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Clara Lemlich Shavelson: An Activist Life

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CLARA LEMLICH SHAVELSON: AN ACTIVIST LIFE

by

SARAH COHN

A master's capstone project submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York.

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the capstone project requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

CLARA LEMLICH SHAVELSON: AN ACTIVIST LIFE

by

SARAH COHN

Adviser: Cindy Lobel

Clara Lemlich Shavelson is primarily known for her impassioned speeches during the 1909 Uprising of 20,000. The majority of histories written about her address her involvement in organizing women garment workers in New York's Lower East Side from her arrival in New York in 1903 up through the eleven-week general strike in 1909. After this, the literature would have you believe she fades into obscurity, for there is only one book that addresses her life post 1909. Shavelson did not give up organizing after 1909. She got married, moved to Brooklyn, and started a family. In Brooklyn, she organized women in her neighborhood--wives and mothers--to engage in consumer activism like food boycotts and rent strikes. She joined the Communist Party and was instrumental in leading more consumer actions up through the Great Depression. She ran for office in New York State, was called to testify in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and had her passport revoked after a trip to the Soviet Union. An organizer and supporter of labor until the end of her life, Shavelson convinced the administration of her retirement home to support the United Farm Workers produce boycott, and helped the nurses and orderlies organize for union representation.

The goal of this digital project is to make visible the entirety of Shavelson's life and activism through curating relevant primary source documents, and combining them with thematic essays that consider the intersections of women's history, labor unions, consumer activism, family obligations, and electoral politics. Not a biography, this project is a documentary history that explores the traces left by a woman who lived a life of public activism and today is little known. Beyond surfacing information about Shavelson, this project aims to be an educational and exploratory tool, as well as a public resource that considers the intersections of organizing, power, and effecting change in New York City. The project can be accessed at <https://clara.common.gc.cuny.edu/>

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Project URL

<https://clara.common.gc.cuny.edu/>

Project Narrative

The inspiration for this project came from Dr. Cindy Lobel's class, "Metropolis: A Political Historical and Sociological Profile of New York". We read David Von Drehle's book, *Triangle: The Fire that Changed America*, about the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. It opens with a vivid account of Clara Lemlich leaving the picket line and being beaten by factory-owner-hired thugs. After this point, Lemlich becomes incidental to the story and is mentioned later in the narrative only in passing. From this tantalizing introduction to Clara Lemlich, one of my classmates mentioned that she would like to read a full-length biography of her. Ever the librarian, I went to WorldCat to see what was out there.

Disappointingly, what I found were two children's books, a short documentary, and chapters in books about the Jewish-American experience or on the Triangle fire. All of these works focused on her role in the 1909 garment workers' strike. As far as these books were concerned, her life ended after the strike did. However, one of the books was Annelise Orleck's *Common Sense and a Little Fire*, a collective biography of four women, one of whom is Clara Lemlich Shavelson. Orleck provides a proper biography of Shavelson that treats the entirety her life with nuance and generosity, and her book provided the foundational material for this project.

I recognized that I was not willing or able to write a stand-alone book length biography of Shavelson, so I considered what I could add to the scant body of knowledge about her. I wavered between a digital project and a traditional written thesis, and after a conversation with Professor Matt Gold, I settled on the digital project. Professor Gold suggested I consider whether I wanted to create an object-based project or a storytelling project, as this choice would help determine

what platform to use, and what elements would go into the research and analytical aspect of the project.

While I love looking at archival material and historic newspapers, projects that are object-only leave me underwhelmed. Over the years, the projects that I have most enjoyed are ones that present the interesting objects along with historical and social context, as well as analytical pieces. This was what I wanted my project to do; I wanted the objects to help tell a story. Considering the audience was helpful in this regard as well. If this was not going to be a traditional thesis for an academic audience, it should be aimed toward and accessible by the general Googling public.

Pulling together purpose and audience, I arrived at an outline of a project. I knew that I wanted to highlight Shavelson's activism after the 1909 strike, since the sources—with the exception of Orleck's book—remained silent on the topic. I knew that I wanted to highlight interesting historic objects but also have the immediate context and relevant background tying them all together, and I wanted to include my own analysis. With all of these goals in mind, I determined that I would aim for a documentary history instead of a more traditional biography.

With a rough content outline, I turned to platform. I was initially attracted by Scalar, with its flexible navigation and because a project I really like, "Black Quotidian,"¹ is built in Scalar. A conversation with Stephen Klein, Digital Services Librarian, about the problematic nature of archiving Scalar based projects, along with concerns that the abbreviated timeframe would not be conducive to learning a new tool while building the project, led me to abandon Scalar as a platform. I then turned to the CUNY Academic Commons. Since I was already familiar with creating sites with this platform, and because it is easy to archive from a library standpoint, using

¹ <http://blackquotidian.com/>

the Academic Commons quickly became the most viable platform. In addition, the recent addition of a plug-in for the timeline visualization tool TimelineJS made the Academic Commons that much more attractive as a platform.

Research

The contours of the project in mind and a platform to build it on decided, I began my research. I started with the secondary literature on the relevant movements, events, and time periods. Since I was not familiar with the literature in labor or Communist Party history, these sources were necessary to round out my understanding of what was happening during Shavelson's life, and how these events have been treated by historians in subsequent years. Once I felt I had a better grasp on the broader issues and theoretical debates, I turned to the primary sources.

I knew that two different institutions had archives relating to Shavelson—the Kheel Center at Cornell and the Tamiment Labor Archive at New York University (NYU). Much of what is at Cornell is material relating to the 1909 strike era, as they also hold the archives for the International Garment Workers Ladies Union (IGWLU), of which Shavelson was a longtime member. Since I wanted my project to cover more than the strike, this archive seemed less crucial to my research than the material held at Tamiment. Additionally, Cornell has digitized a large number of photos and made them available through Flickr, and so I deemed a trip to Ithaca unnecessary.

I did make several visits to the Tamiment collection at NYU, and these visits were fruitful. Shavelson's youngest daughter, Rita Margules, donated the collection. It contains family records for both Joe and Clara, and stretches the length of Shavelson's life. Tamiment also had a number of Communist and Socialist newspapers, several of which Shavelson wrote articles for. I

am familiar with archives in general from my work, and have done a small amount of archival research in the past. This was my first experience doing archival research with a purpose, and it was much more engaging than I expected it to be. It was surprisingly fun and strangely intimate, to be holding objects of others' lives. The material I came away with from the Tamiment collection are the best parts of this project, and was incredibly helpful in putting together the timeline. Instead of relying on secondary accounts or vague mentions in secondary literature, I was able to make my own interpretations of the material and historic record. I found a photo labeled 'Clara and unknown man' and dated only 1960s generally. In the photo, both are wearing corsages and there is a bouquet of flowers in the foreground. Although the man in the photo is unidentified, I thought it must be Abe Goldman, her second husband, and that the photo is likely from their wedding day. I used the photo in the timeline and identified it only as a photo of Clara and Abe, leaving out the wedding day speculation.

The next step was examining newspapers. The *New York Times* archive and the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* archive were incredibly helpful, along with the Library of Congress' "Chronicling America" collection, which provided access to smaller New York City daily newspapers. The newspaper headlines and clippings also served as a major source of images for the timeline. I really enjoyed reading through the newspapers; they are such an amazing window into place and time. I came across so many other fascinating articles. An article from 1912 about a suffragette-hobo alliance! An article from 1954 about librarians safeguarding American's freedoms! The reader advice columns about puppy care and the letters to the editor; all of it supremely interesting.

With the help of a family member who is a skilled amateur genealogist, I was able to find not only census records, but also passenger manifests for various trips Shavelson took. The most

interesting of these is the list from the Lemlich family's journey to the United States. Finding this source was something of a hunt, because of the way their names are spelled on the handwritten manifest--possibly through an error of transliteration from Yiddish, and because of errors in deciphering handwriting during the digitization process. They are listed as:

Husband: Schimschan Lumbach (Simon)
Wife: Esser Lumbach (Esther)
Daughter: Cheise (Claara)
Mabie (Marcus/Max)
Nuchem (Nathan)
Benjamin (Benjamin)

Once the family anglicize their names, they are easier to find in the census data and for subsequent trips abroad. Interestingly, I could find no marriage record for Clara and Joe, and no birth records for any of three children.

As a librarian, the research process of any paper is always the most enjoyable part, and this project was no exception. Through the secondary material, I found a number of assertions that I wanted to follow up on and substantiate through my own research. The first was the assertion that Shavelson had been called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1951. The project I worked on in the Digital Humanities Praxis class was a HUAC transcript-finding project that never made it past the prototype stage. Trying to find Shavelson's HUAC testimony made me wish the HUAC project had been developed!

Ultimately, I was able to find two listings of Shavelson's name in the HUAC index. Neither of them relates to her own testimony. One is a mention during the testimony of her son, Charles Velson, in 1953, and the other is in a list of Communist Party candidates for electoral office. In Velson's testimony, Shavelson is mentioned in relation to a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing in 1951 about a trip she took to the Soviet Union. I was unable to find the

transcript of this testimony without going to the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. As far as I can tell, she was not called in front of HUAC, but more likely testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

One of the postcards I found in the collection at Tamiment, Shavelson sent to Joe and Rita from Washington, D.C. in January 1939. The text of the postcard reads "Dear Joe & Rita, Just a line to inform you that I arrived safely [illegible] [illegible] to appear at the mass meeting. We are preparing to for a real fight for peace and democracy. With love, yours as ever, Clara."² Without any context, my initial thought was that it was in reference to general anti-war efforts. After some research into newspapers from January 1939, I thought it might be in reference to the labor union fight between the AFL and the CIO that was happening at the time in Washington, D.C. and involved the National Labor Board. Knowing that Shavelson was not heavily involved with unions at this point in her life, this link seemed unlikely.

Further research indicated that in January 1939, the Fifth American Congress for Peace and Democracy occurred. This Congress was an event held by The American League for Peace and Democracy (previously The American League Against War and Fascism), which was a Communist Party-affiliated group active in the 1930s. At the end of the meeting, the Congress presented its platform to President Roosevelt. Among the items the group asked for were a federal anti-lynching bill, and an end to the Dies Committee, which was actively speaking out against the League. This seemed the most plausible option for why Shavelson was in Washington, D.C. at the time, especially with the Communist Party connection and her ongoing involvement with anti-fascist movements, and ultimately was the explanation of the postcard that I put into the timeline. I am confident that I my conclusion as to why she was in Washington,

² Postcard, 1939; Clara Lemlich Papers; TAM 577; box 2; folder 4; Tamiment Library, Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, New York University.

D.C. is correct, and this was one of the best research moments of this project. It was satisfying to combine my librarian skills and new-found historian skills together, searching through the newspapers and following the research to the most logical conclusion.

As I dug into the research I discovered a series of connections between the Shavelson family and my own. My grandmother, a child of Russian Jewish immigrants, was the same age as Shavelson's youngest daughter Rita, and lived with her parents less than 2 blocks from the Shavelson family in Brighton Beach in the 1930s and 40s. Sadly, my grandmother passed away in early 2017, just as I was starting to research in earnest, so I never had the opportunity to ask her if she knew, or at least knew of, the Shavelson family. Since Shavelson was, by all accounts, a prominent neighborhood presence, it seems likely that my grandmother would have known who she was. While primarily speculation, this was the strongest Cohn-Shavelson connection. The other two are more tenuous. My aunt's family was involved with the Jewish Home for the Aged in Los Angeles, where Shavelson live at the end of her life. This aunt's grandfather was a president of the Home, his wife was also active in the organization that ran the home, and her great-grandparents lived there. Finally, one of her grandchildren, Joseph Velson, lives in the next town over from my parents, from where I grew up. These connections, however questionable, added a bit of serendipity to the project, and reinforced my belief that a Shavelson-based project had been a good choice.

Technical Development

Some initial work that crossed the research/technical divide was the environmental scan. I wanted to know if there were existing digital projects on Shavelson, and I was looking for models of digital biographies to take ideas from or use as models. Googling for Clara Lemlich Shavelson showed me her surprisingly robust Wikipedia page, along with a handful of

miscellaneous history blog posts, and a few entries from the Jewish Women's Archive, a link to the PBS documentary on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, and other miscellaneous items.

There appeared to be no digital project based on her life, so the possibility of overlap or re-doing work already done was small.

Looking for digital biography projects to use as models was not as easy. I knew about the digital accompaniment to a recent Richard Pryor biography,³ so I started there. The site allows users to browse by people, places, eras, and themes. It combines primary source documents and stories of the people and places related to Richard Pryor and his hometown of Peoria, Illinois. I like how robust the site is, and the way it weaves together the various elements of the people, the places, and the history. However, a project of this scope was unrealistic for completing within a single semester. A more general search for digital biography projects resulted in information about tools to use, and many articles related to teaching digital biography to middle and high school students. I then turned to the examples provided on the TimelineJS site, and this proved to be helpful. There is a compelling project from Boston public radio station WBUR on James 'Whitey' Bulger.⁴ This project utilized TimelineJS along with essays and images in a way that was clear, informative, and engaging. This project served as the aesthetic inspiration for mine.

With an aspirational project to serve as a model, I began exploring the tools at my disposal to see how well I could make them work for me. The Academic Commons is built on WordPress, which is easy to use. However, there are a number of different templates to work with, and I went through at least half of them before I settled on one that was sufficiently simple and flexible enough for my purposes. Some of the styling (font style, size, and line spacing) would come later, after the addition of content, but I wanted to start with as much of the styling

³ <http://www.becomingrichardpryor.com/pryors-peoria/>

⁴ <http://bulger.wbur.org/>

completed as possible. To this end, I decided on a color scheme and changed the default colors to those of my choice. I cleared out unnecessary elements like headers, search boxes, login options, and other widgets that were displayed in the theme by default.

In order to familiarize myself with the process and avoid any surprises further down the line, I created a sample timeline using the TimelineJS tool. It is incredibly easy to use, although it does have technical limitations. The sample timeline was a worthwhile exercise because it allowed me to become familiar with the strengths and limitations of the tool, which in turn made it easier for me to construct my actual timeline.

Process and Practices

In order to ensure the project was completed in the allotted time, I started by creating a detailed work plan. Working backwards from the due date, I outlined every step that needed to be taken and when the goal due dates for individual items were. With a relatively short time frame, and general life constraints like a full time job, this process was both helpful and terrifying. Being able to see exactly what needed to be done and when helped to manage the overwhelming feeling of the project, but it also made very clear just how little time I had to complete everything. To supplement the work plan on a more granular level, I used Trello to create a series of weekly, very detailed checklists.

The work plan was necessary to ensure I was able to reach my project goals, especially building the site and the timeline. So much of creating a digital project involves time-consuming, detail-oriented (often repetitive) tasks. These tasks include formatting and sizing images correctly to creating links to the media in the timeline for enhanced viewing, and spending time on styling and navigation to ensure that users of the site are not turned off by unappealing design or unclear navigation.

When I undertook the research and reading of the secondary sources, I created a spreadsheet and noted instances when Shavelson was mentioned along with dates and notes as to what made the mention worth pursuing. Once I had a basic framework of dates and events, I started on the primary source research—primarily newspapers at this stage—to corroborate and substantiate the events, as well as to get an idea of their historical context and start collecting potential material for inclusion in the timeline.

Initially, as set out in my work plan, I intended to do all of my research and writing first, and to build the digital project (both site and timeline) second. In practice, this was not realistic, and I took a more mixed-methods approach. Research and writing are time-intensive and do not offer instant feedback and gratification the way building a website does. Once I had a critical mass of information, and even though I was far from finished researching, I began to fill out the timeline. This turned out to be a good process, because I could immediately see what worked and what did not, which helped me focus on searching out specific items in newspapers or the archival collection that would best fit my needs.

With the timeline and the research moving forward in tandem, I was able to troubleshoot technical problems, refine existing material, and show the unfinished project to trusted advisers for feedback on both content and user experience. Only once I felt I had the technical and research aspect well under control did I turn to the writing process. As is often the case with writing, I encountered some issues in this process. They are discussed in full in the Challenges section below.

Challenges

My initial challenge was in focusing the shape and scope of the project. I knew broadly what I wanted to do, but I needed to find a balance between a sufficiently robust project and one

that could be completed in a fairly short amount of time. Since I was not going to write a traditional biography, I needed to be able to frame it in a way that made clear what the project was, and what it was not. A corollary challenge was considering and writing the thematic essays. I had originally proposed more essays than I eventually wrote. The difference in proposal and outcome was in part because of time constraints and in part because I found it harder than I expected to identify topics that considered the information in a new way or did not duplicate the work of others.

Once I started researching, especially in the archives, I found it challenging to determine what objects to include and how to frame those objects. Initially I was inclined to take a strictly historical approach, but a historian friend reminded me that all history is interpretation, and what mattered was my framing of the events. The limited secondary sources on Shavelson's life included a number of conflicting reports—for example, discrepancies about the date of events. Interestingly, multiple secondary sources put the date of her death as July 12, 1982. The *New York Times* obituary puts the date as July 25⁵, and the *San Francisco Chronicle* obituary on July 31 says that she died “last Saturday”⁶, which a 1982 calendar indicates was the 24th. In the absence of an official record of her death, I chose to use the July 24th date. The factors that influenced this decision were that her family members were living in the San Francisco Bay Area at the time, and the *Chronicle* obituary was significantly longer, with greater detail, than the single paragraph in the *New York Times*. Other events that were of interest but with no clear dates and no real evidence I decided to leave out. In the interviews Annelise Orleck conducts with Shavelson family members, several people tell stories of the Shavelson household being under FBI surveillance in the 1950s. These stories seemed likely to be true, but it was unclear to

⁵ “Shavelson - Clara Lemlich,” *New York Times*, July 30, 1982.

⁶ “Clara Lemlich Shavelson,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 31, 1982.

me how best to include them in the timeline. Since I could not find a mention of Shavelson in the FBI FOIA documents, I did not have the necessary objects or documents to back up the stories, and in the end I left it out.

In these same family interviews, Shavelson's daughter Martha Schaffer talks about issues and events that were interesting from a biographical standpoint, but did not fit well within the frame of the project. In particular, the interview where Schaffer says her mother was "furious that contraception was considered a woman's problem, though it was far easier before World War II for men to obtain condoms than for women to get diaphragms"⁷ comes to mind. Shavelson never seemed to be a vocal or public supporter of contraceptive access, yet both impacted her life. Why did she choose to prioritize the causes she did over reproductive rights? Margaret Sanger's family planning clinic was operating in Brownsville in 1916 and 1917. Shavelson lived in the neighborhood during that time, so it seems likely that she knew about it, and it could have been an area of action for her. Perhaps this is something that is missing from the project, and I should have written an essay incorporating material that did not fit easily onto the timeline, or was more speculative in nature

With the timeline text, I had to consider how best to frame the events on the timeline, how to connect them with Shavelson's life if the connection was not obvious, as well as how much explanation to include in each slide. I wanted to provide enough context to make it clear why each slide was included, but not so much that reading through all of them felt like a chore. In the same way that I wanted to vary the accompanying images and background color, I wanted to vary the length of the text. Another seemingly small issue was how to refer to Shavelson throughout the project. Something that often irks me when reading both history and biography is

⁷ Annelise Orleck. *Common Sense and a Little Fire* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 307.

that women are referred to by their first names and men by their last names, so I wanted to refer to her as Shavelson throughout. However, because of how intimate the timeline came to feel, I decided to use Clara in the timeline and Shavelson in the rest of my writing.

The biggest challenge over the entire course of the project was time, or lack of it. I used the winter break to conduct research and read secondary sources, but did not start on the technical side until much later. As I began to work on the technical aspects of the project, I was quickly reminded how much time digital projects take, with the many small, often repetitive tasks like hand-coding links and testing different WordPress themes. In hindsight I should have used the winter break to begin this aspect alongside the research. As I worked through the technological process and the writing process, it became clear to me that I had been over-ambitious in my project proposal, and partway through decided to scale back the scope of the project to ensure it could be completed on time.

I built the site on the Academic Commons while simultaneously building the timeline using TimelineJS. When it came time to embed the timeline into the Commons site, I ran into technical difficulties, which necessitated a trip to the Digital Fellows office hours. When I was unable to resolve the problem at office hours, I raised a help ticket to the Commons developer. The problem was eventually resolved, but it extended the time frame in which I had intended to have everything working.

Other challenges on the technical side were primarily related to TimelineJS itself. In many ways, this tool is great because it works out of the box with no real need for technical knowledge or training. The program proved to be a source of frustration however, as I had limited choices in terms of style elements. For example, it is not possible to make images into links, so the links to the full size image had to be placed in the image caption. But there is not a

way to style the links to look like the links in the site—they do not change color and are not obviously links. Further, if the link opens in the same tab, when you click ‘back’ to return to the timeline, it automatically starts the timeline over, which is frustrating. The only apparent solution to this problem is to make the links open in a new tab, which is not ideal either. The style and function of the timeline at the bottom of the screen are similarly proscribed; it is not possible to change the color of the background, or the height of the timeline. In the end, I had to accept the default options that are built into the tool.

Relationship to Track and Coursework

I knew that I wanted my capstone project to combine New York City history and some element of resistance or activism. Initially I was developing a project around city community gardens and other reclaimed lands, although this area seemed to be over studied. I was starting to explore other options that were grounded in the same two basic areas when my classmate made the off-hand comment about Shavelson. This remark turned out to be fortuitous, as a Shavelson project offered the possibility of combining my coursework, personal, and professional interests.

This project is informed by my coursework in life writing, New York City history, activism & resistance, women’s history, and digital humanities. In addition to the courses required for the Digital Humanities track, other relevant courses include life writing and in New York City history and culture, and a great class titled Sociology of Resistance. From the life writing classes I came away with a renewed interest in writing and representing (or making otherwise visible) women’s lives, particularly the need to represent the complexities of women’s lives and experiences in that writing and representation. The New York City history and culture classes helped shape my understanding of the hows and whys of a large, vibrant, diverse city. This knowledge in turn helped me understand how Shavelson and those she worked with and for

fit into it. I am drawn to biographies of women who are outspoken and who defy societal conventions for behavior, and the Sociology of Resistance class offered a theoretical framing to understand what makes resistance possible, necessary, and successful.

My personal interests come into play because although I was raised in California, my father, grandparents, and great-grandparents are all New Yorkers, specifically Brooklynites. They were Russian Jewish immigrants who came to this country in the late 1800's and settled in Brighton Beach. When I first moved here ten years ago, my grandmother sent me a list of all of her addresses in Brooklyn and asked me to visit them and take photos for her. The photos sparked a series of reminiscences that animated most of my conversations with her, especially as her health declined, and she was always interested to hear how things had changed, and what Brooklyn was like now. This project offered a chance to explore the neighborhood and culture where she spent part of her childhood.

As a librarian, I love the research process and relished undertaking a project that I had little initial knowledge of, as it would afford me the opportunity to read and learn in several new-to-me areas, particularly labor and Communist Party history. Beyond the excitement of researching an unknown area, I am interested in how history and objects are curated in an online environment. Digital projects created by librarians and archivists are often simply archival material made available online. These types of projects leave the audience interpret the material themselves; they do not include supporting interpretive material. It is the interpretative aspect that I value in the projects that served as inspiration for this one, and it was important that I provide a similar user experience with this project. I enjoyed the curating and interpreting aspect, which is a step beyond my day-to-day work of helping people with the research process. It was

satisfying to be doing more than research or organizing material for other scholars, but doing that work for my own purposes.

Evaluation of Objectives

In my initial proposal, I set out four main components of the project:

1. A timeline of Shavelson's life & activism showcasing relevant primary source documents
2. Thematic essays drawing on Shavelson, and addressing her connection to broader issues
3. Historical background on key events or periods in the timeline to provide context and showcase additional primary source documents as necessary
4. References and further reading

The project as it stands now is a successful completion of items one, two, and four, with a partial completion of item three. The revision of item three is addressed in the Successes and Failures section. I conceived the timeline to be the primary element of the project, with the objective of highlighting the amount and variation of Shavelson's work after 1909. In this regard, it does well and provides an accounting of the length and breadth of Shavelson's life. The accompanying primary source objects and documents successfully tie Shavelson to specific events, and in particular, the material from the Tamiment Labor Archives provides a much-needed personal element. Having her membership cards, family photos, and postcards helps to represent Shavelson as a person, not just a disembodied actor in various events.

Successes and Failures

In my proposal, I was overly ambitious in the amount of content I thought I could produce during the semester. This over-ambition led to the two most obvious failures of the project: the scaling back of the non-timeline content. I had initially proposed four thematic essays, and in the end wrote only three. I completed only a few the short historical background

pieces (of item three on the list) that would offer users more context for Shavelson's life. The project is complete without more of these explanatory elements, but adding them in would offer a more robust user experience.

Another shortcoming of this project is structural, in that it was conceived as a documentary history rather than a biography. Because of the emphasis on exposing the various public-facing activities that Shavelson undertook, the project does not do a good job of conveying who she was as a person. As I consider the completed project, I think this missing aspect really stands out, especially as the timeline suggests that the family events were incidental to her other activities. Though unintended, the timeline thus relegates family to a lesser status within the narrative of a woman's life, when family was clearly important to Shavelson. I also wonder if the project has a hagiographic air. By not incorporating the idiosyncratic behavior, the times when the personal behavior is at complete odds with the professed public political view, does this project reinforce the idea of the one-dimensional woman? Does it do a disservice to Shavelson and to the idea of telling women's stories in general?

I believe I was successful, if not in demonstrating who Shavelson was as a person, at least providing food for thought about how much more she was involved in beyond the 1909 strike. I wanted to create a project that told a story through the objects, and I have done that, even if it only tells of one aspect of the story. The material in the timeline highlights Shavelson's personality and character traits: she was outspoken, determined, courageous, and committed to her causes. The timeline also shows that the same traits that proved useful to Shavelson as being a public agitator and organizer provided challenges to her relationships as a spouse and a parent.

Continuation of the Project

Overall, even though it is lighter in content than originally anticipated, I find that the project is successful in meeting the goals I set out for it, and I am happy to have it stay as it is. However, I would like to continue working on it, if only to refine and add some elements that I did not have time to complete, in particular the small background pieces on historical events. While the absence of these elements do not detract from the project, I think they are worth continuing to work on, as they add a level of context that would round out the project. After that, the project will be static.

As with most people, if I need a quick background or summary of information on a subject I am not acquainted with, I turn to Wikipedia. In the course of this project, I attempted to look in Wikipedia for information on a number of the people I came across. Shavelson has an entry, but many others do not. All of these people are women who were active in the labor, suffrage, or Communist movements of the 20th century and well deserve Wikipedia entries. While not a direct continuation of the project, a research-based expansion will be my writing new Wikipedia entries for Rose Nelson, Kate Gitlow, and Maud O'Farrell Swartz. Aside from the individuals who need entries, the United Council for Workingclass Housewives and the United Council for Workingclass Women both need entries. There are several other related entries that already exist but could use expansion and further references, most notably the All-America Anti-Imperialist League, also known as Anti-Imperialist League of the Americas, and the American League Against War and Fascism and it's later incarnation the American League for Peace and Democracy. In my research I found material relating to all these groups, including newspaper accounts and FBI files released through FOIA requests. Wikipedia is notoriously

male-dominated in both entries and editors, so my women-focused entries will be a way to make visible women's lives.

Conclusion

Although I had to scale back the amount of content created for the project, and even with its acknowledged incompleteness in addressing all aspects of Shavelson's life, the project overall is a success. I learned a lot about subjects I had no real knowledge of, I was able to do relevant archival research, and I utilized my existing technological skills to produce a cohesive and user-friendly website. This digital history project contributes to the public body of knowledge about Clara Lemlich Shavelson, and situates her work and action within the larger historic context while making her story and the associated history available to a wider, potentially non-scholarly audience. I am happy with the work I did on this project, and how it combines so many of my interests. It reflects the work I have done in the program, and leaves a path forward for future scholars.

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