postal strike participants still carry vivid memories of what took place in 1970. In fact, most of the interviews I have conducted have been in groups, where lively discussions about the past evoked the spirit of strike debates.

This article is part of a larger work in progress. In addition to the archival and published materials on the strike from both the post office and the unions along with published scholarly works, this project uncovers and uses stories from the participants in the 1970 postal

strike to argue what a phenomenal event it was in United States labor history – one that was both unique and representative of the times. The strike was a product of years of built-up frustration with low pay, bad working conditions, and inadequate representation. But it was solidarity that drove this uprising. That sense of mutual risk and support had long been developed at work and at union events and social gatherings. It united unions and crafts that had traditionally both competed and coalesced. The strike became a rank-and-file union-centered revolt against federal inaction and the inability of their national and local union leaders to resist that persistent neglect. It needed the spark of New York City to get it started and keep it going, but these widespread grievances created the conditions for a *national* wildcat strike, which is what ultimately made it successful.

How does one ‘organize’ a wildcat strike? The idea is almost an oxymoron, as wildcats are typically considered spontaneous in addition to being unapproved by a union. Indeed, the fact that so many local votes were taken in the postal unions, and that so many local officers and shop stewards (then called ‘delegates’ or ‘representatives’) were involved made this a unique kind of wildcat strike that complicates any notion that it was led entirely by rank-and-file postal workers, even though they probably provided most of the leadership.⁶ The strike’s dual nature also hampered the government’s ability to identify this as a union-led strike, which it both was and was not. That distinction, however, did not stop federal judges from issuing injunctions against postal unions and their officers, and threatening to impose fines. But in the courtroom of public opinion, this was a strike by workers previously considered docile in many quarters who were now standing up for themselves, and who were beyond the control of both their union leaders and postal management.⁷

The strike did more than win a living wage, which was a considerable feat in itself. It also triggered the transformation of the U.S. Post Office Department (USPOD) into the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), with full collective bargaining rights for postal unions representing its employees. Moreover, it brought rank-and-file politics into postal unions, as well as contributing the increased strength of postal unions, public union organizing, and the labor movement in general. The bipartisan political consensus that negotiated the 1971 USPS government agency/corporation hybrid in response to this popular wildcat strike was based on a widely agreed upon assumption that is entirely foreign to today’s increasingly powerful narrative of privatization and de-unionization. That assumption was that government should provide improved universal postal service by career union employees, with postal unions ensuring production and labor peace. It could probably not have been better put than by the Republican President of the United States, Richard M. Nixon, at the 12 August 1970, Postal Reorganization Act (PRA) signing ceremony establishing the USPS, where he predicted a future with ‘better operation of this department ... better service ... [and] better working conditions and better pay over the years for the hundreds of thousands of people who work very proudly for the Post Office Department here in Washington and across the country.’⁸

Striking postal workers brought the federal government to the bargaining table and wound up winning their most significant demands (although not the right to strike, or the ‘area wage’ that Branch 36 had originally demanded.)⁹ The strike also revived a post office previously stuck in a financial, infrastructure, and labor relations gridlock. The passage of the PRA established the USPS in 1971 as an ‘independent establishment of the executive branch.’ Full collective bargaining rights were won, and on 20 July 1971, the four recognized unions signed the first contract with USPS: the NALC, the American Postal Workers Union or APWU, the National Postal Mail Handlers Union or NPMHU, and the National Rural Letter

Carriers Association or NRLCA.¹⁰ It is therefore astonishing that the story of that strike has seen so little coverage in popular media or scholarly works. By contrast, the strike for both the NALC and the APWU is more than a rallying cry or a preserved historical memory. It has become a kind of heroic origins myth of birth and rebirth. Some of my NALC interviewees find the rebirth narrative ironic considering that the NALC leadership at the time publicly opposed the strike, as did all national postal union leaders. But even many who opposed the strike in 1970 later hailed this event as one that transformed the NALC from an association to a union.¹¹ As for the APWU, it became the largest postal union in the world on 1 July 1971, with the merger of five postal unions – two of which (the National Postal Union or NPU and the United Federation of Postal Clerks, or UFPC) had vigorously competed against each other for members before the strike.¹²

Who has actually written on the strike? The NALC has published its history by M. Brady Mikusko and F. John Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*, which provides a clear synopsis of the strike, its origins, and legacy.¹³ The APWU commissioned its own history, *Labor Struggle in the Post Office* by John Walsh and Garth Mangum, which examines the strike with a fair amount of detail.¹⁴ The USPS itself notes the significance of the strike in its official history *The United States Postal Service, an American History: 1775–2006*.¹⁵ As far as scholarly works, Tom Germano, in his 1983 Columbia University sociology doctoral dissertation, has provided us with the best account of the strike, its background, and its meaning – all from a unique vantage point: Germano was also a General Post Office (GPO) NALC Branch 36 strike captain from the first day of the strike.¹⁶ Another fine discussion of the strike appears in a 1996 Columbia University doctoral dissertation by labor historian Aaron Brenner, part of which was later revised into an academic journal article.¹⁷ My 2006 Duke University history doctoral dissertation was later revised into a book on black postal worker history and included an entire chapter on the strike.¹⁸ But there is little else written on the strike by academics.¹⁹

Meanwhile, U.S. labor historiography of the late twentieth century is a steadily expanding field. Most of these works, like *Race Against Liberalism* by David M. Lewis-Colman, *Rebel Rank and File* (an anthology edited by Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow), *Stayin' Alive* by Jefferson Cowie, *From the Jaws of Victory* by Matt Garcia, and *On the Ground* by Liesl Miller Orenic (to name just a few) mainly focus on the private sector, from auto to airlines to farm workers to teamsters to sanitation workers and more. The handful of books that do engage public sector work, however, are important ones, such as Joseph Slater's *Public Workers*, Michael Honey's *Black Workers Remember*, Paul Johnston's *Success While Others Fail*, and especially Joseph McCartin's *Collision Course*. Honey, Garcia, and McCartin's works also make extensive use of oral histories as sources.²⁰

The story of the 1970 postal strike, coming on the cusp of two decades, runs counter to common assessments of the 1970s being marked by pessimism and rank-and-file union declension following a burst of insurgency. While those narratives were actually true in many cases, they did not apply to postal unions. In the postal strike, black and white workers combined successfully and were not split apart. After the strike, rank-and-file caucuses became reform slates that won elections to national leadership of the two largest postal unions, the APWU and the NALC. Women played key roles in the strike despite having just broken into the postal ranks in the 1960s in a major way.²¹ Notwithstanding the sparse media and scholarly references to the strike, first-person postal strike narratives from all sides combined with easily accessible evidence should help make a case for why this was such an important event in U.S. labor history.

For postal workers in 1970, to go on strike was a big deal. Striking the federal government had been outlawed since the 1912 Lloyd-LaFollette Act first permitted the organization of federal employee associations and unions. What pushed postal workers to take such a risky, dramatic action? Roth told me that at the time of the strike, he made less than three dollars an hour and was working a second job driving a cab. This is a typical story told by postal workers from that era. According to Tom Germano, 20% of New York's postal workers worked second or third jobs, and another 20% had a spouse working. In addition, 10% were eligible for and received food stamps and welfare payments. Postal workers in other cities told of similar stories.²² Roth had just turned 27 the day before this strike vote. A carrier since 1967, his status was still Part Time Flexible (PTF). He was hoping to soon 'make regular' – which meant he could attain career employee status and be guaranteed 40 hours of work per week. Postal workers who were not 'regular' could not 'get on the clock,' that is, begin work, until given an assignment. But even 'regulars' did not enjoy economic security.²³

About 1800 miles west of New York City, in Denver, Colorado, Vern Evenson, then a recently hired letter carrier described a similar situation: 'Everybody had a second job.' Evenson remembers carriers lined up at the time clock at the end of their shift, anxiously waiting to 'clock out.' There was no overtime then, he said, and many of them were getting ready to go straight to their next job. A 24-year-old U.S. Army veteran, married with a one-month old child, Evenson joined the NALC on Friday 20 March, the night of Branch 47's debate and strike vote in Denver, as the strike made its way across the country. As in New York and elsewhere, most of those voting were also military veterans. And all postal workers were required to sign an oath that they would never strike. But now many felt that the government had violated its social contract by not paying them enough to support their families. That night Evenson and most of Branch 47 voted to join the strike: 'And so the vote in Denver was: if these guys [in New York] are willing to do this for us, the least we can do is support them.'²⁴

Striking at the post office could have resulted in termination for Roth, Evenson, and thousands of others, not to mention \$1000 fines and up to one-year jail terms if convicted for what would have been a felony charge. It could have ended Roth's and Evenson's careers at the post office. Others had worked 10–20 years, with some close to the standard 30-year minimum time a postal worker needed to work in order to be eligible for retirement and a full monthly pension from the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS).²⁵

Wage and benefit increases for Roth and about 750,000 postal workers were at the discretion of Congress and the president. At the time, federal government employees only enjoyed partial collective bargaining rights provided under Executive Order 10,988, signed by President John F. Kennedy in 1962. This order allowed government employees to vote for which unions they wanted to represent them in negotiations over work rules with their respective agencies in a three-tiered system (exclusive, formal, and informal), from local to regional to national levels. In the case of the USPOD, postal workers belonged to nine different unions – seven craft and two industrial (open to all crafts).²⁶ With Executive Order 11491 signed in October 1969, President Richard M. Nixon abolished all categories except 'exclusive.' Intended as a progressive modification of Executive Order 10988, and one that was supposed to have been handed down during the previous Lyndon B. Johnson administration, it nonetheless effectively stripped national representation status from the two independent industrial unions: the historically black NAPFE (National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees) and the militant NPU.²⁷ But regardless of which union postal workers chose to represent

them, all postal unions still had to lobby Congress for pay raises and benefit increases – a process they dubbed ‘collective begging.’ By the 1960s, they had become accustomed to seeing their annual pay raises averaging less than 2%.²⁸

On the eve of the strike, annual starting pay at the post office was \$6176, and top pay was \$8422 – after 21 years – which many never reached. Postal workers were becoming increasingly bitter at broken pay raise promises by presidents both Democrat and Republican.²⁹ Low pay was the main issue for those willing to risk their postal jobs by going on strike. Wages for postal workers had never been very high historically. This was a job that attracted those who wanted the security of a federal government job. Veterans could earn 5 extra points in taking the highly competitive civil service exam, and veterans with disabilities could earn 10 points. By 1949, half of all postal workers were veterans – and by 1966 that figure had increased to three-quarters.³⁰ Immigrants and their grown children also found a niche at the post office: in particular Irish, Italians, and European Jews in the Northeast. And the post office was especially a job magnet for African-Americans shut out of private sector jobs by racial discrimination, or in search of a flexible job where they could work another job or attend college.³¹

But postal workers in the 1960s had watched their wages, which had just recently started to keep up with those of police officers and fire fighters in New York, now drop not only past those occupations but those of sanitation workers. What is more, they had seen New York City municipal workers join the nationwide strike wave and win wage and benefit increases. This was more than just a pay battle, however, as important as that grievance was. As Aaron Brenner has pointed out, the carriers of Branch 36 who voted to strike ‘organized around their rights, in large part because they were public employees whose wages and benefits were set through a political process carried out in the language and practice of rights.’³² One can also see in the narratives of strikers how low pay also served as a marker for their feeling of general powerlessness and treatment as second-class citizens, barely able to provide for their families. A spike in 1960s hiring of blacks, veterans, women, and young people brought in new militancy and helped fire up frustrated veteran postal workers. This new aggressiveness combined with established labor unity traditions to spark a seemingly spontaneous wildcat strike that somehow lasted for eight days with no central coordination.³³

Ironically, the strike was led by those who in many ways both claimed and appeared to have enjoyed their jobs the most at the post office – namely the letter carriers. These were postal workers who were out in public, wearing uniforms, some keeping the same routes for years and feeling a sense of pride contradicted by their ill treatment by Congress and often postal management. Letter carriers I interviewed spoke of feeling for the most part ‘left alone’ by management after they left the office to make their rounds – the part of the job that served to mitigate the often contentious relations on the shop floor with supervisors.³⁴ Clerks and mail handlers especially in urban areas meanwhile battled daily supervisor pressure, often in antiquated buildings that were freezing in the winter and unbearably hot in the summer.³⁵

The wildcat strike that Bill Usery later said everyone could see coming but no one believed would happen had in fact been building since 1968. In September 1968, the *Wall Street Journal* reported the post office’s strike contingency plan along with the news that the three largest postal unions (the NALC, UFPC, and NPU) had scrapped their respective constitutional ‘no strike’ clauses at their conventions that summer. In fact, the NALC in August had passed a watered-down resolution to ‘study’ the feasibility of gaining the right to strike and ‘removing

the no-strike oath.' For its part, the NPU convention in June passed a resolution that authorized a 1 July 1969 strike deadline until President David Silvergleid overturned it as illegal. And UFPC legislative director Patrick Nilan warned Congress that postal union leaders were 'sitting atop a live volcano.'³⁶ As cautiously as these unanimous convention resolutions were phrased, they represented a growing rank-and-file resentment at their unions' inability to use workers' ultimate weapon – the collective withholding of labor.

On 20 June 1969, thousands of postal workers who were angry at President Nixon's paltry 4.1% pay raise announcement demonstrated for higher pay outside the Grand Central Station Post Office (GCSP) and the GPO in Manhattan as well as in the Bronx, chanting 'Strike!' and waving signs that read 'Strike – July 1st.' On 30 June, almost all of the letter carriers at the Kingsbridge Post Office in the Bronx voted to call in sick the following day as part of an organized protest, and were joined by almost all of the clerks. On 2 July, 16 carriers from Throgs Neck Post Office in the Bronx called in. All employees on 'sickout' were suspended but reinstated without back pay following protests by NALC Branch 36 and the Manhattan-Bronx Postal Union (MBPU), the NPU's largest local, which was made up of mostly clerks but included workers from other crafts as well.³⁷

Strike momentum continued to build as Branch 36 rank-and-file tried to get their union to help cover strikers' back pay as the MBPU had done for their members. Letter carrier Vincent Sombrotto, who went on to help lead the 1970 strike, later called the Bronx sickout a 'dress rehearsal' that was instrumental in his getting involved in Branch 36 activism. Branch 36 meetings, not known for their high attendance, by the end of 1969 and into early 1970 had become mass meetings.³⁸ Growing postal worker militancy and solidarity in Manhattan and the Bronx, Tom Germano points out, was reinforced by social relationships and discussions forged across lines of craft, race, age, and ethnicity – not just at work but also off the job through such vehicles as the Branch 36-organized bowling, softball, and football leagues.³⁹

Meanwhile, the NALC's 'Save Our Service' protests to Nixon for higher pay that included three million letters and postcards prompted Nixon's request for NALC President James Rademacher to meet with him at the White House beginning on 5 December. When it was later discovered that Rademacher had, in secret meetings with Nixon, agreed to postal corporatization 'in exchange for a 5.4% wage increase,' postal workers were outraged. Those meetings coupled with Nixon's holding postal wages hostage to his corporatization plan helped ignite the strike. The MBPU denounced the meetings and Nixon's plan. During the January 1970 Branch 36 meeting, rank-and-file activists proposed their own postal reform plan that included the right to strike. At that same meeting, they finally were able to vote to compensate carriers who had been suspended for the Bronx sickout.⁴⁰

Two months later, Branch 36 officials led by President Gus Johnson attempted to sidetrack a strike meeting that the membership had demanded on 12 March 1970, for the night of 17 March. The officials instead scheduled a strike vote that they were sure would lose. Meanwhile, rank-and-file caucus members were meeting among themselves just prior to the 17 March strike vote. According to Tom Germano – a strike meeting opponent who wanted an immediate strike vote – the efforts by others in the caucus to hold a branch meeting before any strike vote were actually rebuffed by the rank-and-file carriers already assembled at the Manhattan Center. And Vincent Sombrotto, a strike meeting proponent, later recalled a woman from the HBA wrestling the microphone from his hand as he tried to call for that meeting. Having a meeting before the vote, following the union bylaws, was actually the

correct thing to do according to Germano, but he was more afraid of losing momentum if a strike vote was not called quickly.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Frank Orapello had gotten to the Manhattan Center at six o'clock that evening when the strike vote was scheduled. Most carriers had gotten off work at two-thirty that afternoon and had to wait around for the strike vote. Tom Germano reports that many went to nearby taverns for a beer to wait. Orapello thought that delay was intentional by union leadership to try to suppress pro-strike votes. Adding to that tension, the Manhattan Center doors didn't open until six forty-five after carriers repeatedly banged on them:

I was one of the first carriers who entered Manhattan Center. Just try to visualize what I saw. What they did was set up chairs on both sides of the room for carriers to walk through to the voting machines. What they wanted was for the carriers to enter on 34th Street, walk between the chairs to the voting machines and walk out at the 35th Street exit. They wanted the carriers to go home and then they would tell us what the total vote was. You have got to understand the distrust we had for our local president Gus Johnson who had too many ties to our national president James Rademacher. I believe if we had voted and went home, there would never have been a strike. When I saw this, I realized what was going to happen. With this in mind, I started to rearrange the chairs.⁴²

Many of those who voted that night in midtown Manhattan stuck around the ballroom afterward. The talk was loud and excited. The lines were slow, as mentioned earlier, and many went home without voting. But at 10:30 pm, pandemonium greeted the results: 1555–1055 to strike. Branch 36 president Gus Johnson announced something that he had fought against, but now was obliged to declare. Their branch was on strike as of 12:01 am 18 March, and as branch president he would lead it. He would not be seen again in public during the strike, but the courts nonetheless served him with injunctions later as if he were responsible for the strike.⁴³

The first pickets went up Wednesday morning at GCSPPO at Lexington Avenue and 45th Street. Among Branch 36 strikers I have interviewed, Cleveland Morgan was then 27, Frank Orapello was 38, and Vincent Sombrotto was 46 years old. Morgan recalls how he, Sombrotto, and others used police barricades from the St. Patrick's Day parade to set up the first picket lines at the GCSPPO. This became an innovative as well as a symbolic and defiant way of establishing a solid object complement to what would soon become the moving picket lines of striking postal workers.⁴⁴

Frank Orapello recalled that letter carriers Charlie Springer and Eddie Morris were the first GCPSO picketers. There were a handful of NALC and MBPU members at the GCSPPO during that first walkout, according to Tom Germano. 'Routers' in New York City (carriers who 'case' or arrange mail at night for letter carriers to deliver during the day), about two-thirds black and Latino, either did not report for their midnight shift or walked out afterward and onto picket lines. Picketing at the GCSPPO was followed by walkouts from the mammoth GPO (over 10,000 employees) at 8th Avenue and 33th Street. Strike veterans describe picket lines at the main post offices in the city as being 'in the hundreds.' These initial walkouts set in motion what has been described as a snowball effect of post offices throughout Manhattan and the Bronx, along with Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Long Island, across upstate New York and into New Jersey. The postal strike of 1970 was on. This was no 1960s private sector manufacturing union-called strike after collective bargaining talks had broken down. Those kinds of legal strike actions were often used by unions to pressure management for wage and benefit increases in a periodic ritual where management would typically accept a temporary shutdown without hiring strikebreakers until conceding some kind of wage increases in

exchange for higher productivity and changes in work rules. But postal workers had no such recourse. And they had become fed up with working in a key government job for such low wages.⁴⁵

Pickets went up across the city in time for the morning shift (also known as 'Tour II'), and by that afternoon virtually no postal workers had crossed them.⁴⁶ The vote by other NALC branches in New York was followed on 19 March by both a voice and hand vote to strike by the by the MBPU, the largest postal union local in the world at over 26,000 members. 'It was fabulous! Everybody was on fire!' is how Eleanor Bailey, an African-American GPO clerk, recalls the raucous meeting Wednesday night at the Statler Hilton on 7th Avenue and West 33th Street. At least a quarter of the membership packed the Statler's ballroom, even spilling out onto the street. But votes that night were disallowed by MBPU President Moe Biller who insisted on following union bylaws to hold a secret ballot vote on Saturday night, which produced an overwhelming pro-strike majority of 8,442,940. Many members had already struck or refused to cross carrier picket lines since the first day of the strike. Besides pledging support from the beginning, Biller himself was now on the picket line every day – after having warned postal officials for months that a strike was likely if pay and working conditions did not improve. And Bailey, an MBPU 'delegate,' was among those policing the GPO picket lines to make sure that no one crossed – even before the MBPU had formally voted to strike. She even warned her father, who worked as a mail handler, not to cross the lines or she would 'break [his] legs.'⁴⁷

Meanwhile, picket lines were spreading from New York into New Jersey, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado, and California. Over 152,000 postal workers (by USPOD count but likely exceeding 200,000) struck 671 post offices in dozens of cities and towns across the country. Entire branches or locals from the NALC, NPU, UFPC, NAPFE, as well as the smaller craft unions either struck or refused to cross picket lines. Of the nine postal unions, members of eight unions (six of them AFL-CIO affiliates along with the independent NPU and NAPFE) were involved. NALC Branch 36 members who worried about whether the rest of the country would join became encouraged by each news report of the rapid spread of the strike across the country, often conveyed by transistor radios, which became important portable communication devices for those picketing or holding meetings and strike votes.⁴⁸

Bill Burrus, who went on to become elected the first black president of the APWU in 2001, at the time of the strike was a clerk and Cleveland NPU local vice-president. He thinks they walked out on Thursday 19 March, a day after New York did. The much larger Cleveland UFPC Local 72 had about 2000 members, and that night the UFPC invited NPU to meet jointly: 'The message of the meeting was there would be no walkout in Cleveland, that what happened in New York was an aberration ...' But NPU local members had other ideas. 'We were tired of what was happening in Washington,' Burrus recalled. 'We had no idea what collective bargaining meant at that time. We basically wanted more money. But it was a good punch line to say you wanted collective bargaining rights, too.' After the meeting, he said, 'we convinced everybody to go, UFPC and NPU. The next morning [Friday], we had pickets in front of the post office ... Letter carriers relied upon our pickets of their facilities.'⁴⁹

For their part, Cleveland NALC Branch 40 members recall Friday 20 March as when they went out. Branch 40 President Harold Loewe had called a meeting at the United Auto Workers hall the night before to ask what they wanted to do. Former Branch 40 president Joe Vacca, who was now NALC assistant secretary-treasurer, came from the national office to try to talk

them out of striking. 'That place was packed,' recalls rank-and-file-member Bob Murphy. 'We had nobody get up who did not want to go on strike.'⁵⁰ And strike is what they voted to do.

Three time zones earlier in San Jose, California, now-retired Mexican-American letter carrier and 50-year NALC member Hector Gallardo was listening to music on the radio while 'casing' (preparing) mail for delivery on Wednesday 18 March 1970, when a 'news flash' announced that postal workers in New York had struck. He tried to call the Branch 193 president but got no answer. Gallardo told me what happened next 'was like a tidal wave' when he and about 25 other letter carriers at his sub-station walked out. The Branch 193 meeting that followed saw a lot of 'hot' debate, with opposition especially from union officers and military retirees afraid of losing their pensions. But ultimately, according to Gallardo, 'everyone was united' after the formal strike vote. Recollections by Burrus, Gallardo, and others paint the strike as a wave that moved swiftly. It is remarkable how many local strike votes were held that week around the country following that of NALC Branch 36 in New York City. But that nationwide movement was also subject to multiple forces. There were threats of fines, jail terms, and loss of collective bargaining rights. President Nixon first threatened and then did call out troops to try and move the mail. There were also rumors that a deal had been struck. NALC President Rademacher threatened to suspend Branch 36 and any other striking branch, and even suggested that 'subversive' leftist elements had infiltrated that branch.⁵¹

Despite the inconvenience to the public of a total mail stoppage, strikers enjoyed the support of the majority of Americans, as reported in both personal stories and news media polling. Strike veterans I spoke to remembered cars honking, and people waving or even bringing donuts and coffee to picket lines. 'Right on, mailmen, you deserve your money,' is what letter carrier Verle Craven recalls people shouting from their car windows as they drove by encouraging NALC Branch 1111 strikers in Richmond, California, where the strike had spread by the end of the first week. The White House acknowledged that their *mail* response from Americans favored the strike by a ratio of ten to one (an ironic admission for them to have to make). And a nationwide post-strike survey found support for the strikers at 61–25% opposed.⁵²

Meanwhile, court injunctions were served on local union leaders, fines were levied, and government officials threatened to break the unions. With that fear in mind, NALC President Rademacher, who had tried to stop the strike, on Friday 20 March, called about 300 NALC state presidents and presidents of the largest branches to come to Washington, DC. Wayne White was then president of the North Carolina NALC state association: 'I was just a country boy listenin' and watchin' ... It was quite an experience!' He vividly recalls those meetings where Rademacher, along with Bill Usery, tried to convince these state and local union leaders to give them more time to reach a settlement and end the strike. According to White and others, there were NALC branches in the South and elsewhere that had voted to walk out but were willing to wait and follow Rademacher, who pledged to lead a nationwide strike if an agreement was not reached in five days.⁵³

Those votes in the South to strike, such as the one by Atlanta NALC Branch 73, were conditional on Rademacher's word, if and when he said so, according to Charles Windham. Windham, a Vietnam War veteran and branch 'representative' who later became an NALC regional administrator, backed Rademacher's position at the time. 'There must have been 250 of us,' Windham said of a shop floor meeting at the Federal Annex that first week of the strike. 'And of course the agitation was: "Strike, Strike, Strike!" Because the rest of the country

was going out on strike. We didn't want to be left out.' Atlanta's 78% 'yes' vote to strike, even though it was contingent, was nevertheless impressive. Furthermore, Windham declared, '[If a] national strike had been called, then we certainly, I think, would have walked.' Other NALC branches and locals in the South had strike votes, and some of them wanted to participate immediately, including Miami, Chesapeake, Norfolk, and Washington, DC.⁵⁴

To be sure, however, there were solid postal unionists who opposed the strike, fearing the government would use it to break postal unions. Atlanta NAPFE official Samuel Lovett told me he thought the strike was 'crazy,' believing that strikers should have 'stuck to the law' to resolve outstanding issues. In the same interview, Miami NAPFE official Sam Armstrong voiced similar objections. On the other hand, Countee Abbott, then a Chicago postal clerk who at the time of the strike was NAPFE District Seven (Midwest region) president, proudly proclaimed: 'I participated in it!'⁵⁵

Meanwhile, over at the Chicago Plumbers' Union Hall, NALC Branch 11 was voting to strike on Friday 20 March over the objections of their president Henry Zych. 'My first [union] meeting was the strike meeting,' remembers Mildred Cross. 'There were more letter carriers than you can imagine!'⁵⁶ In addition to NAPFE, NPU, UFPC, and other union members who struck in that city, this huge NALC branch of about five thousand members was key to Chicago's short but crucial strike participation starting Saturday 21 March and ending by the following Tuesday 24 March. It underscored the city's role as a key mail distribution center, which meant that postal workers did not have to shut down or disrupt the whole country, as Countee Abbott pointed out but rather 'major metropolitan areas' like New York, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Los Angeles. Nevertheless, it also helped the strikers' cause for Americans to see suburban and small town postal workers shutting down their local stations demanding a living wage and fair treatment. It demonstrated a nationwide postal worker solidarity.⁵⁷ That unity across craft lines was dramatically demonstrated in Detroit with a mass strike vote that Sunday morning at Cobo Hall – after several days of picketing had already shut down Detroit and some suburban offices. There was a 15-minute meeting where about three thousand postal workers voted unanimously to strike after the fact. Participants included 19-year-old NALC rank-and-file Branch 1 member Stephen Burt ('Most of my co-workers were WW II vets!'); and NPU local president Doug Holbrook, who presided over the meeting ('I announced that we were officially on strike.')⁵⁸

If NALC President James Rademacher and NAPFE President Ashby Smith were postal union leaders who were quite vocally opposed to the wildcat strike, their counterparts in the UFPC and NPU took more measured approaches. UFPC President Francis ('Stu') Filbey called on members to not cross picket lines if they feared violence (none was ever documented). NPU President David Silvergleid, in reply to a USPOD query, said that all he knew about the strike was what he read in the newspapers, but that he was on his way to New York to investigate.⁵⁹

On Monday 23 March, in an effort to break the strike, President Nixon mobilized 26,007 U.S. military troops, of whom 16,836 were actually used in a futile effort to move the mail. The strike ended two days later on Wednesday, 25 March, when postal union leaders convinced strikers that a deal had been struck (there was no deal) and asked them to return to work during negotiations with Nixon administration officials. No one was fired or jailed. Further negotiations led to legislation passed by Congress and signed by Nixon granting a 14% raise: 8% upon his signing the postal reform bill, 6% added retroactively to 27 December 1969, and top pay 'compressed' to eight instead of 21 years of service, plus full collective

bargaining rights under a reorganized self-supporting hybrid government agency/corporation to be established in 1971 called the U.S. Postal Service.⁶⁰

The value of first person accounts in uncovering the history of the strike is considerable. But the stories that many of us have recorded from strikers do not just tell us a lot about what we did not previously know, or confirm what we already did know. The stories have also revealed what the participants *thought and felt* about what they were doing in a number of different places throughout the nation.⁶¹ Those stories highlight a real diversity of postal strike experiences, but also a lot of similarities. Once the strike started, for example, many local union officers received help from members in ‘disappearing’ to avoid being served with court injunctions. Some letter carriers took address ‘case strips’ from their route cases before walking out to hinder attempted mail delivery during the strike.⁶² And older postal workers who were nearing retirement were often just as likely to strike as young people.⁶³

Some of the soldiers mobilized by Nixon to move the mail had even been postal strikers just before being mobilized as reservists or guardsmen to break the strike. Striker John Alversa of NALC Branch 294 in Flushing, New York, exclaimed: ‘We lost two-thirds of our pickets because they were in the National Guard. That was their second job!’ Jeffrey Chester, who years later would join the post office and the NALC after retiring from the Air Force, had just turned 30 when the strike began. He was called up from McGuire Air Force Base in Wrightstown, New Jersey, where he was stationed as a security policeman, and sent to the Manhattan GPO:

The plastic containers of letter mail would come down in front of you, and you would pull out a handful, and one by one you’d put ‘em in the pigeonhole [case] by zip code. And it was like, ‘You gotta be kiddin’ me!’

Chester corroborated stories commonly told of troops not only being unable to quickly master mail-sorting, but in many cases also unwilling to – often voicing sympathy for the strikers. Mail coming into New York was embargoed, and little mail moved in the city.⁶⁴ The strike was also nothing if not dramatic, which adds to the curiousness of this major labor event being largely ignored today. Imagine the spectacle of President Nixon at the height of the Vietnam War (and antiwar protests) dispatching thousands of troops in transport trucks witnessed by millions in media photographs and videos, rolling through the streets of New York en route to its largest post offices to try to move the mail and break the postal strike, but ultimately failing.

The 1970 postal strike also inspired other government employees, in addition to benefiting them directly. All government employees were entitled to the 6% raise the postal workers won in 1970. In addition, three major government unions saw their members clamoring to strike: the American Federation of Government Employees, the National Federation of Federal Employees, and the National Association of Government Employees.⁶⁵ The Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), founded just two years before, saw about two thousand members go on a 19-day planned ‘sick-out.’⁶⁶ Postal strikers had been influenced by labor struggles of the 1960s, especially in New York City, the genesis of the strike, where union density was strong and public sector strikes were common and successful. And in turn postal insurgents inspired rank-and-file democratic action that was also occurring in other unions.⁶⁷ The NALC and APWU within the decade would become two of the largest, strongest, and most influential unions in the AFL-CIO.⁶⁸

The 1970 strike transformed the post office and its unions.⁶⁹ As it was itself inspired by other public sector strikes in New York during the 1960s, the 1970 nationwide postal wildcat

strike in turn inspired no small amount of labor militancy and engagement. Every strike veteran I have interviewed or read has expressed pride in their action and the outcome despite the risks. Not one regrets the tradeoff that was made after the fact: collective bargaining rights in a new government corporation. Yet they are universally concerned with the future of the U.S. Postal Service. Some wondered if younger postal workers appreciated the struggle that was necessary to preserve their jobs. None have thought that the strike could be repeated in today's political and economic climate. And all are individually modest about their own participation or contribution. Soon after the strike, the post office became a well-compensated, desirable career, as turnover dropped dramatically (now less than a 1.5% 'quit rate' today).⁷⁰

The postal strike, as mentioned before, also helped reinforce a set of assumptions about America's labor-management social contract. At the Postal Reorganization Act signing ceremony cited earlier, President Nixon effusively praised 'the postal unions' without whom 'this reform could not have been accomplished.'⁷¹ Yet the idea that strikers should not be replaced because labor unions functioned best for management as control mechanisms rather than as adversaries was itself contingent. Imagine if the path of negotiation advocated by Labor Secretary George Shultz and Assistant Secretary of Labor Bill Usery had *not* prevailed over Nixon's initial command to his aides on 20 March that they should 'attack' the strikers, and that 'if people can be fired, fire them.'⁷² We might instead be talking today about 'Nixon the postal union-buster.' As it turned out, Shultz became the author of possibly the most famous quote from this strike when he offered negotiations that very same day to James Rademacher and other postal union leaders with these prophetic words: 'There's only thing worse than a wildcat strike – a wildcat strike that succeeds.'⁷³

Of course, contradictions ruled Nixon's response to the strike. He failed with his unprecedented offer of negotiation if postal workers returned to work, so he turned around and sent troops to try and break the strike. Nixon on the one hand publicly termed the strike a threat to 'the survival of a government based on law.'⁷⁴ And his administration even tried (unsuccessfully) to get media stories planted that the strike was Nixon's 'domestic equivalent to the [1962] Cuban missile crisis.'⁷⁵ But on the other hand, Nixon used the troops to nudge strikers back to work rather than actually try to replace them or crush their unions. In a 1990 oral history interview, Bill Usery confirmed Nixon's commitment to collective bargaining for federal employees as well as a lack of desire to fight the postal strikers or unions in general. Usery reflected on his own sudden and unusual elevation to chief negotiator between government and postal unions: 'I'm now appointed by the President, and who have I got to straighten out – the Postmaster General, the Secretary of Labor, the Deputy Postmaster General ...' The fact that Nixon gave Usery – an assistant secretary of labor sympathetic to unions – mediation powers to greater than those of other administration officials suggests Nixon's intent to put postal unions back in charge of their membership to ensure labor peace at the post office. It was also part of an expansion of union rights in the federal government. Despite seeing unions as his 'political enemy,' Nixon acknowledged to Usery that they were 'a powerful force' that were 'part of America' with whom government should 'get along.'⁷⁶

How did the strikers win going against the federal government and without the support of their national unions? It may seem counterintuitive, but the evidence suggests that time was on the side of the strikers who realized and demonstrated their power for as long as they reasonably felt they could. The nation's mail had been shut down. No one else but postal workers could move it. As Aaron Brenner describes it, even the Shultz–Rademacher

collaborative effort (approved by Nixon) failed to drive the strikers back into the control of union leaders. Nixon's subsequent use of the military proved incapable of acquiring the requisite labor-intensive skills fast enough to move the huge volumes of mail in New York City – the flashpoint of the strike and the financial center of the country.⁷⁷

The military entered the picture when most of the striking postal workers were already starting to return to work except for New York and a few other key cities. The military presence sent some strikers outside New York back to work while giving pause to others who had just gone out or had considered striking. But there were also those who struck just for a day to make a statement. New York postal workers, meanwhile, showed no signs of going back to work. Cooler heads in the White House must have realized that strikers were 'going for broke' by striking when they knew they could be fired, fined, and jailed. The so-called post office 'contingency plan' developed in 1968 (with a 'supplement' on March 4, 1970) to handle potential work stoppages had proven to be hardly a plan at all, never anticipating the possibility of a *nationwide cross-craft* walkout. Another approach had to be tried.⁷⁸ One could argue that the strikers made negotiation inevitable, and thus made mass termination untenable. They had suddenly shut down the nation's premier communications network with no alternative labor to keep it going.

On the other hand, American presidents (including Nixon) in both domestic and foreign policy have often made rash choices with devastating consequences. But in this case at least, Nixon appears practical in retrospect for working toward bringing three-quarters of a million government workers into the collective bargaining system and under the provisions of the 1935 Wagner Act, the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, and the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act.⁷⁹ Furthermore, in exchange for negotiating with the postal unions, he achieved his goal of postal reorganization. Jefferson Cowie sees this effort as no fluke, but rather part of what Nixon's aides called their 'blue-collar strategy' for Nixon to become the 'workingman's president' (Cowie's term).⁸⁰ Nixon could thus align himself with mass popular sentiment in favor of striking postal workers. Strike veterans like Cleveland Morgan along with mail handler and former MBPU member Richard Thomas – both African-American and both not having much use for Nixon's policies in general – later expressed amazement that Nixon accepted such a radical conversion of the post office that actually gave postal unions more power.⁸¹ Striking rank-and-file postal workers forced tough choices and institutional change on the post office, President Nixon, and the national postal unions. The latter then had to figure out how to negotiate in a new, more favorable format that was still on the same unbalanced playing field that favored management. Keeping alive the rank-and-file democratic spirit that brought the postal unions to their present prominence in an otherwise weakened labor movement also became a challenge.

For its part, the USPS, successful overall as a government enterprise since 1971, has increasingly become a target for elimination or privatization.⁸² Opposition forces that previously could not gain traction against the former USPOD, or its self-supporting successor in its first three decades, have seemingly found the perfect alibi for dismantling public postal service, reflected in the refusal by Congress to repeal the 2006 bipartisan Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act (PAEA). Initiated by Republican President George W. Bush, that law mandated the USPS to deposit \$5.5 billion a year over a 10-year period into a new entity called the Retiree Health Benefit Fund (RHBF). Previously, the USPS operated on a pay-as-you-go basis, which proved adequate. And despite decreased mail volume and revenue

losses due to the 2008 Great Recession and increased Internet use, the Postal Service has still shown annual revenue surpluses. But because of the PAEA mandate, the USPS is over \$15 billion in debt.⁸³

Congressional inaction today concerning the postal financial crisis reflects a new set of general assumptions by government and management. Joseph McCartin has argued that these assumptions were first brought into being with President Ronald Reagan's firing of about 11,000 striking PATCO members in 1981, which in effect proclaimed that management has no obligation to ensure strikers' jobs, and that labor unions are no longer necessary for managing workplace control. The new workplace 'norm' proclaims that most labor ideally should be contingent, low-waged, and in the private sector.⁸⁴

In Congress today Democrats have essentially acquiesced in the Republican push to downsize postal personnel, benefits, and service.⁸⁵ This is a far cry from the 1970 bipartisan agreement to improve not just postal service but also labor relations, optimistically expressed in this way by AFL-CIO negotiator James Gildea at a collective bargaining conference two months after the 1970 strike:

[T]he postal negotiations were a monumental first step in bringing first class citizenship to postal workers in the workplace ... The President and the Postmaster General have served notice on them [postal supervisors] and the Congress will do so shortly – that they want first class treatment of their workers and first rate labor relations in providing that treatment.⁸⁶

But Aaron Brenner has also noted the larger labor context of those times:

The Post Office strike and the larger militancy of which it was a part represented a break in the pattern of postwar labor relations. Both employers and workers found themselves in an unfamiliar situation, one of declining economic prospects. Employers responded with a productivity drive and efforts to hold down wages and benefits; rank-and-file workers countered with organized activity to maintain and improve their work and living standards, often without the approval of their union leaders.⁸⁷

This activity often meant strikes, as Brenner points out: 'In the 1967–1976 period, the average number of workers on strike rose 30% and the number of days lost to strikes rose 40% compared to the period 1948–1966.'⁸⁸ Even if the postal strike was a unique event, as commonly expressed afterward by its participants, it is still instructive – and not just in terms of contrasting eras and shifting hegemonies. It also offers positive possibilities even in the worst of times for labor. In the 1970 strike, rank-and-file postal workers from many parts of the country united within and across crafts to confront the federal government over their terms of work, while at the same time demanding more democracy within their unions. At a time when postal reform and workers' rights at the post office were dead in the water in Congress, the union rank-and-file managed to produce a more favorable atmosphere for their demands by doing the unthinkable: striking the federal government. If today's public amnesia of the strike can be traced at least in part to the improbability of strikes happening virtually anywhere in the U.S. today – let alone in a post office in the throes of what is arguably a politically manufactured financial crisis – we should consider how audacious an act it was at the time by those who had been widely considered 'docile employees' right up until the moment of the strike. More work is needed to uncover and consider that 'organized wildcat strike' in its rightful historical place.

Notes

1. User, "The Postal Dispute" in *Collective Bargaining Today*, 361. I am indebted to Jan Edmiston, Reference Librarian for the U.S. Department of Labor Willard Wirtz Library, Washington, DC, for providing me with a copy of this document.
2. Germano, "Labor Relations," 175–9. On NALC Branch 36 membership see 91–2: the eight thousand figure included about two thousand retirees and associate members.
3. Author interview with William Roth, 24 July 2014, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, recording in possession of author. This was one of 55 interviews conducted by author 22 July and 24 July 2014, at the NALC biennial national convention, almost all in groups of varying sizes.
4. See Germano, "Labor Relations," 196. Germano claims about 230,000 nationwide strike participants in 671 offices. See also USPOD, "The Postal Strike – March 1970: Draft, September 21, 1970," 1, Files of the USPS Historian, which claims about 152,000 strikers, which seems low but is the official USPS figure. I am indebted to the USPS Office of the Historian, especially Meg Ausman (retired) and Jennifer Lynch for providing me with this and other USPS documents as well as analysis. Jennifer Lynch. Lynch in email communications of 25 April 2016, noted that the Postmaster General's *1970 Annual Report*, 35, and "The Postal Strike," 38, both peg the final strike tally at 'an estimated 152,233 employees [who] were absent without leave [AWOL]. But that would be leaving out those who struck who were non-scheduled (NS), on annual leave (AL), sick leave (SL), leave without pay (LWOP), or even allowed to clock in and out and picket by sympathetic station managers. (See, for example, 2014 NALC Convention interviews.) It also begs the question of how many of those AWOL were striking, as well as how many 'subs' striking were NS and therefore not counted. As to figuring the total number of employees, according to figures on page 104 of the *1970 Annual Report*, which includes postal labor figures for 1966–1970, there were a total of 739,002 employees as of 30 June 1969, which includes 192,821 'substitute employees' alongside 546,181 'regular employees.' That total number barely moved a year later, but the percentage of 'subs' for 1969 at 26%, and indeed high for all five years cited (30% for 1966!) is typical for that era but nonetheless staggering. What further complicates trying to get an exact strike figure is the USPOD Draft Report calling the 152,233 number '30 percent of the total post office complement,' which suggests they were just counting 'regular' employees. But even that would be 38,738 fewer than the 546,181 actual regulars, unless they were not counting those NS, AL, SL, or LWOP. We may never know the exact number of strikers, but it was probably over 200,000.
5. See The President's Commission on Postal Organization [also known as the Kappel Commission], *Towards Postal Excellence* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1968), 18–9.
6. Many shop stewards and union officers participated and led local walkouts, but some strike veterans outside of New York also reported officers not participating or opposing the strike – sometimes even crossing the picket lines. See, for example, 2014 NALC Convention interviews.
7. See, for example, "The Day the Mail Stopped," *Newsweek*, March 30, 1970, 14: 'And never in the 195 years of their history had the docile servants of the world's largest mail service raised so much as a pinky in organized protest.'
8. Richard Nixon, XXXVII President of the United States: 1969–1974, "259-Remarks on Signing the Postal Reorganization Act, August 12, 1970," from The American Presidency Project, available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=2623>, accessed March 27, 2015.
9. Area wage differentials have long been a controversial topic, based on the premise that postal workers in parts of the country like the Northeast where the cost of living is higher should be paid commensurate wages.
10. See APWU History, available at <http://www.apwu.org/apwu-history>, accessed April 22, 2016; and Germano, "Labor Relations," 292–6.
11. See 2014 NALC Convention oral histories by author. See also oral history with James Rademacher, conducted by Mike Smith, November 16, 2009, in Roanoke, Virginia, NALC Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University. I am indebted to NALC historian Nancy Dysart for providing me with a copy of the transcript.
12. See APWU history on their website.

13. See Mikusko and Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*.
14. Walsh and Mangum, *Labor Struggle*. See also Burrus, *My Journey*, ch. 5, on the strike and its aftermath.
15. *United States Postal Service: 1775–2006*.
16. Germano, "Labor Relations"; and electronic communication to author, May 20, 2015.
17. A. Brenner, "Rank-and-File Rebellion," 112–46; and "Striking Against the State," 6–27.
18. Rubio, *There's Always Work*, ch. 10.
19. Some references to the strike are contained within larger studies: see Loewenberg, "The Post Office," in *Collective Bargaining in Government*, 192–215; and Halpern, *Unions, Radicals, and Democratic Presidents*, ch. 5. See also Shannon, "Work Stoppage in Government," 14–22; Zieger and Gall, *American Workers, American Unions*, 211–2; Brecher, *Strike!*, 258–60; and Aronowitz and Brecher, "Notes on the Postal Strike," 1–5. Two recent trade press publications on U.S. postal history include brief mentions of the 1970 strike. See Gallagher, *How the Post Office Changed America*; and Leonard, *Neither Snow nor Rain*.
20. See Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*; Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism*; Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory*; and Orenic, *On the Ground*. See especially A. Brenner, R. Brenner, and Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File*, on other 1970s rank-and-file insurgencies. On public sector workers see McCartin, *Collision Course*; Slater, *Public Workers*; Honey, *Black Workers Remember*; and Johnston, *Success While Others Fail*.
21. Rubio, *There's Always Work*, ch. 11.
22. Author interview with Roth. See also Germano, "Labor Relations," 127; and A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 7. See also author interview with Joseph Henry, August 15, 2005, Washington, DC, available at *Philip F. Rubio Papers, 2004–2006, 2009*, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.
23. Author interview with Roth.
24. Author interview with Roth; and with Vern Evenson, 22 July 2014, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, NALC convention. See other interviews at 2014 NALC convention for this idea popular among strikers of the post office having violated its social contract.
25. Author interviews at 2014 NALC Convention.
26. These included the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), the National Postal Union (NPU), the National Association of Post Office Mail Handlers, Watchmen, Messengers, and Group Leaders (better known by its shorter name and acronym National Postal Mail Handlers Union or NPMHU), the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees (NAPFE), the United Federation of Postal Clerks (UFPC), the National Association of Post Office and General Services Maintenance Employees (NAPOGSME), the National Association of Special Delivery Messengers (NASDM), the National Rural Letter Carriers Association (NRLCA), and the National Association of Post Office Motor Vehicle Employees (NAPOMVE). See *Towards Postal Excellence*, 19.
27. Rubio, *There's Always Work*, ch. 9. See also Gill, "Future of 11,491," in *Collective Bargaining Today*, 372–8; and William J. Usery, Jr., in an interview conducted by Les Hough, March 15–16, 1990, Washington, DC L1985–12_AV0111, Southern Labor Archives. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University. I am indebted to GSU archivist Traci Drummond for access to this document.
28. Author interview with Vincent Sombrotto, Frank Orapello, and Al Marino, October 15, 2004, New York City, New York, *Philip F. Rubio Papers*.
29. Germano, "Labor Relations," 133. See also author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino.
30. *Annual Report, 1945–1949*, 23. Thanks also to the USPS Office of the Historian and Jennifer Lynch for these veteran postal employment figures.
31. See Rubio, *There's Always Work*.
32. A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 22.
33. *Ibid.* See also author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino.
34. See Mikusko and Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*; Germano, "Labor Relations"; and Walsh and Mangum, *Labor Struggle*. See also Montgomery, *Workers' Control in America* on skilled workers and work stoppages.

35. Author interview with Richard Thomas, July 18, 2005, New York City, New York, *Philip F. Rubio Papers*. See also Dana Schechter interview with Moe Biller, July 7, 1976, Cornell University Oral History Project, Box 4, 1976, American Postal Workers Union Collection, Tamiment Library/Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University; and Germano, "Labor Relations," 127–31.
36. Richard J. Levine, "Restive Postal Workers Pose Mounting Threat of Wildcat Walkouts; Post Office Hopes to Cope with Stoppages; Unions Drop No Strike Pledges," *Wall Street Journal*, September 9, 1968; John Cramer, "Postal Unions Revolt Over Strike Law," *Washington Daily News*, August 26, 1968; "NPU Drops 'No Strike' Provision," National Postal Union *Washington Report*, September 4, 1968, 1; and Mikusko and Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*, 70.
37. Germano, "Labor Relations," 131–40.
38. *Ibid.*, 133–9, 141–9; and author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino.
39. Germano, "Labor Relations," ch. 4.
40. Author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino; Smith interview with Rademacher; A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 11; and Germano, "Labor Relations," 141–51.
41. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 14; and electronic communication from Tom Germano, June 19, 2015. Only two of 75 NALC Branch 36 executive board members voted to strike. Germano, "Labor Relations," 174.
42. Frank Orapello, "Victory Success," part of longer article "1970 Postal Strike," New York Letter Carriers Branch 36 website, available at <http://www.nylcbr36.org/history.htm>, posted in 2005, accessed June 12, 2015. See also Germano, "Labor Relations," 175–9. Indeed, President Joseph Henry of NALC Washington, DC Branch 142 told me that his branch's votes were incorrectly tabulated, and that they should have struck. See Joseph Henry interview.
43. Germano, "Labor Relations," 179–80; and Orapello, "Victory Success."
44. Germano, "Labor Relations," 184; and author interview with Cleveland Morgan, July 18, 2005, New York City, New York, *Philip F. Rubio Papers*.
45. Germano, "Labor Relations," ch. 5; and Orapello, "Victory Success." The GPO, built in 1912, has been known since 1982 as the James A. Farley Post Office. Today it is being converted into what will be an Amtrak railroad terminal annex called Moynihan Station, part of Penn Station. See Charles Bagli, "Progress is made in plan to convert post office into Penn Station Annex," *New York Times*, August 26, 2014, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/27/nyregion/progress-is-made-in-plan-to-convert-post-office-into-penn-station-annex.html>.
46. Germano, "Labor Relations," 63: In Manhattan, and generally speaking throughout the U.S. postal system, Tour I was the night shift that ran from midnight to 8:30 am. Tour II ran from 8am to 4:30 pm. Tour III was the afternoon or 'swing' shift that ran from 4 pm until 12:30 am.
47. See Rubio, *There's Always Work*, 243–6; author interview with Eleanor Bailey and other New York Metro APWU members, October 14, 2004, New York City, New York, *Philip F. Rubio Papers*; and Schechter interview with Biller. See also Eleanor Bailey, "United is the Way!" speech, Charlotte, North Carolina, March 11, 2012, Southern Workers Assembly website, available at <http://southernworker.org/workers-rights-are-human-rights/solidarity/>, accessed April 18, 2016.
48. USPOD, "The Postal Strike," 1. There is no evidence that anyone from the NRLCA struck.
49. Author interview with William ('Bill') Burrus, Jr., 16 January 2009, Washington, DC. Vincent Sombrotto told me the same thing about collective bargaining demands during the strike. See author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino.
50. Author interview with Cleveland NALC Branch 40 members Bob Murphy and Bob Enz, July 22, 2014; and from the same branch: Alfonzo Wilson and Leroy Thompson (both African-American in a city whose post office had long had a large black component), July 24, 2014, NALC Convention. See also Vacca Collection (Vacca, J. Joseph. Collection at NALC Collection, Reuther Library, Finding Aid. Available at <https://reuther.wayne.edu/files/LR001914.pdf>. Accessed April 22, 2016).
51. Hector Gallardo 2015–2016 telephone interviews and emails to author, especially phone conversation with author, 18 February 2016. See also USPOD, Status Reports, and "The Postal Strike." See also author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino; A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State"; and Germano, "Labor Relations," ch. 5. See also Rubio, *There's Always Work*, ch. 10.

52. Germano, "Labor Relations"; A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State"; and 2014 NALC Convention interviews. See also "The Postal Work-Stoppage." I am indebted to Eric Kutner for providing me the link to this article, which also includes the "US Army After Action Report."
53. Author interview with Wayne White, July 24, 2014, NALC convention; and Mikusko and Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*, 78.
54. Author interview with White; and Charles Windham, Jr., and others, July 24, 2014, NALC convention.
55. Author interview with Samuel Lovett and Sam Armstrong, August 11, 2004; and Countee Abbott, August 12, 2004, Washington, DC, NAPFE national convention.
56. Author interview with James Davenport, Cornell Booker, and Booker Palmer, all NALC Chicago Branch 11, July 22, 2014, NALC Convention; and from the same branch: William Bean, Jr., Mildred Cross, Juanita Newsome, and Pearline Sanford, July 24, 2014, NALC Convention. All six are African-American, in a city where blacks have long made up the majority of postal workers. See also author interview with Abbott.
57. See author interview with Davenport, Booker, Palmer, Bean, Cross, Newsome, and Sanford. See also USPOD Status Report, March 23, 1970, 9 pm, and "The Postal Strike," 38, Files of the USPS Historian. The latter noted that 37 offices struck were in the 'largest 100,' which included 9 of the 10 largest, generating almost one-quarter of total mail volume, with New York City by itself handling 6% of total U.S. mail. See also author interview with Abbott. See other interviews, 2014 NALC Convention.
58. See author interview with APWU Retirees Director Douglas Holbrook, August 16, 2005, Washington, DC; and author interview with Stephen Burt, July 24, 2014, NALC Convention. See also USPOD Status Report, March 22, 1970, 2 pm; and Rubio, *There's Always Work*, 247.
59. USPOD, "The Postal Strike," 33–4. See also A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State"; and Germano, "Labor Relations," ch. 5. The author was unable to find any public strike responses by NPMHU President Lonnie Johnson.
60. Germano, "Labor Relations," 221–31; A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 21; and "US Army After Action Report," I-5. The troops, including reservists and National Guardsmen, were from all branches of the armed forces except the Coast Guard.
61. See, for example, 2014 NALC Convention interviews. See also author interview with Burrus.
62. 'Case strips' are long paper strips with printed addresses, often protected by a clear plastic strip, with both inserted between metal dividers under each shelf of a metal route case where carriers sort (or 'case') their letter mail by address in route order for delivery. DPS or 'delivery point sequence' automated barcode mail was introduced in the late 1990s, whereby most mail would be presorted by street address, with increasingly less mail sorted only by route and thereby needing to be 'cased' and later collated into the rest of the route mail. 'Flats' (large envelopes and magazines) were cased separately, but are now also being introduced as DPS mail. See USPS website, Flats Sequencing System, update January 2014.
63. 2014 NALC Convention interviews.
64. Author interview with John Alversa, and Jeffrey Chester, July 24, 2014, NALC convention. See also "US Army After Action Report," I-4, which quantifies the amount of mail loaded, unloaded, sorted, cased, transported, and delivered by military personnel. Postal officials praised their 'overall performance,' but made no comment on actual results in what was widely regarded as an ineffectual effort. See also Mikusko and Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*, 79.
65. Brecher, *Strike!*, 231. Brecher here notes that all government employees including military were entitled to this one-time 6% raise. See also Gildea, "Labor Looks," in *Collective Bargaining Today*, 370: 'Five million people got a one-year raise totaling two and a half billion dollars.'
66. McCartin, *Collision Course*, ch. 4.
67. See author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino; A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State"; Mikusko and Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*, 66–83; and Rubio, *There's Always Work*, ch. 9.
68. See author interview with Sombrotto, Orapello, and Marino; Mikusko and Miller, *Carriers in a Common Cause*, 81–131; and Walsh and Mangum, *Labor Struggle*.

69. See, for example, Fleishman, "Postal Policy and Public Accountability." I am indebted to Mark Jamison for this reference.
70. Shaw, *Preserving the People's Post Office*, 124–5.
71. See Fleishman, "Postal Policy and Public Accountability"; and Nixon, "Remarks on Signing."
72. Nixon's initial confrontational stance is reported by A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 15, citing Nixon aide H.R. Haldeman's notes of 20 March 1970. Nixon's White House taping system was not in effect at that time. See also Weber (Weber, Arnold. Interview with Timothy Naftali. Available at <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/histories/weber-2007-11-15.pdf>. Accessed June 17, 2015) interview with Naftali. (Arnold Weber was Assistant Secretary of Labor for Manpower in 1970.) See also Shultz interview with Naftali on Shultz's unique attitude within the Nixon administration toward labor-management conflict mediation (Shultz, George P. Interview with Timothy Naftali. Available at <http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/documents/histories/shultz-2007-05-10.pdf>. Accessed June 17, 2015). See also interview by author with labor lawyer Jules Bernstein, who was part of the 1970 postal strike negotiations, May 30, 2015, Washington, DC, in possession of author.
73. A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 17.
74. *Ibid.*, 16.
75. 'Confidential memo' from Jeb S. Magruder to H.R. Haldeman, March 26, 1970, 1970 strike material, Files of the USPS Historian, Washington, DC.
76. See Usery interview. See also Usery, "The Postal Dispute and Settlement"; and "Postal Labor Relations," 227–8.
77. A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 17.
78. See "Post Office Contingency Plan for Work Stoppages, July 15, 1968," Box 3, Folder Officers Files – Presidents – Moe Biller – Kingsbridge – Postal Reform, *New York Metro Area Postal Union Collection*, Tamiment; and USPOD, "The Postal Strike," 44–5.
79. A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 11.
80. See Cowie, *Stayin' Alive*, 128 for the quotes; for the postal strike see 140–1. See also ch. 3 for Cowie's explanation of Nixon's direct appeal to workers and unions as policy to remake Roosevelt's New Deal Democratic coalition with Nixon's Republican New Majority based on so-called ethnic whites, and split Democrats (and civil rights groups) from labor.
81. See author interview with Morgan; author interview with Thomas; and 2014 NALC Convention interviews.
82. On conservative opposition to public postal service see the Cato Institute website, for example, Tad DeHaven, "Why the USPS Should Be Privatized," published July 28, 2011, accessed May 27, 2014, available at <http://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/why-usps-should-be-privatized>. See also the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), article published online October 11, 2010, by resident AEI scholar Kevin A. Hassett, "Post Office Shows Where United States is Headed," available at <http://www.aei.org/article/economics/fiscal-policy/labor/post-office-shows-where-united-states-is-headed/>, accessed May 27, 2014. See James L. Gattuso, "Does the Postal Service Have a Future?" available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2013/10/can-the-postal-service-have-a-future>, accessed May 27, 2014. Also leading postal privatization efforts is the Public Service Research Center, along with its publications *Government Union Review* and *Government Union Critique*. See, for example, Denholm, "The Case Against Public Sector," 31–52; and Savas, "It's Time to Privatize." See also National Right to Work Committee's efforts against public sector unionism. See also William F. Buckley, Jr., "On the Right," *National Review*, December 14, 1992, 62–3; Kevin D. Williamson, "USPS, R.I.P.: We never needed a postal monopoly," *National Review*, March 11, 2013, 36–7. For critiques of privatization forces see Shaw, *Preserving the People's Post Office*. See also James Brebard, "The Last Dinosaur: The U.S. Postal Service," available at <http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa047.html>, accessed May 27, 2014. Cato has also published book-length studies such as: Hudgins, ed., *Mail at the Millennium*; Ferrara, *Free the Mail*; and on their website they promote a book by Adie, *Monopoly Mail*. For a summary opposing view, see for example, Steve Hutkins, "Who's behind the government shutdown? Some of the same people trying to privatize the Postal Service," available at Save the Post

- Office website, <http://www.savethepostoffice.com/who%E2%80%99s-behind-government-shutdown-some-same-people-trying-privatize-postal-service>, accessed May 27, 2014.
83. Steve Hutkins, "How the Postal Service Began Prefunding and Fell into a Deep Hole," available at <http://www.savethepostoffice.com/how-postal-service-began-prefunding-retiree-health-care-and-fell-deep-hole>; and "USPS Releases May 2015 Financial Statement," available at <http://www.savethepostoffice.com/usps-releases-may-2015-financial-statement>, both accessed July 27, 2015. See also Rolando, "Outside the Box," U.S. Senate website.
 84. See McCartin, *Collision Course*, 344–51. See also Joe Nocera, "Scott Walker's Wisconsin Audition," *New York Times*, June 12, 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/13/opinion/joe-nocera-scott-walkers-wisconsin-audition.html?emc=eta1>. See also Robert Reich (Secretary of Labor under President Bill Clinton), "Just in Time Scheduling," available at <http://www.RobertReich.org>, accessed April 21, 2015; and Noam Scheiber, "Growth in the 'Gig Economy' Fuels Work Force Anxieties," *New York Times*, July 12, 2015, available at http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/13/business/rising-economic-insecurity-tied-to-decades-long-trend-in-employment-practices.html?_r=0.
 85. See, for example, "Chairman Carper Statement on USPS FY2014 3rd Quarter Financial Statement," press release sent to author from office of Senator Tom Carper (D-DE), ranking member of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, 11 August 2014.
 86. Gildea, "Labor Looks," in *Collective Bargaining Today*, 371.
 87. A. Brenner, "Striking Against the State," 22. See also Brenner et al., *Rebel Rank and File*.
 88. A. Brenner, "Rank-and-File Teamster Movements," in *Trade Union Politics*, 112.

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