

Time's Up (Again?): Transforming Hollywood's Industrial Culture

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Abstract

In the 1970s, almost fifty years before the “Time’s Up” movement, women in Hollywood unions organized “women’s committees” to counter institutional sexism and address rampant underemployment. While the unions supported the general motive behind these committees’ efforts, women activists struggled to gather information about hiring practices and enact policy changes. To understand gender inequity in contemporary Hollywood, I argue that we need to reexamine Hollywood infrastructure and consider how it continues to inform labor practices. Using the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA) women’s committee as a case study, this article shows how employment insecurity, a problem that has plagued male and female actors, and the inability or unwillingness of Hollywood institutions to address the precarious work culture inhibited women’s activist efforts in the 1970s.

Keywords: Labor, AFTRA, Time’s Up, Precarity, Gender

On January 1, 2018, female actors, directors, and producers in Hollywood collectively declared “Time’s Up”! In their letter posted in *The New York Times* and *La Opinión*, the women explained, “The struggle for women to break in, to rise up the ranks and to simply be heard and acknowledged in male-dominated workplaces must end; time’s up on this impenetrable monopoly.”² Detached from unions and established professional organizations, the unique structure of Time’s Up brings together several working groups to tackle issues with a multi-pronged approach rather than a central hierarchy. These groups include a commission to develop steps to end sexual harassment, a group focusing on parity in hiring, and a legal defense fund for victims of sexual harassment. The Time’s Up activists approach the industry’s gender problems as systemic rather than anomalous, advocating for industry transformations that impact workers both above and below the line.

A group such as Time's Up offers an innovative avenue for challenging industrial practices and improving Hollywood labor conditions, but it does so by detaching labor advocacy from long-existing unions and guilds. In previous decades, the guilds, in addition to their primary function as negotiators in collective bargaining agreements, provided venues for workers to voice concerns and strategize answers. Solutions provided by unions catered to the fact that women from different employment sectors below and above the line face different forms of discrimination and occupational challenges. In theory, women could find opportunities within guild membership to address their career-specific problems.

While most guilds and unions represent media laborers who share a common place within the industry's hierarchy, Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) is a counterpoint with its membership extending from the lowliest bit player to the biggest movie star. The wide array of workers stems from SAG-AFTRA's relatively low barrier to membership in comparison with the Directors Guild of America (DGA) or the Writers Guild of America (WGA). Prior to the 2012 merger, SAG was often characterized as the union for film actors and AFTRA as the union for television actors and broadcasters, but in practice both SAG and AFTRA had contracts which spanned media venues across film, television, and radio broadcasting. The actors' unions, both AFTRA and SAG, respectively, were unique among the guilds because they represented a wide array of different types of screen talent, some of whom work regularly and others who struggle to work sufficient days to qualify for health care. As such, SAG and AFTRA provide a unique example for considering how media industry organizations have approached a stratified group of struggling and public-facing workers.

In 1972, both SAG and AFTRA performers formed National Women's Committees to address women's employment struggles in the industry. AFTRA's committee was organized out of Los Angeles and is the focus of this article. It is worth noting, however, that AFTRA's efforts were national in scope and that its National Women's Committee also reached out to women around the United States to collect data on regional local chapters and to start new regional chapters.³ If time is up for existing models of power in the current moment of industry reckoning, it is worth understanding these past attempts at intervention in order to learn from failures or missteps. Guild activity in the actors' unions often provides unique insight into the experience and concerns of the working actor. In the case of AFTRA specifically, activism reveals the union's uneven priorities and the unique challenges of working with a professionally diverse group.

While all of the major guilds had women's committees, recovering the specific findings or written reports presents an archival challenge. My reasoning for focusing on historic activism efforts on behalf of women stems from my broader interest in the relationship between labor and the politics of on-screen representation. The focus on AFTRA specifically is a result of archival access to correspondence that offers a more nuanced understanding of committee practices. Many of the AFTRA records are housed at New York University's Tamiment Library, but most other unions maintain their own historical records. Few guilds have designated archives, and occasionally, as is the case with the SAG Women's Committee meeting minutes, documents have gone missing. Oral histories can likewise be problematic; as former SAG-President Kathleen Nolan noted in our conversation about the SAG Women's Committee, memories can be hazy.

The guild material that scholars use to understand labor practices and history are often living documents moving between contemporary union workers to shape decisions. While historical work typically looks at the past in its historical context and actively limits present understandings of culture from seeping into analysis, industrial history and historical documents have a different function and life. Some historical records, such as those that track income, production costs, and specific labor practices, are still used by guilds to help build their cases in negotiations. Institutionally speaking, labor's past is in continuous dialogue with its present in union offices and negotiations. The continued relevance of union histories and data for contemporary actions and future decisions is precisely why this material should be of interest for all scholars of industry and should encourage us to think dynamically about the relationship between the past and the present.

AFTRA's efforts were not isolated, but part of a wave of activism in the Hollywood unions in the 1970s as women organized to combat underemployment in the film and television industries. As Maya Montañez Smuckler and Miranda Banks have demonstrated in their respective work on the DGA and the WGA Women's Committees, these histories reveal where women have hit cultural roadblocks in their efforts to transform the system.⁴ In order to do effective work against inequality, the Women's Committees often found that they needed to first educate the union membership that discrimination against women was a cause that merited union advocacy and resources.

As the embodiment of diversity or its lack, actors often feature prominently in discussions of representation even if they seldom control casting, the content of roles, or the number of roles available for women or people of color. The efforts of AFTRA's Women's Committee, from showcasing progressive on-screen media representations to lobbying for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), engage with these characteristics of actors' labor, specifically their visibility and relative empowerment with respect to hiring practices. Even when these efforts fail to enact meaningful changes in Hollywood, they reveal how screen performers made sense of the gender politics of the industry, understood the nuances of institutional power and their own agency, and fashioned feminist politics and practices within industry communities that were not gendered female. For women in Hollywood, widespread sexism combines with other cultural and structural conditions to create unique and sometimes unanticipated challenges for gender parity. I argue that employment insecurity, a problem that has plagued both male and female actors, and the inability or unwillingness of Hollywood institutions to address the precarious work culture inhibited women's activist efforts in the 1970s. Women's struggles in Hollywood, especially for those working on screen, were and continue to be connected to and exacerbated by the competition and insecurity that characterize Hollywood labor.

Precarious Employment in a Union Town

"Precarious work" is any kind of work defined by the lack of continuous employment, job security, or workforce protections.⁵ As scholars such as Andrew Ross, Christian Fuchs, and Guy Standing have stressed, precarious work applies to a broad spectrum of employment sectors worldwide, ranging from factory work in China, retail and hospitality in England,

and media work in the United States.⁶ The observation of problems across workforces indicates broader economic and social changes that have created a crisis for workers. For workers and activists, noting the similarities across workforce sectors has been essential for coalition building. The letter from Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, a group devoted to fighting exploitation and harassment of women farmworkers, to members of “Times Up” shows how workers understand these common experiences and have tried to create alliances across class to recognize contemporary workplace insecurities. The Alianza Nacional de Campesinas writes,

Even though we [farmworkers and Hollywood workers] work in very different environments, we share a common experience of being preyed upon by individuals who have the power to hire, fire, blacklist and otherwise threaten our economic, physical and emotional security.⁷

Theoretical and political work that seeks to unite workers who share the experience of sporadic work bridges class and professional boundaries and often does so to underscore the absence or dwindling presence of government protections that formerly offset employment insecurity.

Although much of the work on precarity focuses on the twenty-first century and often tacitly assumes this to be a recent change in worker cultures, Hollywood workers have experienced many of these conditions since the end of the studio era. Media production is project-based, meaning that groups of workers come together for a discrete period of time on a creative project. Focusing on media workers within project-based careers, sociologists have termed this mode of existence the “boundaryless career.”⁸ The notion of the boundaryless career encapsulates both how workers move across firms and the way a worker’s value is determined by her value in the market, which is demonstrated by continuous employment (perhaps by many employers) rather than the ability to rise through the ranks.⁹ Essential to understanding the core characteristics of these kinds of precarious careers is the role of the personal networks that workers build in order to help them sustain employment.

Characterizing precarity in relation to on-screen performers is tricky, because in Hollywood not all employment insecurity is seen equally. Like many workers in Hollywood, on-screen performers work under short-term contracts or on a part-time basis. As Angela McRobbie stresses, many creative workers often rely on jobs in the service economy as a primary source of income. Actors are unique among Hollywood workers because they experience a particularly high percentage of unemployment or underemployment. Although even stars might work infrequently, they are well-paid and can live comfortably off their income. Earnings data from SAG give a general indication of how many people make a living as actors in a given year. In 1972 (when both SAG and AFTRA formed their women’s committees), 90 percent of SAG actors made less than US\$10,000 for acting work during the year.¹⁰ While the extremely successful are uniquely visible to a mass audience, they represent only a small fraction of the on-screen population. Those further down the hierarchy might only be able to sustain a living as an actor for a brief period of time. For many SAG and AFTRA members, there is often a strong desire to simply get work at any cost. Robert Castels and Isabell Lorey point out that underemployment in creative circles is more socially accepted than in other professions.¹¹ While I agree with Castels and Lorey, socially

acceptable bouts of unemployment can quickly extend to untenability. For example, prolonged unemployment can cause actors to fail to qualify for health benefits, thus pushing them into an even more precarious existence.

Despite the divergent work experiences across classes of actors, harassment has proven to be an equalizer. Many of the abuse allegations against producers, directors, executives, and other actors have revealed that star power does not protect an actor from harassment or secure her from the criticism and negative publicity that often accompanies allegations. For women, opportunities for roles decline precipitously after they turn thirty—SAG-AFTRA has been forthcoming about this trend.¹² Understanding that careers often have early expiration dates and that women need to take advantage of opportunities early in their careers when they might not have as much knowledge or experience about the profession contributes to their vulnerability. In this sense, women in Hollywood might need to be prepared for a significant decline in work or even plan for a different career later in life.

Men and women often have different experiences building and sustaining their professional networks. As Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson have noted, women are often “excluded from the homosocial rituals of the workplace.”¹³ Success for women in Hollywood often requires the accumulation of “soft skills” or the emotional efforts of managing interpersonal relationships. In Hollywood (as in other towns or industries), these interactions frequently cross a line from professional to inappropriate. Securing employment might require a worker to skillfully appease a supervisor or co-worker rather than to acknowledge harassment. Unseemly behavior is so common that many assume harassment as the status quo or a necessary hardship on the path to one’s desired career. Speaking of a different segment of the industry, John T. Caldwell explains in his analysis of career narratives and books offering advice for breaking into the industry: “workers tell stories that affirm constant interpersonal flexibility, quid pro quo networking, and mutual exploitation as a vocational skill-set.”¹⁴ The specific sexual behaviors and advice these books offer, such as encouraging aspirants to prepare for “the hookup as both networking opportunity and index of job performance,” put women in particularly vulnerable positions.¹⁵ In 2008, Caldwell’s discussion of this kind of career advice situates it alongside other types of career “genesis” myths; however, the public reckoning that has accompanied #MeToo and #TimesUp indicates these stories and advice should be more central to how we theorize precarious work.

The culture of quid pro quo networking is emblematic of what Angela McRobbie identifies as a move away from trade unions “to the nebulous notion of the network.”¹⁶ McRobbie stresses how when people rely on personal connections, friendships, or even liaisons as a means to find work and grow a career, the role of unions in workers’ lives and well-being is diminished. Speaking of the problems inherent in informal networks, Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson have also pointed out that “informality can prove to be a breeding ground for new forms of inequity and laddish behavior.”¹⁷ For actors, informality has always been part of the hiring process—unions have never had any influence over hiring, so actors have relied on connections and introductions in order to meet agents, managers, and casting directors. In this sense, actors have a hybrid labor identity, with some union protections, but many persistent insecurities, especially in relation to the hiring process.

For Hollywood workers, historic conditions of precarity continue to inform labor relations with management, degrees of solidarity between unions, and intra-union relations. Understanding the specificity of insecure working conditions is foundational for thinking about how women have developed practices and behaviors to respond to the lack of job opportunities, unequal pay, and harassment. While Hollywood workers share many of the characteristics of the precarious worker, the continued existence of unions makes this an industry with unique working conditions that combine insecurity with some forms of institutional support—indeed, the union memberships have steadily grown despite the continued precarity of work for individual members. Thus, the unique precarity of Hollywood workers who are also union members is a negotiation. On the one hand, many lack worker protections, but on the other they often have benefits and a pension plan. Using actors as a case study I will show how their feminist strategies were hindered by their status and limited power as precarious workers.

Union Diversity Committees and the Politics of Data Collection

The diversity committees organized in the 1970s by several of the Hollywood unions reflected an implicit understanding that women and people of color faced unique challenges in Hollywood.¹⁸ The WGA formed a women's committee in 1971 as a means for women to network and discuss opportunities in the industry. The two actors' unions, SAG and AFTRA, followed suit with women's committees in 1972. Minority committees, including one at SAG, also formed during the same period to address structural discrimination in Hollywood. Some of these committees, like the (SAG) Ethnic Minorities Committee, came together in 1972 explicitly "... to create and implement positive and constructive goals and objectives for minority problems . . .," whereas others, like the DGA's Women's Steering Committee, formed in 1979 to research employment opportunities and problems.¹⁹ All of these committees represent institutional recognition of discrimination as well as efforts to understand and improve industry practices and culture around race and gender.

These committees in some ways contradicted the overarching mission of unions to support *all* members. As Vicky Ball and Laraine Porter have pointed out, the existence and importance of women's groups that only serve a portion of the membership in the media guilds are surprising.²⁰ Yet performers' unions might be the one exception to Ball and Porter's characterization. Unions often coalesce around a socioeconomic class identity, but performers' unions have a wide array of members and notoriously high percentages of unemployment and underemployment. In the case of AFTRA, the union represented radio performers, broadcasters, hosts, and actors in narrative television shows. As a result of the diverse and often divergent needs of performers, smaller subgroups within the union have always formed to address specific contract needs or interests. Although these unions have a history of recognizing the many differences between performers within the same union, there was backlash against these efforts to differentiate women and minorities. Union members who

felt that unemployment was a systemic problem and not a product of structural racism or sexism voiced their concerns to the SAG Ethnic Minorities Committee.

Although the complaints were not directed at a Women's Committee itself, some actors expressed concern that because underemployment affected all actors equally there was no reason for women or minorities to get access to special resources. Writing to the SAG Ethnic Minorities Committee, one actor proclaimed,

[. . .] where are the jobs for MINORITIES or MAJORITIES? The proposed Minority Opportunities be it acting or technical will have no more effect in getting you a job than you have today. If a member of the Minorities is hired it is because his or her type was needed and you and we know it. Not because our concentrated effort.²¹

AFTRA's Women's Committee did not have an open period for responses like the SAG Ethnic Minorities Committee, but the rhetoric in their efforts belies a certain concern for this type of backlash. Rather than making an argument about systemic injustice, the AFTRA Women's Committee took special care to position gender equality as an issue that affected all members of the union.

Although some union members felt these committees granted members access to more resources, in reality this was not completely true. The women's committees were sanctioned by the guilds, but their efforts were not always supported. The lack of full support is visible in the committees' stymied efforts to collect data on membership. Women in these committees knew that there was a tremendous gender disparity in employment, but they did not have data to support their anecdotal evidence. As correspondence between union leadership and members demonstrates, collecting data on employment was a politically charged request that was difficult at best and impossible at worst. At times, leaders tried to confirm existing data that had no clear source. For example, when the AFTRA Women's Committee asked the President of the Associated Actors and Artistes of America (the 4As) to confirm that 40 percent of its members were women, he responded that he could not confirm that number and had no idea where that estimate came from.²² The WGA, as Miranda Banks explains, produced the first union study on gender and diversity. When the women of the WGA committee requested access to membership records, they were met with reluctance since they needed to search through income information in individual member files, although they later received permission from the Guild Board.²³ Members of the SAG Women's committee were flatly denied access to records that would help them make this case with the simple explanation: "Nothing in the Guild's Constitution and By-Laws and nothing in the applicable law and cases, requires the Guild to make all of its records available to a member."²⁴ Although data are only one tool to understand inequity in the media industries, they can help illuminate broader trends.²⁵ Taken on its own quantitative data does not provide sufficient context to systemic problems, but it is an important piece of the larger picture and one that can be difficult to collect. Although women had the ability and space to organize, the failure to provide access to internal data indicates a combative process in which dismissive institutions doomed women's committee efforts from the start.

Union earnings data, even in aggregate, are guarded as proprietary information not only out of deference to the privacy of its membership but also out of the desire to occlude Hollywood's labor instability. When the data are made publicly available, they are often released in intervals that mask the realities of industry labor and underemployment. In the late 1960s, actor Alan Hewitt, a long-time member of Actor's Equity, SAG, and later AFTRA, attempted to mount a full study of actors' earnings. It was Hewitt's hope that a more detailed study of earnings would be useful for determining a fairer dues structure for underemployed actors and help the unions in their dealings with government agencies and unemployment insurance.²⁶ After a series of letters between Hewitt and SAG representatives, SAG Executive Secretary John Dales rejected Hewitt's offer for help conducting a study. Dales explained,

Even with all figures compiled it would be difficult to draw general conclusions beyond the fact that acting is a precarious economic choice of profession, and that there are a great many more persons desiring to be actors than are able to make the grade.²⁷

For the union, a common-sense understanding of employment rates was sufficient. They were not looking to make available the raw unemployment numbers or change policy and practice in a way that might serve these workers more effectively. By extending this logic to the women's committees in the 1970s, it seems clear that accessing income information for women to transform policy and practice would force Hollywood and its unions to address broad and long-standing issues of unemployment and underemployment relevant to both gender discrimination and systemic labor concerns.

Union studies did not help women gain any traction to improve hiring practices in the long term.²⁸ For writers, the change, as Banks notes, "led to micro-changes during the following [television] season, but not sweeping institutional change."²⁹ Members of the DGA Women's Committee recall that they spent three years meeting with studios over their findings and eventually leaked the data to the news media. Absent actual union pressure or a threat to financial bottom lines, hiring managers had no incentive to change practices or develop industry pipelines.

Women in SAG, AFTRA, WGA, and DGA all worked to gather evidence to substantiate their experiences, but they struggled because data collection of industry labor was often at odds with other union objectives. In Hollywood, taking up structural inequity around gender or race rather than trying to reduce the overall surplus of labor (which is itself a structural problem) is controversial for members. As the example of the SAG data collection efforts demonstrates, members of the performance unions particularly struggled to address their employment issues. When women did manage to collect data, they did not necessarily have sufficient clout to change policies and practices because the Hollywood guilds did not have hiring power, nor were they considering ways to apply pressure to change hiring practices. While all women in these above-the-line unions struggled to improve their working conditions, they did succeed in maintaining union leadership roles to support the existence of such committees. This was not true in all sectors of Hollywood labor. Organized efforts for women in craft or below-the-line careers came much later—International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) did not form a comparable women's committee until 2015, and the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) only launched its Vision committee focused on diversity in 2016. This comparison indicates that this type of camaraderie and collective action

was not organizationally possible for all women in Hollywood. The culture of competitive and inconsistent labor underscores many of the problems women have faced, and continue to face, in trying to establish that the gender problems in Hollywood are systemic.

AFTRA's Women's Committee: A Case Study

The AFTRA Women's Committee formed at a 1973 general meeting with two clear goals: to promote equal rights for female industry workers in Hollywood and to improve women's on-screen representations. Like the other guilds, AFTRA wanted to collect membership data about women in Hollywood to draw attention to gendered inequities, but struggled to access those data. For the AFTRA Women's Committee, the challenge featured the added obstacle of the geographic sprawl of its members. AFTRA represented a wide range of screen performers, including television actors, broadcast journalists, hosts, and radio personalities. Because these performers live in cities across the United States, committee leadership found itself sending letters to local branches and struggling to obtain even basic information about the number of men and women in each local. The geographic diversity of AFTRA's members also posed a set of unique organizing challenges that differed from those experienced by unions centered in Los Angeles and New York. While the other unions had to negotiate varied degrees of professional success and financial stability, the AFTRA Women's Committee had to build alliances across diverse careers in radio and television, as well as negotiate distinct regional attitudes.

The language employed by the Women's Committee to explain its organizational goals demonstrates a sensitivity to AFTRA's broader unemployment problem and a reluctance to alienating male union members. Rather than stating a desire to advance conditions for women, the Women's Committee suggests that improving conditions for women will benefit all actors. Its statement declared,

The AFTRA National Women's Division, in exploring and determining the "equality of employment opportunity" for women will seek "equal rights" and "equal opportunity" for all members of AFTRA, and when inequities or infractions are uncovered, whether . . . women or men, they will be called to the attention of the AFTRA National Board.³⁰

Although this language sought to temper any outrage from male union members, including both women and men in the committee's statement about inequities undermines any argument that gender bias might be institutional. This discussion of accountability also fails to provide a clear actionable solution. Like the WGA, AFTRA could encourage better hiring practices, but as the union did not participate in the casting or hiring process, there was little they could do.

The second part of the committee's stated goals focused on the politics of on-screen representations, yet a similar committee statement softened the discussion of strict gender bias. The statement proposes, "Regarding 'images', the committee will call attention to debase-ments, stereotypes, distortion. When women's 'images' are upgraded to the realities of life today, it is hoped that men's images will also, in the new awareness of the value of human dignity for all."³¹ By continuing to reach out to men, the committee again undercuts its role

as an advocate for women. What is perhaps most noteworthy about this statement is that it does not explicitly link the quality of representation to the industrial inequities such as the number of on-screen roles or the amount of available jobs. In essence, the two objectives of the committee were positioned as separate rather than related industry phenomena.

In addition to the Women's Committee's two primary goals, they outlined eight key procedures and actions which ranged from collecting data about employment, wages, and on-screen representations to strategies for communicating activities to members. But labor insecurity impacted committee members' ability to work as activists and advocates. Members of the Women's Committee had to balance their own auditions and acting work with their unpaid activism. Speaking of this very problem, Alice Backes explained in a letter:

As a free-lance actress who must continue to earn my living in this business, my challenge continues to find enough hours each day. I am, also, increasingly aware that this responsibility, which I did not seek out, is probably the most important volunteer effort I've ever taken on. The depth of what needs to be done and the responsibility of the media in shaping the mores and expectations of women in our society and around the world . . .³²

In this letter, Backes identifies her struggles to make a living as separate from the job of transforming representations through her committee work. Members of the Women's Committee such as Backes were aware of the importance of their efforts on a larger scale, but still struggled to balance the unpaid labor of advocating for social mobility with the struggle of making a living as a professional actor. As much as Backes views them separately, the work of the committee was inseparable from her existence as an actor.

One of the greatest limitations of the AFTRA Women's Committee was its inability to demand accountability in hiring practices. Given the prevailing conditions, it is perhaps unsurprising that the committee worked in concert with more widespread national efforts for workplace equality. In the 1970s, the ERA provided a potential solution for some of the problems that the Women's Committee identified. The ERA was a Constitutional amendment that would provide a basis for enforcing equal rights and legal protections for women. From 1972 to 1982, women around the United States organized and advocated to get three-fourths of US states to ratify this amendment. In 1973, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO; the federation of US trade unions and AFTRA's parent union) decided to support ratification of the ERA. For media workers, this amendment would help guarantee equal workplace protections and provide what the Women's Committee ultimately needed, which was an external body that could enforce equal rights in hiring practices across broadcast industries. Implementation of the ERA would have required some policies and oversight to ensure equality, thus making sense that the Women's Committee would ". . . promote the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment in unratified states in every way possible."³³ Although the efforts to support the ERA did not help to support their internal organizational priorities, these efforts were a tangible way for the Women's Committee to advocate for equal employment opportunity and connect with the women's movement more generally.

Efforts centering around representation involved separate initiatives and events for the Women's Committee. Concurrent with their efforts to support the ERA, the Women's Committee scheduled events in Los Angeles and New York to celebrate progressive

on-screen representations. Showcasing works which highlighted the experiences of women and people of color during their 1976 program entitled “Celebration,” the Committee explained, “we were reminded that of the network programming done under AFTRA’s jurisdiction, shows such as ‘Maude’, ‘All in the Family’, ‘The Jeffersons’, ‘Chico and the Man’ are among the highest rated shows in television.”³⁴ Of course, several of the examples lauded for their progressive representations could also be criticized from the perspective of hiring diversity. For example, in 1974 the WGA found that only 5 percent of *All in the Family*’s (1971–1979) teleplays were written by women, a number lower than the rest of the industry at the time.³⁵ Furthermore, the presence of a diverse staff does not guarantee that all voices are weighted equally during the creative decision-making process. With respect to shows with predominantly black casts, Herman Gray has noted that while African American writers contributed to stories, they were ultimately not responsible for the creative vision.³⁶ From an industrial standpoint, the celebration of existing progressive on-screen writing reifies the industry structures that produced them, even if the number of roles for women is far fewer than that offered to men.

The AFTRA Committee worked to encourage ratification of the ERA, but over many years, anti-ERA sentiment grew, especially in states that still needed to ratify.³⁷ When the Amendment failed, the union was left with a void as to who would be able to enforce fair hiring practices. Given AFTRA’s lack of a role in hiring, even if the Committee reported its results to union leadership, it would be difficult to act upon their grievances. With the ERA’s failure, the Women’s Committee lost the means to systemically agitate for employment opportunities and shifted its focus.

During the earliest years of the AFTRA, Women’s Committee efforts focused on hiring parity and quality of representation, but these dual goals were not explicitly connected. When the Women’s Committee lost its best chance at gaining hiring leverage, priorities shifted and the Women’s Committee sought instead to recognize and honor progressive representations and on-screen achievements. The shift toward on-screen representations was not only a “safer” cause for the precarious workforce, but it also reflects the limited agency of the Committee and its union more broadly with respect to hiring practices. Even though women organized, raised awareness, and worked for concrete change, industry infrastructure limited the potential impact of these efforts.

Conclusion

In its very name, the “Time’s Up” movement seems to signify a rupture in the historical timeline of discriminatory workplace structures, biased hiring practices, and sexual assault in Hollywood. “Time’s Up” also signals a break from the unions as the central advocate for workers as women in media form new coalitions to transform Hollywood. Operating outside of the guilds allows “Time’s Up” to take a more forceful position against harassment and bias. While the Women’s Committees in the 1970s struggled against Hollywood’s desire to create an illusion of industrial unity, “Time’s Up” can embrace women across class and craft. The stories of the various union Women’s Committees indicate how a culture of precarity can undermine feminist politics and activism and function to maintain the status quo. The Women’s Committees struggled to make progress working within the established systems

and networks. Although “Time’s Up” provides a new approach to addressing some of the systemic challenges of Hollywood, as an organization it is dealing with problems in Hollywood that have been consistent through many eras, mainly that insecure employment results in a culture of disenfranchised workers who are reluctant to advocate for themselves for fear of finding their next jobs.

Despite the many breaks indicated by the phrase “Time’s Up,” the group’s existence does not indicate a fundamental restructuring of Hollywood institutions. As Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson explain, “Labor relations are a historical phenomenon—over time they inevitably adapt and transform.”³⁸ The shift from advocacy work within the unions to organizing outside and across worker groups may be an inevitable outgrowth of the contemporary culture of shared precarity. “Time’s Up” does not have the institutional history that anchors the relationship between management and unions, which can be essential for creating space for conversations about inequities. In the case of “Time’s Up,” workers adapted in a way that breaks away from the longer histories of struggle. The question for the future is whether or not studios, networks, and producers can be made to adapt to the invigorated demands of women in Hollywood.

The relationship between Hollywood’s business practices, institutional norms, and its treatment of women has long been intertwined. Hollywood stories from the past hundred years indicate that exploitation is not only endemic but also structurally enabled.³⁹ As film historians know, abuses of power against vulnerable Hollywood aspirants are as old as Hollywood itself. Not only are these histories resonant with many contemporary discussions surrounding Hollywood labor, these histories have often informed present cultures and conditions. For media scholars, declaring “Time’s Up” should include a willingness to look at the cultural history of Hollywood and to develop an understanding of its development as a male-dominated industry. Rampant inequity and harassment are not the result of anomalies or “bad apples”; they are enabled by institutional structures and empowered by cultural norms. When we look at the relationship between infrastructure and culture, and we explore histories of industry diversity work, we will be better equipped to understand the possibility of gender equity and how to advocate for change in Hollywood.

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² Cara Buckley, “Powerful Hollywood Women Unveil Anti-Harassment Action Plan,” *New York Times*, January 1, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/movies/times-up-hollywood-women-sexual-harassment.html> (accessed February 21, 2018).

³ For an example of this type of correspondence, see: Alice Backes, “Letter to Elsa Ransom of Euclid, Ohio,” April 7, 1975, AFTRA Papers, Tamiment Library, NY.

⁴ Miranda Banks, “Unequal Opportunities—Gender Inequities and Precarious Diversity,” *Feminist Media Histories* 4 (4, fall 2018): 109–129, and Maya Montañez

- Smuckler, "Thirty Years of Women Directors," *UCLA CSW Update Newsletter*, January 1, 2011. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3pd5t9m6>.
- ⁵ For a more general discussion of precarious work, see: Ruth Milkman and Ed Ott, ed., *New Labor in New York* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2014); Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (NY: Bloomsbury, 2014); Leah Vosko, *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship, and the International Regulation of Precarious Employment* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- ⁶ Christian Fuchs, *Digital Labor and Karl Marx* (London: Routledge, 2014) and Andrew Ross, *Nice Work If You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (NY: NYU Press, 2009); and Standing, *The Precariat*.
- ⁷ Alianza Nacional de Campesinas, "Dear Sisters," Printed in "700,000 Female Farmworkers Say They Stand with Hollywood Actors Against Sexual Assault," November 10, 2017. http://time.com/5018813/farmworkers-solidarity-hollywood-sexual-assault/?utm_campaign=time&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_medium=social&id=time_socialflow_twitter (accessed February 21, 2018).
- ⁸ Candace Jones, "Careers in Project Networks: The Case of the Film Industry," in *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*, ed. Michael B. Arthur and Denise M. Rousseau (NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 58–75.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 59.
- ¹⁰ "SAG—Earnings of Actors, 1969–1980," SAG-AFTRA Negotiating Files, Los Angeles, CA.
- ¹¹ Isabell Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, trans. Aileen Derieg (NY: Verso, 2015), 55.
- ¹² This information was presented in graph form, but lacked specific salary numbers. Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, "Labor, Entertainment, and Sports: An Intersectional and Interdisciplinary Inquiry" (paper presented at Labor, Entertainment, and Sports: An Intersectional and Interdisciplinary Inquiry Conference, Beverly Hills, CA, April 18, 2015).
- ¹³ Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson, "Listening to Labor," in *Voices of Labor: Creativity, Craft, and Conflict in Global Hollywood*, ed. Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 11.
- ¹⁴ John T. Caldwell, *Production Cultures: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 59.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ¹⁶ Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 68.
- ¹⁷ Curtin and Sanson, "Listening to Labor," 11.
- ¹⁸ Mollie Gregory, *Women Who Run the Show: How a Brilliant and Creative New Generation of Women Stormed Hollywood* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 2002), xiv.
- ¹⁹ For more on the founding of the Ethnic Minorities Committee, see: Press Release from Screen Actors Guild, February 18, 1972, Folder 97—Screen Actors Guild—Ethnic Minorities Committee, Robert DoQui Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA. For more on the DGA Women's Steering Committee, see: "About the Women's Steering Committee." <https://www.dga.org/The-Guild/Committees/Diversity/Women.aspx> (accessed February 21, 2018).

- ²⁰ Vicky Ball and Laraine Porter, “Editors’ Introduction: Gendered Patterns of Discrimination,” *Feminist Media Histories* 4 (4, fall 2018): 3.
- ²¹ Anonymous (signed “one of the minorities”), “Letter to Robert DoQui and the Ethnic Minorities Committee, March 1, 1972, Folder 100—Screen Actors Guild—Ethnic Minorities Committee (Member Responses), Robert DoQui Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA.
- ²² Frederick O’Neal, “Letter to Alice Backes,” March 26, 1975, Folder 41—Committee: Women’s, general, AFTRA Papers, Tamiment Library, NY.
- ²³ Gregory, *Women Who Run The Show*, 8.
- ²⁴ Charles Kahn, “Letter to Lisabeth Hush and Shirley Mandel,” November 6, 1975, Folder 12—Screen Actors Guild—Statistics, Lisabeth Hush Papers, Margaret Herrick Library, Los Angeles, CA.
- ²⁵ Banks, “Unequal Opportunities,” 110.
- ²⁶ Alan Hewitt, “Letter to Byron Ellerbrock,” August 27, 1966, Box 4, Folder: SAG Income Survey, 1966–1967, Alan Hewitt Papers, New York Public Library Special Collections, NY.
- ²⁷ John Dales, “Letter to Alan Hewitt,” December 14, 1966, Alan Hewitt Papers, Box 4, Folder: SAG Income Survey, 1966–1967, New York Public Library Special Collections, NY.
- ²⁸ For more on the struggles of the DGA’s Women’s Steering Committee see Rachel Syme, “The Original Six: The Story of Hollywood’s Forgotten Feminist Crusaders,” *Pacific Standard Magazine*, February 26, 2016. <https://psmag.com/social-justice/the-original-six-and-history-hollywood-sexism> (accessed March 3, 2018).
- ²⁹ Banks, “Unequal Opportunities,” 120.
- ³⁰ The 1973 objectives were reprinted in a later document, see Carol Bell, “Spring Status Report,” March 8, 1979, Folder 26, AFTRA Papers, Tamiment Library, NY.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² Alice Backes, “Letter to Ms. Joan M. Goodin (Asst. Director International Affairs, Brotherhood of Railway, Airline and Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express and Station Employees), April 23, 1975, Folder 41, AFTRA Papers, Tamiment Library, NY.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
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- ³⁶ Herman Gray, *Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 71.
- ³⁷ For more on changing sentiments around the ERA see: Donald Critchlow and Cynthia Stachecki, “The Equal Rights Amendment Reconsidered: Politics, Policy, and Social Mobilization in a Democracy,” *The Journal of Policy History* 20 (1, 2008): 157–76.
- ³⁸ Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson, “Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor,” in *Precarious Creativity: Global Media, Local Labor*, ed. Michael Curtin and Kevin Sanson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 10.

³⁹ For more discussion of these scandals, see: Hilary Hallett, *Go West, Young Women! The Rise of Early Hollywood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013) and Denise McKenna, “The City That Made the Pictures Move: Gender, Labor and Los Angeles, 1908-1917” (PhD diss., New York University, 2008).

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