# David Montgomery: A Biography

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David Montgomery, union organizer, political and civil rights activist, and well-known scholar of American labor history died suddenly on December 2, 2011. A retired Yale University Farnum Professor of History, he is equally well known for his publications and skill as a teacher as he was as an advocate for equality and for his tireless support for workers and trade unions. Through his published works and lectures—in English, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish—Montgomery's influence as a historian of workers' history and their struggles for equality and survival was felt by workers, students, and academics in several countries.

Early in his adult life, David Montgomery was very active in union and political organizing. His first jobs, following military service and college, were as a machinist. He was an active member of several local unions in the International Association of Machinists and the United Electrical Workers Union. He was the victim of political firings from several jobs and blacklisted during the McCarthy era in both New York City and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Born December 1, 1927, in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, David grew up in nearby Wayne as a summer farmhand and scholar-athlete at Haverford College. A drafted veteran in the US Army, he served at the Manhattan Project in Los Alamos until his discharge as a staff sergeant in 1947. After discharge, he completed his undergraduate education on the GI bill at Swarthmore in 1950, where he earned Highest Honors in Political Science and forty years later, in 1990, also received an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters.

Returning to the world of academia near the end of the McCarthy era, David received his MA in 1960 and PhD in 1962 in history from the University of Minnesota. His graduate thesis was the basis of his first book, *Beyond Equality, Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872*, published by Alfred A. Knopf in 1967. It became the first of six books and more than eighty-five articles and book chapters, which he published alone or with others. His last book was *Black Workers' Struggle for Equality in Birmingham* (University of Illinois Press, 2004).

With a reputation as a tireless organizer, David was a faculty supporter for the clerical and technical organizing strike at Yale University in 1984, a frequent antiwar speaker at rallies during the Vietnam era, and could always be seen walking picket lines both as a worker (American Safety Razor in 1954) and as a supporter.

His influence in other countries was evidenced by his appointment as Senior Lecturer, University of Warwick in England (1967–1969); his Fulbright Lecturer appointment at the State University of Campinas, Brazil

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(1986); his time as the Harmsworth Professor of American History, Oxford University, (1986–1987) and John Adams Professor of American Studies, American Institute University of Amsterdam.

It was his role of enthusiastic teacher that made him popular both at the University of Pittsburgh (Distinguished Teaching Award, 1971), where he ended his tenure as chairman of the history department; at Yale (Sidonie Miskimin Clauss Prize for Teaching Excellence, 1982), and with the labor movement (John R. Commerford Labor Education Award, New York State Labor History Association). His classes "American Labor in the Twentieth Century" and "The Civil War" still warranted mention in the student *Yale Herald* as he neared retirement in 1997. As recently as September 2011, David gave a paper on "Working People's Responses to Past Depressions" at Georgetown University, which he had agreed to publish as a monograph in 2012.

David Montgomery is survived by his wife of fifty-nine years, Martel, his two sons Claude (married to Diane) and Ed (married to Kari) and five grandchildren: Doug, Nick, Elizabeth, Lindsey, and EJ.

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