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“RED DEVIL RADICALS”: THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF AMERICANISM IN
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
I. The Origins of Ideology in the Origins of Words.....	5
II. American Nationalism, 1776-1865.....	10
III. A Nation Confronts Industrialism, 1865-1900.....	22
IV. Americanism Becomes Official, 1900-1920.....	31
Chapter 2: Chicago as an Ideological Center of Industrialism.....	36
I. Chicago Emerges.....	38
II. New Industry Brings New People.....	51
III. Toward Class Consciousness.....	55
IV. The Ravages of Fire.....	72
Chapter 3: Chicagoans Face a New Threat, 1871-1877.....	83
I. The Shadow of the Paris Commune.....	86
II. Paris as Seen From Chicago.....	95
III. The Shadow of Economic Crisis.....	102
IV. The Shadow of the Great Strike.....	114
Chapter 4: Ideology Precipitates Bloodshed, 1880-1889.....	131
I. Trouble at the Reaper Works.....	136
II. Anarchy Reigns.....	148
III. Reactions to Haymarket in Chicago and Beyond.....	163
IV. True Americans.....	174

Table of Contents, cont.

Chapter 5: Un-Americanism Becomes Institutionalized, 1890-1919.....181

 I. Trouble in a Model Community.....183

 II. Teaching “Americanism” to the Teachers.....201

 III. Americanism Goes to War.....212

Chapter 6: Conclusion.....238

Bibliography.....256

Abstract

In the midst of the struggle to reunite and reconstruct the nation following the Civil War, citizens of the United States also began to renegotiate what it meant to truly be an American. As the nation attempted to recover from this destructive and deadly war, some Americans found new sources of fear. While appeals to race hatred outlived the war, many people on both sides of the conflict looked with apprehension at the waves of immigrants coming to work in the industrializing nation. The leaders prominent in this historical account were searching for a unity that would paper over rather than resolve differences over slavery and the fundamental questions of human rights, which now flowed from its demise. These Americans ventured to define that which could now be rendered politically “unthinkable” as simultaneously “Un-American.” Beginning in the 1870s, this term takes on a new meaning and significance that will last well into the twentieth century, as un-American is inextricably linked to the terms radical, socialist, or communist. The ways in which some Americans chose to react to events such as the Paris Commune in 1871, railroad strikes and general strikes in 1877, and the Haymarket affair in 1886, was used to create a new nationalism in the United States.

“Americanism” was conceived in opposition to the Paris Commune and was consistently developed and applied to fight against organized labor and various political ideologies from 1871 to 1919. By the end of the First World War, “Americanism” had become institutionalized through national and legislation. This study examines that process of ideological invention and

institutionalization at exceptionally close range by looking at its origins and trajectory in the heartland city of American industrialism, Chicago. From this local knowledge we gain the keys to a larger story: how an enduring and politically reactionary form of nationalism known still as “Americanism” came to be.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Imagined Communities

In his classic study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as an “imagined political community,” particularly conceived as its inhabitants sharing a deep comradeship that makes fraternity and loyalty possible.¹ In writing about the events that deepen this sense of solidarity among people of specific geographic spaces, Anderson argues that the convergence of capitalism and print technology created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, setting the stage for the modern nation.² These new states contained genuine nationalist enthusiasm, but also underwent a “systematic...instilling of nationalist ideology” through such forms as the mass media and the educational system.³ Once imagined and created, what, then, creates a sense of patriotism or attachment to the nation of their imaginations? According to Anderson, in the 19th centuries, when experiencing the new nation was no longer possible, a new consciousness arose, eliciting imagined bonds of fraternity among inhabitants of nations.⁴

This dissertation explores one particular expression of this political emotion, a variety of American nationalism known as “Americanism.”

Americanism can be broadly defined as loyalty to certain conceptions of

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

² *Ibid.*, 46.

³ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

democracy and capitalism that are imagined by their advocates to be the only constructions of reality suitable for organizing any society, not just their own. Although the rituals of American political cultural pay routinized homage to the value of intellectual and religious liberty, historian Michael Kammen finds much intolerance for political ideas that are “outside the mainstream,” even if they are held by a professedly and manifestly “loyal opposition.”⁵

This study examines the origins of “Americanism” in the late 19th century, and how its proponents capitalized on the fear caused by foreign communist regimes, American labor uprisings, and supposed “radical” movements in the United States to forge this, at times, violent nationalism that itself disregarded American liberty and freedom of speech. This form of nationalism is well-known to Americans, especially those who lived through the Cold War, not to mention the years since the September 11, 2001 attacks initiated a “war on terror.” Though the idea may have been clearly understood by the mid-20th century, this dissertation moves the history of Americanism back much further than the Second Red Scare, which most conspicuously starred Senator Joseph McCarthy, and even further back than the so-called First Red Scare that followed World War I. By examining the rise of labor movement and its ensuing conflicts in the later years of the American chapter of the industrial revolution, we find Americanism to be a much older concept with a distinct and influential group of advocates.

⁵ Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 5; 14.

In the midst of struggle to reunite and reconstruct the nation following the Civil War, citizens of the United States also began to renegotiate what it meant to truly be an American. As historian Peter Parish argues, Americans became bound together by a shared belief in common ideals;⁶ however, in the late nineteenth century, these ideals were questioned, at times, by immigrants whose ideas seemed as foreign as their passports, also by native born Americans (such as Eugene Debs and Jane Addams), who saw a new and exceptionally brutal industrial system threatening not only the material and physical well being of workers, but their power as citizens of a democratic republic dedicated to the sovereignty of the people.

As the nation attempted to recover from a destructive and deadly war, some Americans led a movement to inspire fear. Rich and powerful, these citizens were well placed to promote their ideas, rendering those they labeled “others” as tainted and their ideas “unthinkable” and “un-American.” Most often the proponents of Americanism had a vested interest in a new industrial order built on mass production and standardization, with laboring reduced to a routine that was both boring and dangerous. In this context, workers were interchangeable, without any other skill or value. The promotion of “Americanism,” therefore, can be seen as a response to worker protests against the new rules of life and work that were being imposed from the top. I agree with Robert J. Goldstein that a more accurate chronology of American “Red Scares” begins in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. In these years

⁶ Peter Parish, *The North and the Nation in the Era of the Civil War* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), xiii-xiv.

large numbers of Americans were made to react to events such as the Paris Commune in 1871, railroad strikes and general strikes in 1877, and the Haymarket affair in 1886, began the institutionalization of “Americanism.”⁷

This new identity, largely centered on anti-radicalism, was firmly in place by the time the nation entered the Great War in 1917, as evidenced by the creation and actions of the American Protective League, and the so-called first Red Scare that followed the war. Historians have examined many of these events, while others have been largely ignored; no historian, however, as attempted to synthesize the reaction to these events to reveal how Americanism came to be defined. This study proposes to do just that. It is my

⁷ Robert J. Goldstein, *Political repression in modern America from 1870 to the present* (New York: Schenkman Publishing Co, Inc., 1978). Goldstein labels the first period, 1873-78, as the first major “red scare” in the United States. He lists at least five major events that contributed to this first red scare: the Paris Commune of 1871 caused severe fright among conservatives; prior to the 1873 depression, farmers and workers became increasingly organized, posing challenges to the development of big business; during the 1873 depression itself, workers and farmers demanded public works and relief; Marxist parties appeared for the first time in the United States; and finally the Molly Maguire affair and the railroad strikes of 1877 confirmed the growing suspicion that American labor was radical, violent, and subversive (see pages 23-24). For further reading on the Paris Commune of 1871, please see: Philip Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). For readings on the railroad strikes of 1877, please see: Robert V. Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1959); David O. Stowell, *Streets, railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Black, Paul V. “Experiment in Bureaucratic Centralization: Employee Blacklisting on the Burlington Railroad, 1877-1892,” *The Business History Review* 51:4 (Winter, 1977), 444-459; Foner, Philip Sheldon. *The Great Labor Uprising of 1877*. New York: Monad Press, 1977; Mackey, Philip English, “Law and Order, 1877: Philadelphia’s Response to the Railroad Riots,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 96:2 (April, 1972), 183-202; and Stearns, Peter N. “Not Only the Ruling Classes to Overcome, but Also the So-Called Mob: Class, Skill and Community in the St. Louis General Strike of 1877,” *Journal of Social History* 19:2 (Winter, 1985), 213-39.

contention that “Americanism” was conceived in opposition to the Paris Commune and was consistently developed and applied to fight against organized labor and various political ideologies from 1871 to 1919, becoming institutionalized through federal legislation by the First World War. A local setting can provide the most appropriate and effective laboratory for studying these conceptions of Americanism; therefore, because of its direct links to many of the events surrounding these debates, I have chosen to examine the history of Chicago and how its citizens helped to forge this new American nationalism.

I. The Origins of Ideology in the Origins of Words

We must begin by defining what makes Americanism historically important. It originates as a form of nationalism. Nationalism refers to a cluster of ideas that find strength by combining two emotionally powerful human motivations: the modern human’s desire for self-determination and a sense of belonging to an entity larger than one’s self. There is nothing inherently destructive in this combination, but there is no denying that it has, at times, been used to destroy.

Historians have long debated over how this identity, necessary for achieving self-determination, is formed. These scholars have not only questioned the creation of nations, but more importantly the ways in which citizens are inspired to become loyal to that new nation.

Prior to an analysis of these works, it is helpful to understand the importance of certain key words in American politics, and how those helped to shape American identity. Historian Daniel T. Rodgers, in his *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence*, writes about the power of words in the American political sphere. As he so eloquently states:

Political words do more than mystify; they inspire, persuade, enrage, mobilize. With words, minds are changed, votes acquired, enemies labeled, alliances secured, unpopular programs made palatable, the status quo suddenly unveiled as unjust and intolerable.⁸

Rodgers argues that through words, the masses have engaged in revolutions and crusades, and through this political rhetoric, the most potent forces were wheeled into motion.⁹ Americans rallied behind political words, perhaps more importantly, against words such as *radical*, *socialist*, *communist*, and especially *un-American*. The mobilization against these words, and their political implications, encouraged the conceptualization of the new Americanism in the late 19th century.

Welsh academic Raymond Williams discusses the value of words and their effects on culture in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, in which he argues that the vocabulary we share with others significantly affects the central processes of our common life, binding people together with certain ways of viewing culture and society.¹⁰ Though he wrote from the linguistic and

⁸ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 12-13.

cultural standpoint of Great Britain, we can gain important insights from his works. Most valuable to this study are his interpretations of the words *nationalism, radical, socialist, and communist*.

According to Williams, the term “nation” has been in common usage since the late 13th century, originally most closely associated with the idea of blood or race,¹¹ rather than a politically organized grouping. In the modern era, the latter definition is predominant, although some obvious overlap certainly exists. Williams argues nationalist movements, and nationalism, continued to have racial elements, and inherent in the terms were the complexities of the idea of “native.”¹² The history of nationalism in the United States, therefore, is further complicated as Americans are not connected by a shared sense of breed or race. What did connect Americans into forming this sense of “nation” will be discussed later in this chapter.

The term “radical” was used as early as the late 18th century, most commonly referring to the ideas of “radical reform.”¹³ By the middle of the 19th century, the term was often used in conjunction with socialist sympathies, however, Williams claims by the latter half of the century, clear distinctions between radicals and socialists existed. The use of “radical” was complicated by the 20th century, especially in the United States where it was re-adopted in the 1950s and is generally equivalent to the terms socialist or revolutionary;

¹¹ The term is derived from the Latin, meaning breed or race. Williams, *Keywords*, 178.

¹² *Ibid.*, 179.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 209.

elsewhere, however, rigorous and far-reaching reforms are often referred to as “radical.”¹⁴

According to Williams, the term “socialist” emerged in the early 19th century as a philosophical and political description. In the beginning, socialist had two very different meanings. The first referred to the continuation of liberalism, the propagation of the ideas of political freedom, and the cessation of formal inequalities and social injustices. The second use of the term, while still political in nature, described those who believed real freedom could not be achieved, or social inequalities ended, unless the society based on private ownership of land was abolished and replaced by one based on social ownership and control.¹⁵ The resulting controversy, Williams states, between different groups or political ideas all labeling themselves “socialist” was long, intricate, and bitter.¹⁶

The use of the term “communist” has a very different history. While the best known origins of the term can be traced to the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Richard Engels in 1848, the term was already in use, especially in England. In 1841, Goodwyn Barmy founded the London Communist Propaganda Society, a Christian utopian socialist society dedicated to a type of “holy communitive life.”¹⁷ Williams argues these competing definitions of communism served to complicate the word, leading to many misunderstandings in the 19th and 20th centuries, especially as the English

¹⁴ Ibid., 210.

¹⁵ Ibid., 239.

¹⁶ Ibid., 239.

¹⁷ Ibid., 63.

language associated the term with “community” and with experiments in common property. To add further confusion, as Marx and Engels later argued, they could not call the *Communist Manifesto* a “socialist manifesto,” because one was considered a working class movement, the other a more respected middle class movement. While communist was used in the modern sense after the example of the Paris Commune of 1871, socialist was still the most acceptable term for these groups until the early 20th century and the Russian Revolution. When the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party (also known as the Bolshevik Party) renamed itself the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1918, the members reconstituted the term, and the 20th century distinctions can be traced to this point.¹⁸ As we will see in the primary sources used in this study, Americans freely used the terms radical, socialist, and communist interchangeably, identifying no notable differences between the terms, and the terms adopt different connotations in the 20th century.

These ideas have been at the center not only of European, but also of world history, and yet, they have a distinctive history in the United States. The United States was certainly not spared a brutal regime of industrialization, replete with bloody strikes and much death. American workers, both immigrant and native born, organized themselves to fight for their rights as workers. Despite this, efforts to make any type of collective action be seen as “un-American” were especially effective. This study will turn to Chicago to examine why these actions, and their accompanying concepts, occurred.

¹⁸ Ibid., 65, 241.

II. American Nationalism, 1776-1865

As we turn to the historical experience of the United States, historian Reynolds J. Scott-Childress writes that for much of this nation's first century the dominant sense of American nationalism was something rooted in and "forged in the American Revolution, polished in the Constitution, and thereafter simply went through various periods of greater or lesser luster."¹⁹ Americans in the nineteenth century continuously renegotiated the terms of both their loyalty and their identity.²⁰ Many scholars look to unifying factors in the early nineteenth century, such as the Louisiana Purchase or the War of 1812, while others focus on the regional loyalties that tore the nation apart in the Civil War.

Any analysis of American nationalism must begin with classic works on the subject. In one of the most important works on the subject, *Roots of American Loyalty* (1946), Merle Curti explores how pride and love of country evolved in this heterogeneous society. Curti focuses most heavily on the one hundred years following the American Revolution, although he does go beyond the nineteenth century to examine American patriotism through two world wars.

Long before such groundbreaking works as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, or even Trish Loughran's *Republic in Print*, Curti utilizes

¹⁹ Reynolds J. Scott-Childress, ed., *Race and the Production of Modern American Nationalism* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999), viii.

²⁰ For discussions on nationalism in general, please see: Kohn, Hans, *The Idea of Nationalism: A Study in its Origins and Background* (New York: Macmillan, 1944); Gellner, Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); and Hobsbawm, E.J., *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

evidence from contemporary print culture to prove his thesis, including letters, schoolbooks, Fourth of July orations, dime novels, pamphlets, and periodicals. He argues that loyalty to the nation could be found in the devotion to the land itself, to the glories of its past and promise of its future, and the conception of Americans as being a unique people.²¹

Another work indispensable to understanding American nationalism in the early Republic is George Dangerfield's *The Awakening of American Nationalism, 1815-1828*, published in 1965. Dangerfield investigates two competing nationalisms in the early Republic, the economic nationalism espoused by Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams, and the democratic nationalism exemplified by partisans of Andrew Jackson.²² He argues that the nationalism of Clay's "American system" essentially celebrated the positive possibilities of the "market revolution." It failed, however, to satisfy those who wished to curb privilege and eliminate elites.²³ The War of 1812 occupies a central place in Dangerfield's narrative. Dangerfield contends that after the War of 1812, the average American had a renewed sense of a common national experience, real or imagined, with which he could face the future.²⁴

According to Dangerfield, this new nationalist emotion, while calling to something deeper than the creation of a thriving market economy, was influenced in important ways by economics. Much of the emotive power of

²¹ Please see: Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print culture in the age of U.S. nation building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²² George Dangerfield, *The Awakening of American Nationalism, 1815-1828* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), xi.

²³ *Ibid.*, xii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

national pride was expressed in terms of an economic and political rivalry with Great Britain. This economic nationalism served Americans very well in the beginning, particularly in regard to the demand for cotton following the War of 1812. Within a few years, Americans would experience one of the recessive and even oppressive tendencies: the martialing of national anger in to roust out scapegoats when times grow lean and economic hardship prevails. Dangerfield shows how nationalism turned ugly in 1819 as the price of cotton fell dramatically. At 32 ½ cents per pound, cotton profits were a “stimulus to the nationalist optimism of postwar America.”²⁵ That same year, however, the price of cotton fell dramatically, to only 14.3 cents per pound. At this price, optimism vanished with alarming speed. Americans quickly searched for a scapegoat, turning their attention to the most outstanding of the country’s nationalist expedients – the Second Bank of the United States. Dangerfield argues that the “visible and audible nationalism of the immediate postwar years, the nationalism which had made men think and act more like Americans, was to some extent a response to this delusive but exhilarating process.”²⁶

In the panic of 1819, however, citizens began to realize that their national identity, at least in terms of economics, was marred by fraud, corruption, and debt. Therefore, as Dangerfield suggests, a new kind of nationalism was born out of the panic of 1819 – Jacksonian, democratic nationalism. Those who adhered to this new nationalism did not always agree. As Dangerfield writes, many believed that democratic nationalism was

²⁵ Ibid., 74-75.

²⁶ Ibid., 89.

introspective, individualistic, egalitarian, and required that every public servant should speak its confusing language. Others, however, including John Quincy Adams, disagreed, contending that the nation would advance into the future upon the restrained ideas of conservation, careful stewardship, controlled expansion, rational planning.²⁷ Underlying this disagreement was a greater sense of unity: the concept of democratic nationalism and its emphasis on individuality. Dangerfield concludes that, “one could conceive of the nation, if one so desired, as a nation of individuals, to whom the winds of economic distress had not been tempered; and one could maintain that the future growth of the nation was to some extent a matter of the fostering and release of individual enterprise.”²⁸

Just as Dangerfield points out that nationalism is seen in the competition between varieties of idealistic vision, more recent historians have gone further to show that a unifying nationalism need not preclude fractious political disagreement.

In 1997, David Waldstreicher published *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820*. In this work, he examines the ambiguous middle ground of parades, spectatorship, and politics, arguing that they remain the site of national identity. Waldstreicher contends that through these festivities, Americans during the early Republic practiced a divisive politics and a unifying nationalism at the same time. Adding more layers to the understanding of nationalism, the author suggests that American nationalism is

²⁷ Ibid., 268.

²⁸ Ibid., 269.

unique; it is not reactionary or progressive, as is the case in other countries, its “political meanings are multiple, even contradictory, and can be shown to have changed radically over time.”²⁹

Previous scholars have made regionalism and nationalism mutually exclusive; however, Waldstreicher contends this is not the case, even though he admits that the “emergence of nationalist versions of regionalism also foreshadows the modes of sectional protest that shaped American politics through the Civil War.”³⁰ He argues that regionalism actually contributed to nationalism, even if the ways in which it was accomplished weakened the federal union.³¹

As early forms of public schooling took root, American nationalism, Francois Furstenberg argues, came to be organized around canonical texts of the nation’s founding.³² In his *In the Name of the Father*, Furstenberg realizes that the term “civic texts” covers a broad spectrum, and divides this print culture into two categories: popular and canonical. In the first grouping, the author included schoolbooks, political pamphlets, almanacs, and newspapers, claiming that these publications, “promoted a set of nationalist icons, created a

²⁹ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American Culture, 1997), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 247-48.

³¹ For more works regarding competing American nationalisms, please see: Kastor, Peter. J. *The Nation’s Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004; Kersh, Rogan. *Dreams of a More Perfect Union*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001; Allen, Thomas. *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.

³² Francois Furstenberg, *In the Name of the Father: Washington’s legacy, slavery, and the making of a nation* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 20-23.

nationalist canon, and helped popularize certain major figures and major texts.”³³ Into the second category, Furstenberg places important government documents, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Washington’s farewell address. Additionally, he argues, these canonical texts were often the subject of popular texts, and fomented nationalism, not because each reader agreed on their interpretations, but simply because they attempted to understand them at all.

While this appears to be a straightforward argument, Furstenberg complicates the picture by commenting on the ways in which Americans in the early 19th century attempted to reconcile citizenship and slavery in the new democratic society. The author claims these canonical texts present both citizenship and slavery as a choice. Americans chose to fight for their freedom, and in so doing earned their right to liberty and citizenship; in contrast, the documents claimed that slaves chose not to fight for their own freedom, and therefore deserved their status. By shifting the conception of freedom to individual choice, and making slaves themselves morally responsible for their own captivity, Americans were able, through canonical texts, to forge a nationalism that simultaneously consented to democracy and slavery.³⁴

Furstenberg realizes, however, that these interpretations of nationalism, consent, and slavery did not result in a unified national identity. This discrepancy is most evident in Furstenberg’s discussion of George Washington, his idea of slavery, and how both abolitionists and slaveholders were able to

³³ Ibid., 233.

³⁴ Ibid., 20-23.

look to him as the ultimate example. Upon his death, northern abolitionists particularly latched on to Washington's last will and testament, in which he freed the 150 or so slaves under his direct control. While he did not free these slaves immediately, only on the death of his wife Martha would they be truly free, abolitionists looked at Washington as the emancipator, and believed that in time the entire nation itself would follow in their father's footsteps and abolish slavery. At the same time, slaveholders read popular accounts of Washington's death, and purchased paintings depicting the scene, regarding him as the benevolent patriarch, a loving father figure to his slaves.³⁵ Therefore, while it may appear that the canonical texts formed a unified nationalism, Furstenberg argues that they actually led to the formation of distinct sectional identities.³⁶

To these sectional identities, we must now turn. As slavery became a far more economically important institution over the first half of the nineteenth century, it became, for leading Southern ideologists, a reason to subtract themselves from the United States. As the previous authors have discussed, prior to the Civil War, competing concepts of what it meant to be an American existed in both the South and the North. Scholars have most often focused on Southern nationalism, as after all, Southern states seceded from the Union. One of the more influential works on this subject is *The Idea of a Southern Nation:*

³⁵ Ibid., 83-97.

³⁶ For more works on print culture in the nineteenth century, please see: Martin Bruckner, "Lessons in Geography: Maps, Spellers, and Other Grammars of Nationalism in the Early Republic," *American Quarterly* 51:2 (1999); and Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print culture in the age of U.S. nation building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860, by John McCardell.

To relate the differing conceptions of identity in antebellum America, the author begins his work by quoting Senator James Chestnut of South Carolina, who stated, "There is a conflict, a conflict of ideas irreconcilable. The opinions of those who give life and energy to the antislavery party touching government, society, the relations of man to both and to each other, are radical and revolutionary. If these prevail, there can be no peace, North or South."³⁷

McCardell contends that Northerners and Southerners should not be considered different people, that their intellectual, political and economic beliefs were generally shared, save for one important issue – slavery. The institution of slavery, he argues, came to represent for Southerners an "ideological configuration – a plantation economy, a style of life, and a pattern of race relations – which made Southerners believe they constituted a separate nation."³⁸

McCardell carefully relates the differences between sectionalism (or regionalism), nationalism, and Southern nationalism. Much like Waldstreicher, McCardell writes that the first two are not mutually exclusive; sectionalism and nationalism can coexist. Southern nationalism, however, emerged when Southerners began to perceive that their shared interests were no longer compatible with the rest of the United States. The conception of the South as separate did not begin, the author asserts, until the nullification crisis of the

³⁷ John McCardell, *The Idea of a Southern Nation: Southern Nationalists and Southern Nationalism, 1830-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 3.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

1830s, and eventually culminated in 1861 with the secession of South Carolina.³⁹

Drew Gilpin Faust also makes an especially important contribution by examining the lasting impact of the Civil War on Southern identity. She writes that in the “context of secession and war, nationalism became synonymous with the effort by leaders of this struggle for independence to articulate an ideology appropriate to their ends.”⁴⁰ According to Faust, wartime Southern ideology has been largely ignored, with some historians arguing that Confederate nationalism was not genuine because Southerners had to build their own culture. To these arguments, Faust counters that an examination of nationalism in other countries reveals that the creation of culture was almost always necessary and a self-conscious project. She continues the discourse further by suggesting that nationalism is a process, a “dynamic of ideas and social realities that can, under the proper circumstances, unite and legitimate a people in what they regard as reasoned public action.”⁴¹ The effort to create this Confederate identity reveals a record of Southerners struggling to define themselves to each other.

Faust claims that music, symbols, flags, ceremonies, monuments, poems, and relics contributed immensely to Southern nationalism. Confederates looked to language, race, and nationalist movements such as the French

³⁹ Ibid., 4-6.

⁴⁰ Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 6.

Revolution, to help define the South; however, Faust contends that Southerners most often identified with the American independence movement.

Confederates usually argued that their efforts were simply a continuation of the struggle that began in 1776. Southerners believed they had been “betrayed by Yankees who had perverted the true meaning of the Constitution, the revolutionary heritage could be preserved only by secession. Southerners portrayed their independence as the fulfillment of American nationalism.”⁴²

The evidence of this image abounded in the South, Faust asserts, as the figure of Virginian George Washington adorned the Confederate national seal, and Jefferson Davis chose to be inaugurated on Washington’s birthday at the base of a statue in his honor. Popular ballads hailed Davis as a second Washington. Finally, Faust argues that by identifying with the Revolution, Confederates hoped not just to cast themselves as equivalent to the thirteen original states, they intended to claim American nationalism as their own, creating for themselves at once an identity and a history.⁴³

It is especially important to have a detailed understanding of Southern nationalism if we are to grasp the reactionary power and potential of “Americanism.” Though not a southern creation, Southern political leaders who resisted the pull of modernization, even through the present day, have

⁴² Ibid., 14.

⁴³ Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 14.

For more works on Southern Nationalism, please see: Anne S. Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel-Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

found in Americanism a perspective and a language to which they feel a special affinity.

If Southern nationalism existed, as the above authors claim, did Northern nationalism? While not written about copious amounts, historians certainly recognize a distinct nationalism in the antebellum North. One of the most respected scholars of Northern nationalism was Peter Parish, a British historian of the American Civil War who died suddenly in May 2002. After his death, a collection of his works was published entitled *The North and the Nation in the Era of the Civil War*. Northern nationalism, Parish claimed, was an assertive and self-confident culture that came, with the Northern victory in the Civil War, to impose its vision of the American republic on the nation as a whole.⁴⁴ The North was characterized by Victorian reformism and Protestant piety. This identity was also bound up in the process of politics, elections, and public opinion. The essays in this collection suggest that the conflict between Southern and Northern identities in the mid-nineteenth century American nationalism was an aberration; Parish claimed that the “North hijacked American nationalism, and changed its character dramatically; in reply, the South felt obliged to cling to its conception of the true American national faith by converting into Southern nationalism.”⁴⁵

Daniel T. Rodgers takes this point further when he explores the resonances contained for Americans in the word “nation” during the Civil War. Northern war propaganda resonated with the ideas of loyalty, union, and most

⁴⁴Parish, *The North and the Nation in the Era of the Civil War*, xiii-xiv.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xiii.

importantly, with the word “nation.”⁴⁶ Three months prior to the start of the war, Henry Bellows of New York spoke about the United States being more than an amalgamation of separate communities that could lose its entire identity with one election; instead, he asserted, “It is a Nation.”⁴⁷ Even Abraham Lincoln used the term extensively in his speeches, referring to the “nation” five times in his Gettysburg Address. This very idea of nationalism, Rodgers claims, held the North together against the ever-changing tide of war, weariness, and anger.⁴⁸

III. A Nation Confronts Industrialism, 1865-1900

During the late antebellum period, these differing identities conflicted to the point of destruction and war; however, while both Southern and Northern nationalisms existed, so too did the idea that a shared tie existed between North and South. One part of this bond was a belief in the uniqueness or “exceptionalism” of the United States in world history. Though race has remained a source of division and unequal treatment long after the end of slavery as a constitutionally sanctioned practice, Americans across regions also cherished their republican form of government.

⁴⁶ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 137.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

For more works on Northern Nationalism, please see: Susan-Mary Grant, *North over South: Northern Nationalism and American Identity in the Antebellum Era* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2000); and Melinda Lawson, *Patriot Fires: forging a new American nationalism in the Civil War North* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

Between 1870 and 1919, the corporate elite offered the idea of “Americanism” as a mechanism for preserving an exceptional republic. The entirety of this dissertation is devoted to the study of how and why a cluster of ideas was created to carry the banner of “Americanism.” One of the crucible issues which provoked some leaders to create “Americanism” was a fear that an original American identity was being washed away by immigrants who worked in the nations factories and harbored ideas alien to the notion of a relationship between rights and the necessity to work. In *Strangers in the Land*, John Higham argues that Americans in the late nineteenth century harbored three fears: European religion, European radicals, and European races.⁴⁹ Writing at a high point in the Cold War (and five years before Americans elected John F. Kennedy as their first Catholic president), Higham finds that anti-Catholic and anti-radical ideas were firmly entrenched in American culture by the 1880s, and in turn, inspired anti-immigrant sentiments.

This nativism was born out of the unprecedented wave of strikes, mass boycotts, and labor upheaval of 1886; thus, both the anti-radical and anti-immigrant strains of nationalism became inextricably tied together.⁵⁰ Higham quotes the nativists, who believed, “Anarchy is a ‘blood disease’ from which the English have never suffered.”⁵¹

As documented by Higham, nativism decreased in fervor at the turn of the century, but returned with a vengeance in 1914. In that year, Higham

⁴⁹ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 53.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 138.

claims that nativism “displayed symptoms of hysteria and violence that had been rare or non-existent since the 1890s.”⁵² Domestic problems, not the start of the war in Europe, caused this new outbreak of nativism. Higham continues to explore the war years, when Germans fell victim to the charge of disloyalty – the gravest sin in the morality of nationalism, and the ensuing first red scare.⁵³ Even though the violence against communism ended rather abruptly in 1920, Higham argues that this panic was only the beginning. Anti-foreign outbreaks erupted in the 1920, by economic depression and new waves of immigration. Organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan, and new labels, such as “100 percent Americanism,” were giving nativists new life and considerable political power. Their stance on immigrants culminated in the restrictive Immigration Act of 1924. Higham reiterates that “pre-1914 traditions supplied the massive roots of that hysteria; post-1919 conditions provided fertile soil for a new season of growth; but 100 per cent Americanism was the force that gave it abundant life.”⁵⁴

While the main argument of *Strangers in the Land* is that anti-immigrant nationalism survived, of special importance here is what Higham writes about anti-radicalism. He claims what set these ideas apart from a more racial nativism is the declaration of what Americans were not, rather than what they

⁵² Ibid., 183.

⁵³ Ibid., 196.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 268.

were or what they should be; more clearly stated, anti-radicals attempted to define the nation's enemies instead of its own character.⁵⁵

According to Higham, the fear of radicalism began as early as the 1790s. In the beginning Americans did not view revolutions with a sense of foreboding; in fact, they generally applauded the liberal revolutions occurring in Europe and Latin American in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Nevertheless, Higham argues that many Americans held very different views toward revolutions, as their own largely “involved relatively little political or social transformation.”⁵⁶ He asserts Revolutionary leaders endeavored to perfect the existing society, not destroy it and build a new one in its place. In a perhaps controversial argument, Higham claims the “spirit of ‘76” was a conservative movement, vastly different from the more radical foreign revolutions.

In the 1870s, with Marxism and socialism spreading through Europe, and the scare of the Paris Commune in 1871, the ideas of “revolution” took on new significance. Again, Higham highlights two strains of thought: Americans associated class conflict and labor unrest with foreign agitators, while simultaneously few seriously believed insurrectionary immigrants could endanger American institutions.⁵⁷ He follows anti-radicalism through World War I, claiming attacks on radicals were interwoven with anti-German hysteria. Socialists, and frequently members of the Industrial Workers of the World

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 31, 33.

(I.W.W.) were horsewhipped, arrested, and silenced during the war.⁵⁸ Higham argues, however, that this anti-radical nationalism collapsed by 1920, replaced by Anglo-Saxonism and anti-Catholicism.⁵⁹

Higham's study ends in the 1920s, with the enactment of the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924. He argues that the nation recoiled from the seeming excesses of anti-radicalism in favor of a more sweeping anti-immigrant nativism, complete with its corresponding federal legislation. The political history of the twentieth century should reinforce our sense that "Americanism," though promoted by nativists, does not need immigration to have political power and consequences. It has also inspired me to look back, study, and attempt to identify more clearly the degree to which bare-knuckled economic conflict motivated the creation and institutionalization of "Americanism." Nativist racism was given substance, form, and character because its advocates were able to label strikers and left wing political leaders (such as Eugene Debs) as un-American even if, as in the case of Debs, they had been born and raised in the nation's heartland.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 219.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 266. For more works by John Higham, please see "The Mind of a Nativist," *American Quarterly* 4:1 (Spring, 1952), 16-24; "Origins of Immigration Restriction, 1882-1897: A Social Analysis," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39:1 (June, 1952), 77-88; *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America*. Revised Edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984; "Another Look at Nativism," *The Catholic Historical Review* 44:2 (July, 1958), 147-158; "The Problem of Assimilation in the United States," in *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History*, edited by Jon Gjerde. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998 ;and "Instead of a Sequel, or, How I Lost My Subject," in *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, edited by Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999.

Many historians have continued to build upon Higham's ambitious and rigorous analysis. Of particular importance here is David H. Bennett's *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History*.⁶⁰ In this monograph, Bennett focuses on nativism on the political right, going back to the Know Nothings and extending up to the Klan of the 1920s, focusing on religious and ideological nativism, in direct contrast to Higham's works, which clearly center on the anti-immigrant trends. Bennett suggests that after World War II, this traditional nativism was no longer viable; what took its place, he contends, was a fear of communism. It appears, however, that he does not link the anti-communism of the Cold War era to the anti-radical nativism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶¹

IV. Is American Populism Reactionary?

While this dissertation is primarily a study of the ideologists who created and promoted "Americanism," I must contend with the substantial evidence that their vision of an "imagined community" under threat had

⁶⁰ For more works on nativism, please see: Gerstle, Gary. *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001; Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2000; Portes, Alejandro and Rubén G. Rumbaut. *Immigrant America: A Portrait*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; Reimers, David. *Still the Golden Door: The Third World Comes to America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1975, and *Unwelcome Strangers: American Identity and the Turn Against Immigration*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998; and Scott-Childress, Reynolds J. ed., *Race and the Production of Modern American Nationalism*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1999.

⁶¹ For a consideration of American nationalism in the post-September 11, 2001 world, please see: Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004).

popular appeal. What does this history tell us about the nature of American populism? According to Michael Kazin, the most basic definition of populism is that of a language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as an honorable assemblage not bounded by class. Along with this inclusive sense, “populists,” according to Kazin, also tend to view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter.⁶² For Kazin, populists are part of the large middle class – neither destitute nor privileged – the ordinary workingmen, yeoman farmers, urban craftsmen, native-born factory workers, and home-owners struggling to pay their taxes.⁶³

Kazin acknowledges two problems in attempting to define populism. The first is that many historians have a strict definition of Populism – a grassroots movement of the 1880s among farmers in the South and West that dissolved during the crisis of the 1890s. This is the only movement, he claims, to deserve the title Populist, with a capital “P.”⁶⁴

The other problem, Kazin contends, is that many journalists have developed a habit of branding as “populist” anything that captures the volatile tastes of the public; therefore, everything from Bruce Springsteen to Rush Limbaugh could be labeled “populist.”⁶⁵ Neither definition satisfied Kazin. He argues that to only label as populist the People’s Party of the late 19th century is to neglect a potent tradition to which later insurgents added their own

⁶² Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 1.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

economic dread and missionary zeal. Doing so leads to ahistorical debates about who is or who is not a true populist.⁶⁶

During the 1950s, and 1960s as Senator Joseph McCarthy personified populism to many academics and liberal intellectuals, historians such as Richard Hofstadter and Michael Rogin seemed to forget that economic dread and missionary zeal turn both left and right, depending on which populist leader is doing the driving.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Ibid., 6.

⁶⁷ In his *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.*, published in 1955, Hofstadter admitted that these considerations of so-called McCarthyism both inspired his work, and informed it, claiming that certain sides of Populism strongly foreshadowed some aspects of the “cranky pseudo-conservatism” of his time (20). Hofstadter attempted to show that both the Populist and Progressive movements were ambiguous, but also pointed to strains of illusion and “illiberalism” in both. (18-19). By contrast, Walter K. Nugent in *The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism* (1963), argued against Hofstadter’s claims that the Populist movement had been impregnated with a virulent strain of nativist anti-intellectualism. Instead, Nugent argued that Populists in Kansas were “friendlier and more receptive” to immigrants and foreign institutions than their political opponents. Economic difficulties remained the primary concern of the Populist Party, cutting across religious, national, racial, and political lines, and therefore the movement welcomed various immigrant groups into its fold. Of particular importance here is Nugent’s description of Populist nationalism, and the belief that America embodied a set of ideals that included democratic republicanism and economic democracy: a society where the people ruled and where opportunity was equal – the antithesis of the corruption, decadence, and political oppression of Europe. Therefore, the “worthwhile” or “sturdy” immigrant who believed in the ideas of American republicanism was not the enemy of nationalism, but was free to share in the benefits and opportunity the nation had to offer (3; 237-38). In the years after Nugent, Michael Rogin returned to an argument similar to Hofstadter, claiming a link between Populists and anti-radicals in *The Intellectuals and McCarthy*. He claims beneath the economic demands of the Populist movement of 1880-1890 raged xenophobia, Jew-baiting, intellectual baiting, and a thought-controlling lynch spirit. Rogin makes these charges based on political views, particularly focused on a suspicion of people, fear of radicalism, friendliness to established institutions, and a re-examination of the American past (6-7). In *The Fear of Conspiracy: Images of Un-American Subversion from the Revolution to the*

President Franklin Roosevelt would find few surprises were he to read this dissertation. In the 1930s and 1940s he ably parried the “Americanism” of the *Chicago Tribune* with a populism of his own, as the unlikely yet plainspoken defender of the “forgotten man.” Roosevelt would also not be taken aback at the popular power of the “Americanism” broadcast by Colonel McCormick’s *Tribune*; after all they complicated Roosevelt’s plans to aid Hitler’s enemies before Pearl Harbor. And, as Alan Brinkley persuasively argued thirty years ago, the primal political emotions that gave power to fascism in Europe in the 1930s were present in the United States too.⁶⁸

Only in the fifty years have we come to appreciate that gender, like other ideas, is a powerful social construction. Not only does it prioritize and otherwise arrange relations between people, it can assign value to certain kinds of work while denying it to other forms of laboring. Historically, the idea

Present (1971), David Brion Davis builds on the later works of Hofstadter (see below), examining the psychology and nationalism of anti-radicals. Of particular importance here are Davis’ conclusions that Americans in general have been susceptible to fears of radicalism or conspiracy because they defined their national identity as a state of mind, rather than by a familial heritage. Americans, therefore, feared their neighbors had been “seduced by the devil, that their free institutions were being infiltrated by enemies in disguise, and that a hidden society, opposed to every principle of democracy and Christianity, was growing within the very tissues of the existing social order” (1). For further works, please see: Hofstadter, Richard, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, New York: Vintage Books, 1963; and *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965.

⁶⁸ Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest: Huey Long, Father Coughlin, and the Great Depression* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 273-283. For further works on Populism, please see: Hicks, John. *The Populist Revolt: a history of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931; Creech, Joe. *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006; and MacLean, Nancy. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: the making of the second Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

of a “man’s wage” was a badge of honor, a sign of masculinity and strength, with the connotations of an ordered family. By contrast, the term “woman’s wage” was a term of disgrace; as many working women were single, the idea conjured the symbol of family degradation, the marks of poverty, and an attack on social order. A woman’s wage was the subject of “regulation and control, of discomfort and commentary.”⁶⁹ Despite their many significant differences, the advocates of “Americanism” and their opponents shared one understanding of the world of work: in their imagined communities, the most significant labor was that done by men.

In chapter 5, I take up what happens when women, working as secondary school teachers, assert their right to labor in public as skilled contributors to society, as they struggle for the right to unionize. These women stood at the beginning of a long and continuing struggle to preserve teaching as a profession, even after women became its majority members. By joining unions and striking, teachers defied a gender expectation that as dutiful public servants (ladies) they should not protest that, whether legitimate or not, was men's work.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1990), 2-3.

⁷⁰ For an introduction to the issues regarding women in the labor movement, please see: Hewitt, Nancy, ed. *A Companion to American Women’s History*, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002; Wertheimer, Barbara. *We Were There: The Story of Working Women in America*, New York: Pantheon, 1977; Foner, Philip, *Women and the American Labor Movement*, New York: Free Press, 1979; and Kessler-Harris, Alice, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

IV. Americanism Becomes Official, 1900-1920

The stirrings of anti-radicalism during the late nineteenth century may have appeared dormant in the opening decade of the twentieth, but they came back with a vengeance during World War I. In 1917, private citizens in Chicago formed the American Protective League (APL), an organization aimed at ferreting out foreign spies. Membership in the group quickly increased, soon having chapters in nearly every major city in the United States, and becoming a quasi-official arm of the Department of Justice. While many historians, such as John Higham and Robert Goldstein, devote some time to discussing the APL, very few historians have written full-length monographs on the subject.

The final part of this story brings us to how the idea of Americanism was given institutional support during and after the First World War. The American Protective League is key to this phase in the history. Joan Jensen, in *The Price of Vigilance*, contends that for the members of the American Protective League, the very existence of dissent seemed to cast doubt on the validity of the Leaguer's own patriotism. Therefore, they believed anyone at odds with the League's view of national policy must be dangerous. According to Jensen, the most vindictive attacks were reserved, not for immigrants, but for those Americans so unpatriotic as to oppose the war policies of the government.⁷¹ Jensen finds that this powerful national movement founded to

⁷¹ Jensen, *The Price of Vigilance*, 169. For further reading, please see: Capozzola, Christopher, "The Only Badge Needed is your Patriotic Fervor: Vigilance, Coercion, and the Law in World War I America," *The Journal of American History* 88:4 (March, 2002), 1354-1382; and Miller, Liesl K., "The

root out German spies lived on to preserve Americanism for later use by reactionary conservatives.⁷²

Chicago as a Case Study

In examining these works on American nationalism, anti-radicalism, anti-communism, the Paris Commune, the railroad strikes, the Haymarket affair, and the creation of the American Protective League, it is evident that an attempt to synthesize reactions across the United States to all these events would be an impossible task. Therefore, it seemed prudent to narrow the scope of the study. With so many events centered or having direct links to Chicago, a focus on this city was the most logical choice.

Historians have written many volumes about the history of Chicago; however, two will be the most important. The first narrative is *A History of Chicago: the rise of a modern city, 1871-1893* by Bessie Louise Pierce, the final publication of a three-volume history. While Pierce covers the labor uprisings, railroad strikes, and the Haymarket affair, these are not the primary focus of her work, and therefore she offers little new insight into these events. Her work, however, is valuable for her lengthy discussions of economics, politics, religion, and patterns of urban living. Especially valuable are the appendices, containing census and voting records.

Great War: Ethnic Conflict for Chicago's German-Americans," *OAH Magazine of History* 2:4 (Fall, 1987), 46-51.

⁷² For the most recent work on the American Protective League, please see: Bill Mills, *The League: The True Story of Average Americans on the Hunt for WWI Spies* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013).

The second monograph about Chicago that will be valuable to the present study is Richard Schneirov's *Labor and Urban Politics: class conflict and the origins of modern liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97*. The most valuable sections in this book examine the Haymarket affair and its aftermath. Here, Schneirov argues the event itself is not as important as the realization by large numbers of workers of the need for organization and the collective regulation of market activities.⁷³

Another work essential to my own understanding of why the Haymarket riot became such an important ideological flashpoint is James Green's *Death in the Haymarket*. His analysis of the aftermath of the bombing in Haymarket Square is of particular importance. Citizens of Chicago were panicked, and many did not believe law and order could prevail. Green argues that in the days immediately following the affair, the daily press both shaped and reflected a certainty about who was to blame for the explosion. Instead of being relieved that eight alleged conspirators were arrested for the crime, Chicagoans were no less anxious. In fact, the identification and arrests of the anarchists led to wild exaggerations of the threat they actually posed to the city's social order.⁷⁴ Green asserts that the Haymarket bombing confirmed the fears wealthy urban dwellers held since the railroad strikes of 1877 – the possibility of violent class warfare. The difference between the strikes of 1877 and the Haymarket affair

⁷³ Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: class conflict and the origins of modern liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 11.

⁷⁴ James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: a story of Chicago, the first labor movement, and the bombing that divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), 9.

of 1886 was the invention of dynamite. Nine years earlier, police and militia were able to suppress strikes without suffering fatalities; now, the poorest elements of society possessed a weapon that could inflict serious damage. Politically motivated bombings had taken place just in the previous year, in London and other European cities. For the United States, while riots had occurred in many cities, this was the first time law officers were killed by attacking citizens. As such, the Haymarket affair resonated deep within the emotions of the nation, sending shockwaves that would reverberate for many years.⁷⁵

While reactions to these critical events no doubt varied across the country, we gain important insight by training special attention on Chicago. In many ways, Chicagoans were ideological “first responders” to the challenges of industrialism capitalism; their responses would set a precedent that other American communities followed. This work tells that story of ideological conflict and creation by a thorough examination of Chicago-based sources. The footnotes to each of the following chapters convey the full extent of my immersion in the direct historical record. The intellectual and scholarly dividend of my efforts is a greater understanding of how a defining turn in political rhetoric was devised and successfully utilized to persuade and

⁷⁵ Ibid., 9-10.

For further readings on the Haymarket Affair, please see: Avrich, Paul. *The Haymarket Tragedy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984; David, Henry. *The History of the Haymarket Affair: a study in the American social-revolutionary and labor movements*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1958; and Werstein, Irving. *Strangled Voices: the story of the Haymarket affair*. New York: Macmillan, 1970.

mobilize Americans in an especially decisive and lasting way, leading to the shaping of "Americanism."

Chapter 2

Chicago as An Ideological Center of Industrialism

As Reverend T.C. Gardner strolled the streets of Chicago in 1870, he was filled with wonder and surprise at the rapidity of the city's growth. He marveled at the capitalist enterprise, the beauty of public structures and private homes, and the future prospects of the "Garden City of the West."¹ Visits to New York, Philadelphia, or Boston did not evoke such emotions in Gardner because, in his eyes, those older cities lacked the dynamism of Chicago. Those great cities, each holding a cherished place in the American story, were different from Chicago: they had been growing slowly for two centuries, and Gardner could not sense the same rush of excitement and change as he detected in the Windy City.

In twenty-five years, Gardner observed, Chicago had grown from a small town of 5,000 to a sprawling city of 300,000 inhabitants. For Gardner, this growth could not be explained only by Chicago's natural geography. More important had been the enterprise of man. Gardner greatly admired the accelerated rise of the city, and looked forward to the city's bright future, of which its residents had full faith. Chicago, he claimed, was a city of great expectations.²

¹ T.C. Gardner, "Chicago and its Methodism," *Christian Advocate* (1866-1905) 45. 29 (Jul 21, 1870): 225.

² *Ibid.*, 225.

Not all visitors to the city, however, viewed the urban landscape with as much enthusiasm and excitement as Reverend Gardner. Novelist Hamlin Garland first traveled to Chicago as a young boy in the 1880s, and the sight of the smoke stacks that signaled the soaring skyline of the great metropolis filled him with a feeling of dismay and gloom.³ In one of his earliest novels, Garland compared the grey industrial smoke cloud to a great eagle flying above the city, casting mysterious shadows in its wake. The human innovation that had impressed Reverend Gardner had the opposite effect on Garland. To Garland, human enterprise had burdened the landscape with wounds, which, for Garland, were the things most noticeable about Chicago. Garland and other first-time visitors saw Chicago as impressive, but somewhat unnatural, as only coal, human labor, and a myriad of furnaces and steam engines could produce such an astonishing sight.⁴ Garland's metaphorical description of industrial smoke as an eagle was not a salute to progress; rather, this image created "claustrophobic darkness" for the inhabitants of the city beneath it.⁵

The sharply opposed visions of Chicago provided by Gardner and Garland underline that Chicago has a central and distinctive ideological role in United States history. This newest American metropolis was the first place in which different groups of Americans, with differing conceptions of what industrialism meant and required, battled—in the streets, at the ballot box and in declarations of principle and program— and fought over what quickly came

³ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

to be known as “Americanism.” The advocates of “Americanism”—the very same people eager to detect and destroy the “Un-Americanism” of others—were engaged in an essential political mission. As leaders of this particular new economy were attempting to control the thought and politics of those whose labor, sweat and toil were bringing the industrial age into being.

I. Chicago Emerges

In order to fully appreciate Chicago as a crucial ideological center for the industrializing United States, we need to understand the stages of its social and economic development. In the nineteenth century, many urban centers in the United States experienced remarkable growth, although Chicago’s was perhaps more rapid than others. Beginning in the 1830s, manmade waterways, such as the Illinois & Michigan Canal and Erie Canal, and railroads transformed the former frontier trading post into one of the nation’s leading economic centers. By 1871, Chicago usurped the position as both the nation’s realized and symbolic conception of industry and progress.⁶

Although the history thus far described is especially significant to understanding Chicago’s modern history, its actual beginnings are further back in the past. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, local Native American tribes had long used the Chicago region as a transportation hub. Members of the Potawatomi, Sauk, Fox, Chippewa, Ottawa, and Miami tribes forged hunting,

⁶ Karen Sawislak, *Smoldering City: Chicagoans and the Great Fire, 1871-1874* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8-9.

trade, and war paths along the southwestern shores of Lake Michigan.⁷ The French were the first Europeans to arrive in the area, especially with explorations by Louis Jolliet and Jacques Marquette in 1673. At this early stage, the primary importance of Chicago was the portage, a short waterway that connected the watersheds of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. Because of this connection, French fur traders made Chicago an important stop en route to the Mississippi, though quarrels with Native Americans and eventually British troops caused interest in the area to wane. Nearly one hundred years later, in 1779, a small community existed in Chicago, consisting primarily of French traders and Native Americans.⁸ The newly independent United States obtained the land from England after the Revolutionary War, and quickly recognized its importance to maintaining the security of the west. In 1795, local tribes ceded to the American government a six-mile square piece of land at the mouth of the Chicago River, and almost immediately, politicians began planning the construction of a military fort in this area.⁹

In 1803, Captain John Whistler arrived to Chicago to build what he would name Fort Dearborn. The initial plans for the fort did not include extensive fortifications, but provided a stockade and blockhouses designed to protect against attack by Native Americans. The primary purposes of the garrison were to secure peaceable relationships with the local tribes, and to establish a trading post; as such, both the trading house and the log house of

⁷ Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 1: The Beginning of a City, 1673-1848* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 5; 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

the Indian agent were located just outside the palisades of the fort.¹⁰ Activity at Fort Dearborn remained fairly quiet until 1812 with the renewal of war between the United States and England. Local tribes in the surrounding region were engaging with American troops and raiding farms close by, though the fort itself had not been attacked. Nevertheless, commanding officers believed their positions to be indefensible, and therefore abandoned Fort Dearborn in favor of Fort Wayne, Indiana. On the journey, however, the column was attacked by a large contingent of Native Americans, resulting in several deaths, and the complete destruction of the fort. Chicago lay abandoned until 1816 when news of the reconstruction of Fort Dearborn attracted new settlers. For the better part of the next two decades, the population of the area remained small, though many in the nation turned their attention to Chicago following the Black Hawk War of 1832, allowing for growth and permanent settlement.¹¹

By 1833, Chicago was still an unincorporated frontier village of 350 inhabitants, a handful of whom had just recently begun replacing log cabins with frame houses. The majority of the residents boarded in taverns, behind their stores or workshops, or in empty army barracks at the fort. The Indian agent, still residing at Fort Dearborn, served as the town president. That year, nearly 5,000 members of the Potawatomi tribe arrived in Chicago to negotiate a treaty which ceded the majority of northern Illinois to the United States,

¹⁰ Ibid.,15-16.

¹¹ Ibid., 43.

including the small town on the southwest shores of Lake Michigan.¹² As word spread of the removal of Native Americans from the area, young businessmen, lawyers, and land speculators from the east flocked to the hamlet, joining the population of fur traders. Despite Chicago being on the “very outskirts of civilized life,” these young professionals arrived because of rumors that both the federal and state governments wanted to develop it into a city.¹³ Indeed, these new federal transportation projects would very quickly turn Chicago into a bustling metropolis.

As we highlight Chicago as an important center for cultural and ideological conflict, it is important acknowledge the role of geography in creating this urban landscape. The portage, where the watersheds of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River converge, was the strongest asset for Chicago in the early 19th century, prior to the Industrial Revolution, when both people and commerce traveled extensively by water.¹⁴ As the nation continued to expand west in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, the location of Chicago became ideal for carrying commerce to the east. This east-west moving traffic was fortuitous for the city, for if the primary focus of trade had been north-to-south along the Mississippi River, St. Louis likely would have held the position as the populous industrial center of the Central Plain.¹⁵ While the impetus of

¹² Robin Einhorn, *Property Rules: Political Economy in Chicago, 1833-1872* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 29.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹⁴ David Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City: how railroads shaped Chicago* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 3.

¹⁵ J. Paul Goode, *The Geographic Background of Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), 58.

commerce in the United States was the Atlantic coast, and ultimately trade with Europe, the Appalachian Mountains served as a barrier to most cities in the interior. The mountain range blocked Chicago from the economic centers of Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore, and Norfolk; however, because of the Mohawk Pass, no such barrier existed between Chicago and New York. This pass allowed for the construction of the Erie Canal, a waterway connecting the Hudson River to Lake Erie, and was completed in 1825. From that time forward, the economies of New York and Chicago were inextricably linked. While in 1826, Chicago was still a remote trading post at the mouth of the Chicago River, it would see steady growth in the coming decades. Simultaneous to Chicago's growth, internal improvements, especially the Erie Canal enabled New York to surpass Philadelphia as the nation's financial center.¹⁶

When considering the geography of Chicago, its relationship to the surrounding rural lands is also important. Environmental historian William Cronon examines these concepts by reading Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis backward. According to Cronon, Turner viewed the frontier as a rural place, and its isolation garnered it a special role in American history. For Turner, frontier development was slow, and cities only appeared after long periods of agricultural growth. According to Turner's thesis, "cities marked the end of the frontier."¹⁷ Turner wrote, in 1890, with a sense of nostalgia, with a fear of a new industrial America losing touch with its rural roots. By contrast,

¹⁶ Goode, *The Geographic Background of Chicago*, 58-60.

¹⁷ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 47.

the boosters that flocked to Chicago in its early days, envisioning it becoming the leading urban and economic center of the continent, realized the importance of the rural landscape to the growth of the city. Urban and rural landscapes formed a single economic system, and for boosters, to “speak of one without the other made very little sense.”¹⁸ What this meant was that boosters recognized the need to foster regular exchange between the city and rural areas. While Cronon claimed that these theories helped to explain the explosive growth of Chicago, they could not do so fully. Only history and culture, Cronon argues, can truly clarify how a small village suddenly increased its population twenty times over, why the land value increased by three thousand, and why capitalists from both American and European cities rushed to invest in Chicago.¹⁹

While the geographic location of Chicago provided advantages, especially in terms of economic connections to the east, it also faced numerous disadvantages. Inhabitants were forced to manipulate the landscape in order to create the city they envisioned.²⁰ When Chicago became an incorporated city in 1837, the first government projects were publically funded plans to improve the city’s port. One of these projects was dredging the harbor of the Chicago River, digging away the sandbar that served to block access to Lake Michigan. In 1838, Congress approved \$20,000 to complete this harbor project, and within two years, over 1,000 ships per year arrived in Chicago,

¹⁸ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47-53.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

carrying both goods and immigrants.²¹ These improvement projects were aimed at developing the town as an east-west gateway for commerce, as a center from which manufactured goods from the East could be distributed to the expanding West, and a place from which the western settlers could ship the products of their labor to the East.²² At this point, while Chicago had a continuous water passage to the East, the same could not be said of a connection to the West. As early as 1815, plans were being made to improve the Chicago portage by building a canal that would serve as a permanent link between the Mississippi River system and the Great Lakes. Not until the late 1830s, however, did these proposals begin to seriously take shape, although the Illinois & Michigan Canal did not open until 1848. With the newly constructed waterway and the Erie Canal, Chicago promised to carry farm products from the upper Midwest to either New Orleans or New York.²³

We cannot understand Chicago's emergence as a crucial political and economic capital without addressing the important role played by railroads. These not only tightly tied Chicago into the national economy, they created new relationships between government and business, and government and people.²⁴

Simultaneous with the completion of the Illinois & Michigan Canal in 1848 were the city's first railroads. In the early 19th century, inventors in

²¹ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 30.

²² Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 3.

²³ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 30.

²⁴ For a complete discussion on railroads, primarily in the west, please see: Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

England applied the concept of mounting a steam engine on a wheeled platform that could run on a tramway made of iron rails to carry coal from mines to the nearest canal. After the first successful journey of the steam locomotive in Wales, promoters of the idea realized that the invention could be adapted to transport both manufactured goods and people to places where rivers and canals did not run. Similarly in Chicago, the first railroads were designed and built as overland extensions of the Great Lakes, conveying goods and people to and from ships.²⁵ In the late 1830s, the state of Illinois proposed plans for a network of railroads that, together with the projected Illinois & Michigan Canal, would give Chicago an unprecedented system of both transportation and communication.²⁶ Chicago's first railroad, the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, began operation in 1848, and the concept was so successful that within ten years, the city boasted railways that fanned north, south, east and west.

Development of the railroads in Chicago, however, was not an easy task, especially compared to other Midwestern locales. The most concentrated efforts occurred in Cincinnati and St. Louis, port cities with extensive river traffic to and from New Orleans.²⁷ Politicians in both Cincinnati and St. Louis realized the expansion of their economies would require the construction of railroads, and were willing to utilize public treasury funds in order to do so; in contrast, leaders in Chicago relied on private funding projects for railroads. The

²⁵ Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 3.

²⁶ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 1*, 61.

²⁷ Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 51.

Ohio & Mississippi Railroad began operation in 1857, connecting both St. Louis and Cincinnati to New York, bypassing Chicago. Boosters and railroad executives, however, noted the strategic importance of Chicago. Authors for the *American Railway Times* insisted that anyone who could read a map could understand the importance of the region between the Rocky Mountains and the Great Lakes. By concentrating the region's wealth, the avenues of commerce would naturally flow through Chicago.²⁸ Nevertheless, when Congressmen proposed a transcontinental railroad, Senators Thomas Hart Benson of Missouri and Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois fought over whether the new route would favor St. Louis or Chicago. In 1864, former Illinois resident President Abraham Lincoln decided the dispute to Chicago's advantage.²⁹

One of the most important railroads in the city would be the Illinois Central Railroad, and its terminus in Chicago revealed how the rapid growth of the northern city influenced state lawmakers, who just fifteen years earlier voted to exclude Chicago from the state rail network. Originally the Illinois Central would connect Galena, in the northwest corner, to the town of Cairo, located at the convergence of both the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers at the southern tip of the state. In these early proposals, the railroad would come no closer to Chicago than La Salle, ninety-seven miles to the south. The Illinois Central, however, was a victim of the Panic of 1837, and did not see a renewal

²⁸ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 37.

²⁹ Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 52.

of interest for at least ten years, when a combination of federal grants and private funds revolutionized transportation projects across the country.³⁰

Railroads shaped Chicago, and ultimately linked the city to both the east and the west. As one railroad analyst claimed, “western roads were built *from* and eastern ones *to* Chicago.”³¹ Chicago defined the boundary between two very different railroad systems, and served to connect them into a single unit. The city became the intermediary between the vast western natural resources and eastern markets, with the city itself boasting the principle wholesale market for the entire midcontinent. Though Chicago did not become the nation’s leading city as the boosters anticipated, it did become the gateway to the west, exerting economic dominance over the region’s national and world trade, largely because of the railroads.³²

While this dominance was good for Chicago, it was not necessarily good for those that lived in western rural areas. On one hand, the Chicago railroads meant farmers and producers outside the city could sell their products more easily than before. Many, however, became nervous at the growing dependence on the city and its railroads. Despite the apprehension, rural residents had little option but to transport their products to Chicago if they wished to sell to eastern markets.³³

As the railroads increased in Chicago, so did the city’s industrial growth. The year 1848 serves as something of a watershed date for pre-industrial and

³⁰ Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 31.

³¹ Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, 90.

³² *Ibid.*, 91-92.

³³ *Ibid.*, 92.

industrial Chicago. Although industries existed in the city before 1848, that same year the Illinois & Michigan Canal was completed, the Galena Railroad began operation, the telegraph arrived, and the city's first steam-powered grain elevator was assembled.³⁴ By that date, the city was a busy lake port of 20,000 residents, and served primarily as a destination for goods. After 1848, however, Chicago developed into a distribution center, as the largest employment involved the transfer of goods between water and rail. Additionally contributing to the growth of the city was the potential for back-haul – the ability to convey equal cargo on both the arriving trains and return trips. Geographically, Chicago held a better position to accommodate multi-directional traffic. Cities such as Toledo, Cleveland, and Detroit were regional transportation centers, but were situated too far to the east to support the developing western states of Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, and Minnesota. Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Memphis relied more heavily on the river systems to New Orleans, and during the Civil War, when this traffic was interrupted, Chicago's rail systems had reached critical mass.³⁵

Another geographic advantage Chicago had over other cities in the Midwest was its access to the Great Lakes. As a virtual inland sea, the Great Lakes brought deep-water transportation to the nation's interior; frequently, transportation by water was cheaper than that overland. In Chicago, therefore, water and rail competed for customers. In order to maintain their business, railroads were forced to offer low rates between Chicago and New York, in turn

³⁴ Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 63-64.

³⁵ Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 64.

diverting considerable traffic from other locations through Chicago. Merchants in Chicago received lower rates simply because they had a choice between water or rail transportation; businessmen in rival cities such as Cincinnati or St. Louis did not have these choices and were forced to pay higher prices.³⁶ These factors combined to contribute to the growth of the city.

As a direct result of the cheap rail prices and sheer number of railways in the city, during the 1850s, Chicago became the nation's largest market in corn, wheat, lumber, and pork.³⁷ During this time period, on the eve of the Civil War, the population of the city rose to over 110,000, making it the eighth largest metropolitan in the United States; manufacturing, however, remained small, as the majority of business was focused on wholesale, retail, transportation, banking, insurance and other ventures that "greased the wheels of trade."³⁸ In 1846, Chicago's 177 manufacturing businesses employed 1,400 people, roughly 10% of the population. Ten years later, double that amount worked for factories that produced iron, steam engines and machinery.³⁹ The largest employer in Chicago was the city's gas works, and only the second largest employer, Cyrus McCormick, manufactured goods that were distributed to a trans-regional market. McCormick invented the mechanical reaper, revolutionizing the agricultural industry, and capitalized on Chicago as a

³⁶ Goode, *The Geographic Background of Chicago*, 63.

³⁷ Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: class conflict and the origins of modern liberalism in Chicago, 1864-1897* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 19.

³⁸ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 19.

³⁹ Young, *The Iron Horse and the Windy City*, 66.

transportation center to deliver his products nationally.⁴⁰ In contrast, the majority of Chicago's wealthy businessmen were considered "boosters," such as William Butler Ogden, Jonathan Young Scammon, and William J. Newberry, who promoted the city to investors and developers in the east.

Unlike some northern cities, Chicago's economy actually thrived during the Civil War. Situated far enough from the front lines to be safe from invasion, Chicago profited from its primary role of supplying Union forces.⁴¹ Writers for *The Independent* in 1862 observed in Chicago hotels filled to capacity, busy retailers, and every major thoroughfare congested with traffic. As the city continued to prosper during the war, more businessmen from the East made investments in Chicago's manufacturing, railroads, banking institutions, and real estate.⁴² One of the industries with the largest growth during the 1860s occurred in meatpacking. Prior to the war, Cincinnati held the nickname of "Porkopolis," as the center of the pork packing industry; during the war, however, Cincinnati's river access to southern markets was closed. The Union army maintained a high demand for salt pork, and because of the extensive network of railroads in Chicago, the pork industry shifted away from Cincinnati to the Windy City. As early as the winter of 1861-62, Chicago had become the new "Porkopolis," and within just a few years, the meat packing industry comprised twenty-five percent of the city's manufacturing, compared to just two percent in 1860. This caused the growth of new enterprises in Chicago as

⁴⁰ Goode, *The Geographic Background of Chicago*, 53.

⁴¹ Karen Sawislak, *Smoldering City: Chicagoans and the Great Fire, 1871-1874* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9.

⁴² "Chicago," *The Independent* Vol 1, Issue 732 (11 December 1862): 8.

well, including the manufacture of gelatin into glue, animal oils and tallow into soap and lard, offal into fertilizer, and hides into leather goods.⁴³

II. New Industry brings New People

As industry increased in Chicago beginning in the 1830s, the population grew dramatically both in size and diversity, setting the stage for a conflict over ideology and politics. The first part of this story is most powerfully conveyed through numbers. In 1837, the number of residents in the city was 4,100, but had risen to nearly 300,000 by 1870. By 1870, Chicago boasted 45,000 homes and nearly 1,000 industrial establishments.⁴⁴

Although the numbers increased dramatically from one census year to the next, the demographics remained fairly stable. The majority of residents in Chicago were immigrants, 66% in 1850 and 72% in 1870.⁴⁵ The largest immigrant groups included Germans, Irish, and Scandinavians. The German population comprised the largest nationality, rising from 21% in 1850 to 29% in 1860, but declined to 26% in 1870. German immigrants in the city tended to follow politics from home rather closely. When war broke out in 1870, the majority of Germans in Chicago sided with Bismarck, even sending monetary aid when they could. Upon hearing that peace had reached their home country,

⁴³ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 21.

⁴⁴ "Chicago the Wonderful," *Prairie Farmer* Vol 41, Issue 38 (24 September 1870): 301.

⁴⁵ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 248.

Germans in the city rejoiced, as 30,000 of them took to the streets of Chicago in a colorful procession ten miles long.⁴⁶

Irish immigrants comprised 26% of the population in 1850, 27% in 1860, but decreased dramatically to 20% in 1870.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, while the percentage of Irish-born in the city fell, the actual numbers remained fairly steady. The Irish population was most likely to come from the counties of Waterford, Cork, and Limerick, leaving these areas to escape poverty and political oppression; however, some wealthy shop owners from Dublin did arrive in Chicago to try their hand at prospering in the growing city.⁴⁸ The third largest category of immigrants in Chicago hailed from the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark, though they comprised only 2% of the total population in 1860.⁴⁹

Native-born men and women made up a decided minority of Chicago residents, numbering 20% of the city's population by 1870.⁵⁰ The largest numbers of Americans came into Chicago from the Old Northwest, including Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, and Wisconsin, comprising nearly two-thirds of the native-born population in 1870. More people relocated from other areas of Illinois than any other state. The next likely areas to supply Chicago with

⁴⁶ Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2: From Town to City, 1848-1871* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1940), 18.

⁴⁷ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 248.

⁴⁸ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 13.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁰ Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 13.

native-born Americans were the Middle Atlantic and New England states; very few hailed from the South or the trans-Mississippi West.⁵¹

By 1870, African Americans in Chicago comprised nearly 1% of the total population, though their actual numbers had increased dramatically over the previous two decades, numbering 323 in 1850, but 3,691 in 1870. Nearly two-thirds of the African American population in Chicago relocated from the South, a good portion of which originated in Kentucky.⁵² Similarly, American Indians comprised a very small portion of the population. While the Potawatomi did cede the lands in and around Chicago to the federal government in 1833, some of them remained, and in 1851 were camped outside the southern boundaries of the city. Nevertheless, in 1870, only five Native Americans resided within the city confines.⁵³

Although Chicago during the mid-nineteenth century enjoyed a considerable increase in its economy, not all residents benefited from this prosperity. The demarcation between the poor and wealthy generally fell along ethnic and racial lines. Despite comprising only 20% of the overall population, the native-born in Chicago held 70% of the city's highest-paid white-collar jobs, controlled the most number of businesses, amassed the largest fortunes, and supplied nearly all of Chicago's mayors.⁵⁴ German immigrants, however, did own nearly 38% of Chicago's manufacturing

⁵¹ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 9-10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁴ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 248; Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 13.

businesses.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, on average, the majority of the German population could be considered middle class, though some belonged to the lower class.

Chicago's working class was overwhelmingly comprised of immigrants, as much as 82% in 1870. The Irish tended to make up the largest numbers of the unskilled labor force in the city. They worked in the slaughterhouses, stockyards, packinghouses, and on the docks. Often, Irish workers lived in crowded communities of poorly built, unsanitary shacks on the city's southwest side, close to where they worked.⁵⁶ Competition, or fear of competition, for unskilled labor positions often occurred between immigrant groups, such as the Irish and Hungarians, and between these populations and the small, but growing, African American population. For example, in the 1850s, a number of Irishmen attacked Hungarian laborers working on the Michigan Southern Railroad. Similarly, in 1864, a large mob of five hundred Irishmen attacked twelve African Americans working on a lumber dock. These incidents prompted some companies to exclude the Irish from employment, printing advertisements in the *Chicago Tribune* that unequivocally stated, "No Irish need apply."⁵⁷

Women and children rounded out the working class in Chicago during the mid-nineteenth century with considerably fewer numbers than their counterparts. A few women began to branch out beyond the traditional roles of marriage, teaching and domestic service, and engaged in trades such as cigar

⁵⁵ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 25.

⁵⁶ Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 10; Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 13.

⁵⁷ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 26; note 79.

making, milling, baking, and bookbinding. Nearly 92% of women workers, however, were domestic servants, ironing, cooking, and doing laundry and general housework for those families that hired them. Women in all industries earned considerably less than men; those engaged in domestic service earned little more than \$1.25 per week, while seamstresses could earn as high as \$8.00 per week by 1865. Children aged ten to fifteen comprised three percent of the workforce in Chicago in 1870, below average for national urban centers. The majority of child laborers were boys engaged in manufacturing, especially in cotton mills and cigar factories. Young girls were typically domestic servants, but also worked in factories as seamstresses. Because women and children on average did not earn enough to make a living, especially as high rent was a perpetual problem, ministers and mission workers established protective associations to hire women and girls directly for their sewing needs, cutting out the middle men who tended to withhold profits.⁵⁸

III. Toward Class Consciousness

Demographic records and social statistics can only lead us so far. Most important is what we can learn about how people came together to react to the circumstances in which they found themselves. Census records reveal conditions, but they tell us virtually nothing about what people thought about them or did about them. Beginning most strikingly during the Civil War years, we see evidence of collective action to protest working and living conditions.

⁵⁸ "Chicago the Wonderful," *Prairie Farmer* Vol 41, Issue 38 (24 September 1870): 301; Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 153-154.

People in similar circumstances, doing similar work begin to reach out to one another to express a shared sense of class consciousness.

In the 1860s while the nation's attention was sharply focused on the Civil War, the working classes in many Northern cities started organizing trade unions, and striking for eight-hour workdays and higher wages.⁵⁹ A "free labor" ideology strengthened this new labor movement, and soon extended beyond the eight-hour workday into lobbying for both political and financial reforms.

The fundamental tenet of free labor ideology is that workers should be free to sell their labor for a fair price. Beginning in the 1830s, advocates of this ideology believed both chattel slavery in the South and "wage slavery" in the North threatened free labor. The term wage slavery, coined in Britain, was popularly used to suggest a permanent condition of wage labor from which there was no chance of escape or of becoming economically independent.⁶⁰ The idea of wage slavery took on new meaning in the United States where slavery was an immediate reality, and reinforced the idea that workers were somehow less than fully free.⁶¹ In the 1850s, the Republican Party joined with the workers to advocate free labor, particularly becoming hostile to the expansion of slavery into the west as having direct competition with free laborers. Free labor ideology held a variety of meanings, perhaps leading to its

⁵⁹ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 17.

⁶⁰ Ian McGuire, "Who Ain't a Slave?' *Moby Dick* and the Ideology of Free Labor," *Journal of American Studies*, Vol. 37, no. 2 (August 2003): 290.

⁶¹ Eric Foner *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), xviii.

success.⁶² As the idea of freedom was increasingly associated with the freedom to sell one's labor, emancipated or free labor, could then validate labor reforms, such as free land, unions, cooperative organizations, and other government interventions.⁶³

Empowered by the successes of free labor ideology, skilled workers formed local, national, and international trade unions. For unskilled workers during this time, however, the most characteristic form of class-consciousness continued to be large community based strikes.⁶⁴ Chicago was no exception. Much of the general dissatisfaction among workers was the result of the falling national economy of the late 1850s that continued during the war. Although overall Chicago's industries were not as affected as other Northern cities, only the native-born minority who owned those manufacturing houses prospered. Laborers struggled to maintain a living with lower wages and higher rents. As early as 1857, German workers met at West Market Hall to discuss some type of unified action in the face of these conditions. Nothing, however, was settled or determined by the meeting. Those out of work were advised to relocate to the West; meanwhile, the city decided to pay street laborers fifty cents per day instead of seventy-five, hoping to hire more workers. These steps did little to solve unemployment. After secession, the need for wartime materials

⁶² Adam-Max Tuchinsky, "The Bourgeoisie will fall and fall forever: the *New York Tribune*, the 1848 French Revolution, and American Social Democratic Discourse," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, no. 2 (September 2005), 496-497.

⁶³ McGuire, "Who Ain't a Slave?," 301; Tuchinsky, "The Bourgeoisie will fall and fall forever," 497.

⁶⁴ Bruce Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: A Social History of Chicago's Anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University press, 1988), 23.

somewhat lowered unemployment, although inflation skyrocketed. Adding to the labor problems in the city, politicians in eastern states often issued propaganda to their own unemployed that highlighted the advantages of the West, causing many to look toward Chicago as a viable alternative.⁶⁵ Under these conditions, Chicago's working class began to unite, especially in the trade unions, in order to offer protection for laborers, and primarily better pay and better hours.

The labor force in Chicago, however, was not a cohesive unit, especially among immigrants. While workers shared the experiences of industrialization, alienation, and radicalization, the city's ethnic groups reacted very differently to the same circumstances.⁶⁶ The largest division among workers in the city was between German-speaking immigrants, including Polish, Hungarian, and Bohemian artisans, and those from English-speaking countries, such as Great Britain and Ireland, as they shared more common ground with the native-born.

This language differentiation was important, as German served as the vehicle for a political culture labeled "social republicanism." Rooted in the 1848 European revolutions, social republicans focused on the support of class conflict, economic activism, and social revolution. Beginning that year, several countries across Europe experienced popular unrest, including France, Italy, Ireland, the German states, and the Austrian Empire. These uprisings were in some ways tied to the problems of imperial overload. As both Prussia and the

⁶⁵ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 156-157.

⁶⁶ Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs*, 24.

Austrian Empire expanded their territories into Silesia⁶⁷ and Hungary, respectively, citizens in these areas staged liberal nationalist movements, fueled by their anger and hatred of a foreign military presence.⁶⁸ Similarly, the most violent occurrences in France from 1848-1851 involved the military, recently returned from campaigns in Algeria.⁶⁹ Many historians point to economic crises as the immediate cause of the revolutions, especially in Belgium, Ireland, and Silesia, where famine and food shortages from 1845-1847 led to hunger riots.⁷⁰ In Austria and Prussia, the attempt to raise taxes in order to fund the growing military infrastructure, also led to food shortages, resulting in riots and revolutions in 1848.⁷¹ Americans viewed the European revolutions with caution in the beginning, and later with disdain. The French uprisings captured the minds of Americans above all, likely because of the strong affinity for French support during the American Revolution. While many in the United States initially supported France's two previous revolutions in 1789 and 1830, enthusiasm waned as both uprisings took radical turns. The caution with which Americans viewed the 1848 revolution quickly turned to

⁶⁷ Silesia is a territory now engulfed by parts of eastern Germany, southwestern Poland, and the northeastern Czech Republic.

⁶⁸ Miles Taylor, "The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire," *Past & Present*, No. 166 (Feb 2000): 147.

⁶⁹ Taylor, "The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire," 147.

⁷⁰ Helge Berger and Mark Spoerer, "Economic Crises and the European Revolutions of 1848," *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (June 2001): 294.

⁷¹ Taylor, "The 1848 Revolutions and the British Empire," 147.

disillusionment, as the French began to pursue what Americans considered “unacceptable social, economic, and governmental reforms.”⁷²

Unlike the countries of continental Europe, Great Britain did not undergo a similar revolution in 1848. Although Britain had markedly expanded its empire by the mid-nineteenth century and military expenditures were reaching record highs, Britain’s empire was neither close nor contiguous, unlike other European nations. It appeared, then, that England was far removed and unaffected by the 1848 revolutions. Therefore, in contrast to their German counterparts, English-speaking immigrants typically assimilated to American culture rather quickly, and supported liberal republicanism, highlighting an independent citizenry and a limited state.⁷³

In 1858, German workers from Chicago were present at the first congress of the International Workingmen’s Association, formed in New York the year before. The platform of this organization held that the Constitution of the United States protected the right of revolution, and that the scientific, technical, and industrial changes of the previous decades called for a radical change in the American government.⁷⁴

Religion also served to divide immigrant laborers in Chicago, pitting liturgical Protestants and Catholics against Evangelical Protestants. This was most noticeable when sumptuary and temperance laws became important

⁷² Richard Rohrs, “American Critics of the French Revolution of 1848,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol 14, No. 3 (Autumn 1994): 360.

⁷³ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 26.

⁷⁴ Eric Hirsh, *Urban Revolt: ethnic politics in the nineteenth century Chicago labor movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 13.

issues in Chicago politics. Catholic and Lutheran immigrants, likely the majority of voters in the city, united in defense of their right to drink on Sundays, against the native-born reformers and English and Scandinavian immigrants.⁷⁵

Despite these internal conflicts, laborers in Chicago united to form at least nineteen new unions during or immediately after the Civil War. These permanent organizations were often multi-ethnic, although many formed branches based exclusively on factors such as nationality, language, or neighborhood. Women, children, and non-English-speaking immigrants were largely excluded from union membership. Immigrants from the British Isles were typically accepted into these organizations because they held skilled positions, had experience in establishing unions, and were culturally similar to native-born workers. Non-Anglo immigrants responded by forming their own unions, such as organizations by German coach makers, tailors, and carpenters; these ethnic establishments remained a crucial part of Chicago's labor movement.⁷⁶

Slavery was yet another issue that divided the ethnic communities during the Civil War, as the workers faced problems of wartime inflation and labor shortages. As a result, an important segment of the Irish workers in Chicago detached from their political associations with the *Arbeiter Verein*, a worker's club. Before and during the war, many Irish workers began joining the Fenian Brotherhood, a secret revolutionary nationalist society. Unlike

⁷⁵ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 26.

⁷⁶ Hirsh, *Urban Revolt*, 12.

many urban Irish, the Fenians supported the war and emancipation. Although in direct opposition to the Catholic Church, the Fenians held a nationalist fair in Chicago in April 1864, winning the favor of larger groups of Irish immigrants, and the German Turners as well. From this point, the Fenians helped to assimilate Irish worker activists into a “political culture of popular republicanism,” allowing them to transcend ethnic and political barriers in Chicago.⁷⁷

The first unions in the city were comprised of skilled laborers. In attempting to solve their labor disputes, these craft unions employed a conservative strategy of limiting the labor supply by excluding groups from participating in the trade, especially through the use of apprenticeships. One of the most powerful trade unions of the mid-nineteenth century was the Chicago Typographical Union No. 16, a branch of the national union, which received its charter in 1852 with fifty-eight printers; by 1860, another eighty-four members joined.⁷⁸ Historically, printers’ unions have been strong because they maintained the ability to print newsletters, allowing for better communication between their members. Members of the city’s Typographical Union demanded membership and conformity among all printers. Those who refused to join were often labeled as “rats” and socially ostracized from union members. In an attempt to break up this powerful union, the *Chicago Times* employed forty women to work for lower wages. Typical of the exclusive craft unions, members of the Chicago Typographical Union went on strike and boycotted the

⁷⁷ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 28.

⁷⁸ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 160.

paper. Because boycotts required mass support, the Typographical Union rented a hall in the city, paid for a brass band, and even invited the mayor to speak; the coalition that formed as a result boasted 8,500 members in twenty-four unions.⁷⁹

Chicago's first self-proclaimed socialists arose out of the skilled workers and trade unions. As early as 1854, H. Rosch published a socialist German-language newspaper, *Der Proletarier*, and within ten years, the city was home to a branch of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA), also known as the First International. By 1874, the IWA joined with the International Social and Political Workingmen's Association to form the Workingmen's Party of Illinois.⁸⁰ The socialist movement in Chicago, however, did not gain much attention until after the eight-hour strikes in 1867.

Unskilled workers did not have the same advantages afforded to those eligible to become members of elite craft unions. Their inability to organize meant the wages paid to unskilled laborers was less than half those of skilled workers. Because they did not belong to unions, unskilled workers could not capitalize on business expansions, and therefore economic downturns resulted in personal hardships as their wages continued to fall and unemployment climbed.⁸¹

The eight-hour movement in Chicago further demonstrated the differences between the skilled craft unions and the largely unorganized

⁷⁹ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 162-163; Hirsh, *Urban Revolt*, 11.

⁸⁰ Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs*, 25.

⁸¹ Hirsh, *Urban Revolt*, 6.

unskilled laborers. In December 1863, members of craft unions held a mass meeting at Witkowsky Hall in Chicago to discuss current workers' strikes in New York. Workers elected John Edin as the meeting president, and members of the molders' union, ship carpenters and caulkers' union, tailors' union, and engineers' union served as vice presidents. Led by these men, the workers voted to extend both their sympathy and assistance to their brethren in New York, who were fighting for better wages and an eight-hour workday.⁸² By 1866, workers in Chicago formed their own groups to lobby for the eight-hour workday, and succeeded in electing supporting aldermen in at least five of the city's sixteen wards. Republicans, who held majorities in both city and state government, endorsed the plans as part of public improvement and education projects designed to boost free labor.⁸³

Not all Chicagoans, however, approved of the eight-hour movement in their city. An editorial article in the *Chicago Tribune* from May 1866 claimed the eight-hour movement had failed, and rightly so, in the author's opinion. Government, the author wrote, should not pass laws to mandate eight-hour workdays, largely because the law would subsequently be broken. The primary cause of these strikes in Chicago, however, was higher wages; because of this, perhaps the strikes were ill-timed. The editor argued that the cost of paying for the recently ended Civil War ensured that no worker, whether professional or laborer, could obtain the same wages for the same work, let

⁸² "The Labor Question," *Chicago Tribune*, 29 December 1863, 4.

⁸³ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 33.

alone higher wages. He stated, "A great war has to be paid for; we must take less wages for the same work. There is no help for it."⁸⁴

The following month, the *Chicago Tribune* ran yet another editorial criticizing the eight-hour movement. All men, the editor wrote, had the right to obtain the best price for their labor, and under the right circumstances, a strike for higher wages may be justified, and would likely succeed. The eight-hour strikes differed because workers admitted wages were already high enough, and by their admission, they surrendered any advantage they may have had against their employers. The strikers' demand for a fair day's wage for less than a fair day's work appealed to no one's sense of justice. The very proposition of workers in Chicago and New York was so illogical and absurd, the editor claimed their real objective lay elsewhere. According to the article, the eight-hour movement was solely about higher wages; however, wages were already high enough, as evidenced by the large contributions the workers made to support their fellow laborers "wasting their time" in strikes in other cities, and because of this would get very little sympathy from Americans.⁸⁵

Although the editor of the *Chicago Tribune* claimed the eight-hour movement had failed, laborers continued their petitions throughout the following year. In March 1867, Illinois became the first state to enact eight-hour work laws, provided a contract to the contrary did not exist.⁸⁶ Despite the groundbreaking legislation, the *Tribune* kept silent on the matter. The same

⁸⁴ "The Eight Hour Movement," *Chicago Tribune*, 19 May 1866, 2.

⁸⁵ "The Eight Hour Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 June 1866, 1.

⁸⁶ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 176.

month, J.D. Hendrick of Chicago wrote to the editor, demanding to know why the paper refused to run articles regarding the new law, especially since the topic was of great interest to so many of their patrons. In response, the editor wrote that the newspaper had little to say about the new Eight Hour Law because they had little information to give their readers, and even less advice to proffer.⁸⁷ While the state legislature agreed to the eight-hour workday, the new law did nothing to settle the question of wages, and the editor believed more strikes would ensue. He predicted that any future strikes demanding ten hours wages for eight hours of work would fail, leaving the laborers without savings, and reducing their families to want and misery. The editor also postulated what would happen should the strikes be successful: business costs would rise, resulting in higher rent, groceries, and manufactured goods, and would be a detriment to the economy as a whole.⁸⁸

The eight-hour law passed by the state of Illinois appeared to be a step in the right direction; however, the laws stipulated no enforcement, and therefore employers resisted the shorter working hours. In response, city workers initiated a strike on 2 May 1867, though its effects were highly uneven, and it did not reach the level of a general strike. The majority of trade union members continued to assert their determination to work eight hours, and left the question of wages for another time. Other members, however, insisted on working eight hours and drawing either nine or ten hours' pay. Workers who did not belong to a union claimed their willingness to continue working ten

⁸⁷ J.D. Hendrick, "The Eight Hour Act," 22 March 1867, 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

hours a day. These laborers attempted to continue working, but were forced away by the strikers at the shops, yards, and warehouses.⁸⁹

The strikes raised alarm among the citizens of Chicago, and rumors during the riots were rampant. On 3 May, reports came in of a violent mob of 700-800 men near the corner of Twelfth and Canal streets, and a squadron of policemen were sent to investigate. Rumors began circulating immediately, and soon the people believed the mob numbered closer to five thousand, that dozens of citizens and policemen were dead or maimed, including Captain Sherman and Captain Hickey. All of these rumors were unfounded. In truth, many crowds of men and boys gathered in the streets, vowing vengeance, and forcing workers to leave their posts, but caused no deaths.

On the second day of strikes, various unions held meetings to discuss the situation, all of which drew considerable numbers of workers. A large crowd of men employed by the Northwestern Railroad Car and Iron Works met at Aurora Hall, where many of those present expressed their support of the eight-hour system. The committee unanimously adopted a series of resolutions, signed by James Rockford, W.W. Boyle, and G. A. Williams, which primarily claimed their employers did not intend to abide by the new eight-hour law, and that media had misrepresented the desires of the workers, either through "ignorance or design."⁹⁰ Members also declared their astonishment and regret at the acts of lawlessness and violence committed by workers upon the city the previous day. Finally, the resolutions asserted wages were of

⁸⁹ "The Eight Hour Movement," *Chicago Tribune*, 4 May 1867, 1.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

secondary importance, that they had never demanded ten hours' pay for eight hours work, but would continue to work only eight hours per day.⁹¹ Another group of machinists from the Illinois Central and Rock Island Railroads met at St. George's Hall. At this meeting, Mr. Evans from the *Workingman's Advocate* delivered a lengthy and animated speech in which he urged the workers to stand their ground in regard to the Eight-Hour Law, and by doing so they would receive a favorable result in the end. Andrew Cameron was also in attendance, and again noted that journalists from several Chicago newspapers persistently misrepresented the aims and intentions of the workingmen, especially in the reporters' claims that laborers demanded ten hours' wages for eight hours' work. The resolutions adopted by this committee declared the workers had no desire to stop work or embarrass their employers, but insisted their employers recognize the eight-hour law.⁹²

Within two weeks, the *Chicago Tribune* declared the latest eight-hour strikes dead. While workers claimed five thousand men were still holding out, the newspaper related to its readers that this figure was an exaggeration, and many of those still on strike only remained because of fear of persecution or retribution upon their return to the workplace. During the strikes, the greatest detriment to the city had been the overall stoppage of construction projects, including some multi-million dollar structures. Because of the strikes, and

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 1.

other economic factors including the increased cost of materials, carpenters anxious to return to work were forced to do so at lower wages.⁹³

Although the May 1867 strikes essentially failed, they did, however, unite the twenty-four unions of Chicago's Trade Assembly, comprised of more than 8,500 skilled workers, and lead primarily by English-speaking Anglo-Americans.⁹⁴ Building tradesmen and metal trade workers comprised the largest group of strikers. At the large metalworking factories, British immigrants with craft union experience led the skilled workers in daily meetings designed to maintain morale, and established vigilance committees to admonish weaker members. In contrast, unskilled laborers gathered in what were known as "committees of the whole," visiting places of employment, typically in and around working class neighborhoods, forcibly expelling the workforce and often causing employers to close the brickyards, lumberyards, and furniture mills on the city's south and west sides. Members of the press were horrified and outraged at this unexpected inclusion of the unskilled workforce, and their less than peaceful demonstrations, claiming that mob law had been instituted in Chicago. The striking trade unions also spoke out against the actions of the unskilled laborers.⁹⁵

Largely because the skilled and unskilled workers were not unified in their actions, the eight-hour strike failed. Many workers returned to their positions, accepting a reduction in wages in proportion with a reduction in

⁹³ Ibid., 1.

⁹⁴ Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs*, 30.

⁹⁵ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 35.

hours; many, however, were now unemployed, as strikebreakers had filled their positions. Machine shops reopened on a ten-hour work plan, and some railroads relocated much of their repair work to Indiana or southern Illinois. Chicago's labor movement seemed defeated, the voices of skilled and unskilled laborers alike all but silenced, though a few did continue to call for the eight-hour workday.⁹⁶ The large Trade Assembly and many of its unions disintegrated. In April 1869, the *Workingman's Advocate* reported the organization had been crumbling for months, and finally died in October 1870.⁹⁷ As the English-speaking trade unions deteriorated, however, German skilled workers organized their own unions, and by September 1869, formed a German-speaking citywide trades assembly with their own newspaper, *Der Deutsche Arbeiter*.⁹⁸

From this point, Chicago's German and Anglo-American labor leaders sought separate paths for labor reform, setting the stage for irreconcilable differences between the two. The German unions became increasingly socialistic. By 1869, exiled revolutionaries like Eduard Schlaeger, who had previously linked German workers with the German community at large, were replaced by men such as Carl Klings, an open socialist. Klings arrived to Chicago from Germany in 1869 at the age of forty-four; as the editor of the *Deutsche Arbeiter*, he became one of the most important German labor leaders for the next several years. Instead of uniting the German community as

⁹⁶ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 35.

⁹⁷ Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs*, 30.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

Schlaeger had done, Klings alienated the German workers from their fellow countrymen by leading a boycott of the local celebrations of the Prussian victory over France in 1871. Klings also aided in the organization of the *Sozial-Politischer Arbeiterverein* (SPA), with direct links to Karl Marx's First International.⁹⁹

On the opposite end of the spectrum from Carl Klings was Andrew Cameron, a Scottish immigrant and member of the Chicago Typographical Union. In 1864, Cameron joined with Schlaeger to publish and edit the *Workingman's Advocate*. While Cameron believed that European collectivism had a legitimate place in Europe, and even initially supported the Paris Commune of 1871, once statist-leaning socialism arrived in the United States, he spoke out against it, unwilling to overlook the fundamental differences between it and his own labor reform philosophies.¹⁰⁰ Cameron became a direct opponent of Klings, particularly when the latter proposed the state of Illinois build large manufactories and storehouses for agricultural products in order to eliminate capitalist intermediaries in the exchange of products between farmers and workers. Cameron believed this policy called for the state to guarantee employment, and intervened with a major editorial in the *Workingman's Advocate*. Such a proposal, he argued, would deprive the citizens of the "noblest ambition in man, that of independence," and would make the workers little more than pensioners.¹⁰¹ On the other hand, Cameron did not

⁹⁹ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 54.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

endorse laissez-faire liberalism, instead, he advocated a free-labor republicanism, viewing both dependence on wage labor or the state as incompatible with democracy. He argued for a middle ground between “communism and property.”¹⁰² Cameron thus became a spokesman for the Anglo-American labor unions in Chicago, who in May 1869 excluded so-called communists from a meeting of the Industrial Congress regarding the enforcement of the eight-hour work laws.¹⁰³

IV. The Ravages of Fire

While the arrival of the railroads and the completion of the Illinois and Michigan Canal in 1848 may have served as a watershed date delineating pre-industrial and industrial Chicago, the fire that swept through the city in October 1871, and the subsequent reconstruction, signify the arrival of a modern metropolis, and Chicago’s solidification as the nation’s “second city.” In fact, when referring to the history of Chicago, the most common line of demarcation among writers is simply before- or after- the fire. While the rebuilding of the city following the conflagration may have been as magnificent as its rapid growth in the decades prior, the fire also highlighted the problems that plagued the city, in terms of both politics and societal structure.

In 1871, Chicago experienced an unusually dry summer and autumn, and reports of fires in nearby Wisconsin and Michigan were not uncommon. On the morning of 8 October 1871, the Chicago *Tribune* published an article

¹⁰² Ibid., 55.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 55.

detailing a serious fire the previous evening on the city's west side. The fire of 7 October burned across twenty acres, destroying lumber and coal yards, mills, businesses, and homes, causing an estimated \$1,000,000 in damages. The newspaper labeled the fire one of the "most disastrous and imposing conflagrations" to ever befall a city, even one such as Chicago where numerous fires had taken place over previous years.¹⁰⁴ This fire, however, was only a foreshadowing of what was to come the following day.

Around 8:30pm on Sunday evening, 8 October, a fire began in the barn behind the home of Patrick O'Leary, on Chicago's west side. Citizens of the city did not pay too much attention to the fire in the beginning; however, a strong wind from the southwest, dry conditions and primarily wooden structures added to the natural dangers of the fire. Furthermore, when the watchman at the Court House sounded the alarm upon seeing the flames, he directed firemen to a location about one mile away from the spot of the fire.¹⁰⁵ Prior to their arrival on the scene, these firefighters were already exhausted from extinguishing the large fire from the previous evening, and were unsuccessful in their attempts to thwart the flames. With these factors combined, the blaze quickly spread out of control, leveling neighborhoods on the south and west side. Thousands fled their homes, seeking refuge on the city's north side, many huddled on the shores of Lake Michigan. As the fire raged on well into the next day, spurred on by the strong winds, it turned northward, burning bridges and

¹⁰⁴ "The Fire Fiend," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 October 1871, 3.

¹⁰⁵ Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 3: the rise of a modern city, 1871-1893* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 4.

leveling the affluent homes on the north side as well. Late in the afternoon of October 9th, the fire decimated the city's waterworks, and destroyed homes and businesses along the lakefront. Twenty-seven hours after it began, the "Great Fire" ended with a rainstorm, and Chicagoans were left to pick up the pieces.

The fire killed 300 citizens, left nearly 100,000 (one-third of the population) homeless, and destroyed 18,000 buildings within four square miles. Though the fire began on the west side, it had been mostly spared; however, the fire burned nearly every building of the south side's business district, and much of the industrial, commercial, and residential areas of the north side.¹⁰⁶ Iconic structures such as the First National Bank, the supposedly fireproof Tribune Building, the Post Office, and the east wing of the Court House all lay in ruins.¹⁰⁷ Many throughout the country would claim that Chicago was forever ruined, others believed the city would "rise again," likening it to a phoenix rising from its ashes.¹⁰⁸ Even residents from as far away as London had faith in the reconstruction of the city. A writer for the *London Times* claimed the resources and energy of Chicagoans would "more than repeat the marvels of the original development" of the city, as Americans were in general more indifferent to calamities than citizens of the older countries in Europe, whose possessions have remained for centuries. In a two-column editorial for London's *Daily News*, a writer marveled at the rise of Chicago, and believed the rebuilding would happen just as quickly. He wrote,

¹⁰⁶ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 231.

¹⁰⁷ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 3*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ "Sympathy from abroad," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 October 1871, 2.

“Already...we may be assured that active and undaunted minds are planning the reconstruction of many a gutted and blackened building, the restoration of many shattered fortunes.”¹⁰⁹ Indeed, plans for the relief of citizens and the rebuilding of Chicago had already begun.

Before the rainstorm extinguished the fire, Chicago’s mayor Roswell B. Mason called upon nearby cities for aid. Fire engines arrived immediately from Milwaukee, Detroit, Aurora, and Indianapolis. From cities further away, such as St. Louis, Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and Louisville, came train cars filled with food, clothing, and other supplies to aid devastated Chicago.¹¹⁰ Residents across the country, and even citizens of foreign countries, donated money and other resources. Mayor Mason charged the Chicago Relief and Aid Society, a private, elite-led charity with the responsibilities of municipal relief. Executive members of the organization included: Wirt Dexter, a railroad attorney; Joseph Medill, part owner of the *Tribune* and soon to be the city’s mayor; and bank presidents W.F. Coolbaugh, H.K. Eames, and F. Irving Pierce.¹¹¹ These men went to work immediately, especially issuing food rations to the tens of thousands left penniless, and were joined by doctors who cared for the sick and injured. Citizens helped build temporary shelters for immediate relief, and within one month constructed over five thousand cottages for those left homeless. An unemployment bureau assisted those that needed work, even furnishing

¹⁰⁹ “The Chicago Fire: The London Press on the Great Calamity,” *Chicago Tribune*, 31 October 1871, 4.

¹¹⁰ “The National Sympathy,” *Chicago Tribune*, 16 October 1871, 2.

¹¹¹ Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 60.

transportation to locations outside the city where employment was readily available.¹¹²

The majority of the damage affected buildings, wholesale and retail goods, and personal property; however, some grain, lumber, and manufacturing were destroyed as well. The fire not only caused a downturn in Chicago's economy, but in the national economy as well. Concerns over the ability of insurance companies to fulfill obligations to business owners and home owners in Chicago was not without merit, and these fears spread to other industries as well. Days after the fire, overall stocks decreased sharply. Railroad holdings, especially for those companies that centered in Chicago dropped dramatically as well. An article in the *New York Times* claimed this was the steepest decline of railroad stocks since the panic of 1869.¹¹³ The railroad industry seemed concerned primarily over the construction of new railroad lines, and Chicago's ability to continue to transport goods, as traffic on the Great Lakes could take up the slack until those railroads affected could be operational again.¹¹⁴ Government bonds and foreign exchange were also affected negatively in the days after the fire. Americans across the country were also hit with personal losses because of the disaster. A manufacturer lost several thousand dollars worth of goods that were waiting to be sold in a Chicago retail store, which burned to the ground. One American remarked the same fire that left 100,000 people homeless in one location, also affected the

¹¹² Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 3*, 8-9.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹¹⁴ "The Effect of the Chicago Fire on Railroad Business," *Railway Times*, 4 November 1871, 346.

well-being of an estimated 100,000 others across the nation, causing them to give up certain luxuries, perhaps even their homes, until the national economy improved.¹¹⁵

By October 1872, Chicago's reconstruction was complete, and nearly all traces of the destruction of the Great Fire had been replaced by new stone buildings, promising an architecturally more beautiful city. The economy also rebounded, with trade returning to pre-fire levels, real estate selling for high prices, and confidence in the banking system remaining steady.¹¹⁶

Reconstructing the city, however, had not been an easy process. In coping with the disaster, Chicagoans were forced to change the structure and uses of their municipal government.¹¹⁷ The fire led to dramatic shifts in land use, forms of investment, and innovations that not only allowed Chicago to grow, but also transformed it into a modern city.¹¹⁸ To outsiders, Chicago represented the very "essence of Americanism," revealing to the world all the "pluck and energy" they possessed to accomplish this task in so short a time.¹¹⁹

From the outside looking in, these accolades rang quite true in Chicago. Nevertheless, inside the city, the fire brought to light among some deep dissatisfaction with the nature and structure of government. City politics was now an arena for class conflict, as citizens began to call for a new type of

¹¹⁵ "The Chicago Fire," *The Religious Magazine and Monthly Review* (November, 1871, 46:5): 463.

¹¹⁶ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 3*, 17.

¹¹⁷ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 231.

¹¹⁸ Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 4.

¹¹⁹ "New Chicago: A British Review of the Lakeside's Fire Anniversary," *Chicago Tribune*, 18 January 1874, 10.

reform, not centralized elitism, but social and economic progressivism.¹²⁰

These disagreements were highlighted when the Relief and Aid Society attempted to censure soup kitchens.

In January 1872, concerned citizens from Cincinnati raised enough money to fund and facilitate two soup kitchens in Chicago, in order to help the victims of the fire during the harsh winter. Wirt Dexter, member of the Relief and Aid Society and long time activist in the work of “urban charity,” demanded the Cincinnati organizations cease giving free soup to all. The soup kitchens worked on the premise that all who arrived for the free meals were, Dexter argued, in legitimate need. Just one month prior, a Boston journalist accused the members of the Relief and Aid Society of making the same mistakes. Dexter and the others were “warm at heart, probably, but not particularly large or deep of head,” in their indiscriminate relief to the fire victims.¹²¹ The journalist acknowledged that the days following the fire was no time to introduce red tape, as starving people needed assistance immediately. The author further chastised Dexter, claiming once the prospect of relief began dragging on for months, members of the society should have realized handing out free lunches while not expecting the people to work for it, was only reducing those same workers to pauperism.¹²²

Dexter, in turn, accused the Cincinnati groups of letting the working class of Chicago become dependent on charitable organizations or the state. In

¹²⁰ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 243.

¹²¹ “The Chicago Sufferers: Mistakes of the Relief Committee,” *The Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 20 December 1871, 6.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 6.

a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Times*, Dexter first of all questioned the Cincinnati Committee's insistence on spending their funds on soup kitchens, on the assumption Chicago lacked these establishments. No one, he claimed, could live on soup alone, but also needed solid food, and should not be required to travel to a certain location and wait in line for these provisions. By contrast, the Relief and Aid Society attempted to distribute food to the fire victims that applied for the service and were deemed worthy of legitimate aid. Dexter appeared offended and appalled that a group of people from a neighboring city could spend very little time in Chicago and simply declare the need for more soup kitchens, which the Relief and Aid Society believed should be restricted. The soup kitchens funded by the citizens of Cincinnati were only useful in supporting the "floating paupers" of the city, but were "utterly unsuited to the needs of a large population of a better class, suddenly deprived of their means of support by an unparalleled public calamity."¹²³ Another primary objection to the Cincinnati Committee's plan was that volunteers were handing out the soup without visitation or record. Such a policy, Dexter argued, was dangerous, and posed a serious threat to the highest welfare of the community. By enticing all people, not just the fire victims, with free lunches or dinners, the soup kitchens discouraged the people from honest labor, dispensing the "bread of idleness."¹²⁴

Some residents of Chicago who read Dexter's letter to the editor were less than pleased with the attorney's conclusions and suggestions. A well-

¹²³ "Too Much Soup," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, 28 January 1872, 5.

¹²⁴ "The Relief Work," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 29 January 1872, 2.

known businessman who lost everything in the fire wrote to the Cincinnati Relief Committee, who published his letter anonymously in a local newspaper. This prominent Chicagoan read Dexter's piece, and concluded the Relief and Aid Society merely wanted to control the \$100,000 the Cincinnati Committee had to spend. This citizen vehemently protested such a move, claiming the Relief and Aid Society poorly handled the crisis. He related his own stories of loss, and attempts at getting bedding to sleep on, and rations for a week's worth of flour. Each time he was directed from one place to another, forced to stand in line for hours, usually with little results. Having heard of his plight, the Masons provided the man at the very least with bedding and a stove. Once he did receive provisions from the society, the food was often rotten, and after months of promises, only received a little coal in December after sending a strongly worded letter. The businessman claimed the leadership of charitable organizations made all the difference; one soup kitchen well-run by the Cincinnati Committee could help more people than \$100,000 in the control of the Relief and Aid Society.¹²⁵

Despite the opposition and challenges, the Chicago society continued to control aid to the fire victims, and maintained a very watchful eye, taking care the necessity of relief did not morph into socialism. Once the immediate hardships of the fire had abated, Chicago faced an economic crisis, a crisis which could provide revolutionaries ample evidence of what they claimed to be

¹²⁵ "Our Soup House, what others besides Wirt Dexter think of it," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 30 January 1872, 5.

the evils inherent in capitalism.¹²⁶ Conscious of these internal divisions that could threaten the city, the native-born elites who controlled the Chicago Relief and Aid Society created a “private state,” to ensure the working class victims of the Great Fire did not become dependent on the government.¹²⁷

Not surprisingly, the fears of radical socialism or communism came to the forefront in the days immediately following the fire. Some Chicagoans raised concerns over a supposed confession printed in the *Chicago Times* on October 23, in which an exiled Paris Communard claimed to have set the fire. In his letter, the mastermind boasted that he gathered a dozen likeminded conspirators to destroy the business district, an act of revolution meant to “humble the men who waxed rich at the expense of the poor.”¹²⁸ The newspaper, however, was notorious for printing sensationalized stories, and, realizing its readers expected dangerous tales from the fire, either printed a fabrication or was the victim of an elaborate hoax. While allegations against radicals may have been false regarding the fire, Chicagoans had been hyperaware of socialist movements in the city since the communist takeover of Paris some five months prior.¹²⁹ The violence of the Commune was still often discussed and feared among Chicago’s elites, who were familiar with the stories of a great city being destroyed by revolutionary workers.

¹²⁶ “Our Communists: A Brief Sketch of the Socialist Movement,” *Chicago Tribune*, 25 December 1873, 1; Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 261-262.

¹²⁷ Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 262-263.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Journalist F.F. Cook wrote an analysis of urban life in 1910, and proclaimed that Chicago in the 1860s and 1870s was misunderstood. The remarkable growth of the city and the opportunities it promised and symbolized caused many to view it as a place “representative of democratic equality.”¹³⁰ Cook claimed the city was actually quite different, and described it as a city in which sharply accented lines crossed every sphere of life. Even though Chicago seemed filled with destiny and promise, it was truly the same as other 19th century American cities, communities built around a culturally diverse population arranged into a social and economic class system.¹³¹ While many Chicagoans held similar values, the Great Fire highlighted the differences, especially social and political constructs and their meanings, effectively changing politics in the city.¹³² The political differences the Relief and Aid Society attempted to eliminate were once again brought to the forefront two years following the fire, when the *Tribune* printed a front-page article on Christmas Day entitled, “Our Communists,” providing a history of the movement in Chicago and warning against the wild, subversive, and un-American nature of the movement. These sentiments set an example and a precedent for how differentiating viewpoints on the structure and nature of government would be addressed in Chicago in the decades to come.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹³¹ Ibid., 15.

¹³² Ibid., 15.

Chapter 3

Chicagoans Face a New Threat, 1871-1877

On 23 March 1879, an article appeared in the *Chicago Tribune*, traditionally conservative and the most widely read publication in the city, warning against Communist campaigns in the up-coming municipal elections. Over the previous few years, candidates for alderman from the Socialist Party, sometimes referred to as the Socialistic Labor Party in Chicago, had been able to win elections in several of the city's wards.¹ As would often be the case, this reporter made no distinction between socialists and communists, generally labeling any such radical idea or political party as "communistic," likely in efforts to discredit the party. The author claimed the dangerous organization consistently attempted to "intimidate the timid, law-abiding classes of the community through public displays of armed force."² Throughout the article, the author addressed the four main goals of communism, which he claimed to be: the "abolition of all individual responsibility;" the denial of the "right of acquiring, possessing, and preserving individual property;" annihilation of every "motive for personal effort or progress, or for thrift or enterprise;" and "stagnation by the destruction of every motive to effort and ambition that raises man above the brute."³ While seemingly convinced that the "active, restless, thinking, pushing American people" would never fully embrace the

¹ "The Communists: Their Rejoicing over Election," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 April 1878, 8.

² "The Aims and Ends of Communism," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 March 1879, 4.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

political theory, the author appeared distressed that the communist ideals would entice Chicago's working class, thereby gaining a foothold within the city.

Looking back at the events of the previous decade in Chicago, the author may have believed he had concrete reasons for those fears. The 1870s were tumultuous in Chicago, beginning, of course, with the Great Fire and its accompanying social and political upheaval. In the years to follow, Chicago faced numerous strikes and riots, including the extensive railroad strike of 1877; reactions and attitudes of Chicagoans to these events were shaped by their fears of a violent Communist coup in their city, much like they had witnessed in Paris in 1871. As the events unfolded throughout the decade, residents formed into two relatively distinct camps, with conservative businessmen, politicians, and newspaper editors (from such publications as the *Tribune*, *Chicago Times*, and *Inter-Ocean*) often decrying the perceived radicalism of the working class and their advocates. While the laboring class in Chicago during this period did have some voice in print, particularly through the English-language *Workingmen's Advocate*, and in the later years of the decade the German-language *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, in general their ideas are often difficult to locate, but have been added where possible. Nevertheless, during the 1870s, primarily the members of the social elite, whose opinions were clearly published in the mainstream media, began to reshape the very definition of nationalism, demonstrating that the idea of "Americanism," both

in its early and later expressions, was consistently a weapon of political reactionaries.

This chapter charts how increasing labor unrest led the *Tribune* and its most prominent allies to return again and again to the idea that those protesting against capital were engaging in a quintessentially “un-American” activity. By making this accusation, businessmen and politicians of Chicago cast a mold that later opponents of liberal and left wing causes would use to discredit their opponents as not only politically wrong, but dangerously treasonous.

Did this ideological mobilization on behalf of a particular form of “Americanism” generate what physicists call an “equal and opposite reaction?” Yes, but its content and dimensions are not nearly as easy to see. As we shall see in Chapter 4, by the 1880s those who had been branded, and indeed often saw themselves, as radicals, began to coordinate an organized response against these ideas. But in the decisive early years of struggle, strike and stridency, the sources from the workers are not as easily available, as apart from the *Workingmen’s Advocate* (the surviving articles of which are very inconsistent in the early 1870s), the majority of the workers’ views in Chicago can be found only in German-language publications such as the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. Other print sources available from the 1870s that support laborers are primarily from more modern religious and political reformers. Often these defenders of workers’ rights felt themselves on the defensive—speaking up in behalf of the basic human needs and rights of workers. At the same time, they often felt

compelled to express concern that laborers not be too violent or too threatening to the establishment. The threat of being cast out as “un-American,” however, did not appear to cause labor activism to diminish.

I. The Shadow of the Paris Commune

Before returning to this heartland of American political and economic conflict, we must first reconstruct the American reaction to the rise of the Commune as a specter in Europe. Ten years prior to the *Tribune's* warnings against communism in Chicago, Karl Marx wrote a letter to his friend Dr. Ludwig Kuglemann about a new and interesting movement happening in France. “The Parisians,” Marx wrote, “are making a regular study of their recent revolutionary past, in order to prepare themselves for the business of the impending revolution...And so the whole witches’ cauldron is bubbling.”⁴ The first step in France at creating a commune of the working class took place in Lyons in October 1870, during the Franco-Prussian War. Both workers and a contingent of Republicans established this new government, and the middle-class seemed to sympathize with the new order. Nevertheless, Marx believed the majority of the middle-class would rather have seen the Prussians defeat France than witness the victory of a new republic with “socialist tendencies.”⁵

⁴ Karl Marx to Dr. Ludwig Kuglemann, 3 March 1869. Quoted in: Draper, Hal., ed. *Writings on the Paris Commune by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 216.

⁵ Karl Marx to E.S. Beasley, 19 October 1870. Quoted in: Draper, Hal., ed. *Writings on the Paris Commune by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 216.

The repercussions of the commune in Lyons rippled across France, but did not reach Paris until March 1871, after the French defeat at the hands of a newly unified Germany. The Paris Commune continues to be controversial among scholars, particularly when they consider the various ideological strains, the involvement, or lack thereof, by the First International, and perhaps the possibility that the Paris Commune was nothing more than a myth created by Marx himself.⁶ American authors and experts on Marx, and his writings, have urged caution when regarding the name ‘commune,’ claiming the term did not necessarily mean a revolution to the form of government or society in France. In fact, the base meaning ‘free town’ appears closer to the true reasons for the uprisings, as Parisians demanded autonomous control over their city that for years had been dominated politically by the conservative provinces.⁷

As French officials attempted to remove canons from the city on 18 March 1871, Parisians revolted; within ten days the citizens of Paris held new elections and proclaimed the Commune at the Hotel de Ville on 28 March. That evening, members of the Communal Council delivered speeches from a platform covered in red cloth to a large crowd of nationals, who often raised their caps on the points of their bayonets, fervently cheering the Republic.⁸ Both French officials and the Prussian military prepared for violence in the capital. While the French government organized a “trustworthy” force to march on Paris and remove the Commune and its council, Prussian military

⁶ Draper, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, 8.

⁷ Draper, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, 9; Bruce, Robert V. *1877: Year of Violence* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, Inc., 1959), 226.

⁸ “Proclamation of the Commune in Paris,” *New York Times*, 30 March 1871, 1.

leaders concentrated their forces near Paris, ready to take matters into their own hands if the French government could not oust the insurgents.⁹

A counterstrike against the Commune began in early April. Jenny Marx, daughter of Karl Marx, wrote on 18 April that the ferocious hand of newly-elected President Adolphe Thiers ordered the massacre of the “bravest and best” of Paris. She claimed that even the London press, previously having maligned the Commune, admitted men had “never struggled more bravely and boldly for a principle.”¹⁰ The following month, French troops continued their assault on the city, culminating in what became known as the “bloody week,” during which tens of thousands of Communards died in a last ditch effort to save their insurrection. With much of the city in flames, the Paris Commune ended on 28 May. Karl Marx realized early in the struggle for Paris that the leaders of the Commune would likely not be able to hold the city. Nevertheless, the important issue for Marx was that the struggle between the working class and the capitalist-controlled state had entered a new phase, with global implications. Even though the Commune was defeated, he argued its principles were eternal, and proponents would “assert themselves again and again until the working classes were emancipated.”¹¹

⁹ “Proclamation of the Commune in Paris,” *New York Times*, 30 March 1871, 1; “News of the Week,” *The Christian Union*, 5 April 1871.

¹⁰ Jenny Marx to the Kuglemanns, 18 April 1871. Quoted in: Draper, Hal., ed. *Writings on the Paris Commune by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 222.

¹¹ Karl Marx to Dr. Kuglemann, 17 April 1871; Report by Karl Marx to the General Council of the International, 23 May 1871. Quoted in: Draper, Hal., ed. *Writings on the Paris Commune by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 222, 223.

The Paris Commune was fairly short, lasting only two months, and did not radically alter the government or society of France; however, the Commune captured the attention and ideological imagination of Americans from every background. For many in the United States, the events in Paris were unsettling; the Commune was a reminder, not only of the French civil war, but also of their own recently ended war.¹² Historian Philip Katz has compared the Commune to a “flat pebble that skipped across the surface of American culture...with every skip it propagated ripples...even when the pebble sank from view, it continued to alter the flow of things around it, however subtly.”¹³

In general, while Americans reacted negatively to the Commune, an unlikely base of support for the Parisians existed in the “French Quarter” of the American South. The *New Orleans Daily-Picayune* offered its support to what editors claimed was a politically legitimate revolt against Thiers and his government. A revolt by one person, the article stated, against laws sanctioned by all others was a crime; similarly, a few revolting against the will of the majority should also be held responsible for their crimes. In comparing their own struggles against national power to the Commune, the editors of the *Daily-Picayune* wrote: “when an insurrection assumes vast proportions, is sustained for a long time with ample military power, and takes the shape of an orderly, independent government, its adherents, coadjutors, and sympathizers can no longer be held as amenable to criminal laws...insurgent sway may become so

¹² Philip M. Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

extended, and take on ...the insignia of legitimate power.”¹⁴ The only point of contention for the New Orleans reporters was not the Commune itself nor its leaders, but the anarchy that followed the initial events, intensifying party differences, and arousing old hatreds, allowing the “worst passions of the most dangerous classes” to commit riotous disorder in the name of the Commune.¹⁵

Throughout the south, ex-Confederates appeared ready to support the Commune, which seemed to them a wholesome uprising against an oppressive centralized power.¹⁶ Some even compared the Commune to the Ku Klux Klan, as Democratic congressman Samuel S. Cox stated both began as secret conspiracies, the result of bad government. Former Confederate Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens also supported the Commune, seeing parallels between both the southern and Parisian struggle for home rule.¹⁷ To readers of more recent times, it may be especially surprising that these southerners could not see the parallel between what the supporters of the Paris Commune wanted, and the desires of former slaves for “40 Acres and a Mule.” Material interest can profoundly skew one’s point of view.

Despite some opportunistic and self-serving support for the Commune among southerners, most American newspapers opposed and feared the Parisian uprising. The common response of the American press was severe hostility, as authors and editors began to imply that workers in the United

¹⁴ “A Sign of Peace,” *New Orleans Daily-Picayune*, 26 April 1871, 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁶ Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre*, 107.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 107; 109.

States might pose a similar threat to American society.¹⁸ Just after the Parisians declared the Commune at the end of March, the *New York Times* told its readers not to expect a new social organization. Instead, what the Commune signified was that a mob in Paris decided the capital city should be independent and sovereign, with “unquestioned power to manage its own affairs.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, the establishment of the Commune was the beginning of the worst, as the political and military charlatans who controlled the city would stop at nothing less than a Parisian city-state, completely independent from the rest of France. Predicting other cities would follow the lead of Paris, with the entire nation devolving into chaos, the author declared that civil conflict, even if long and bloody, would be better than the consequences of the Commune.²⁰

The following month, the *New York Times* published another denunciation of the Commune, this time not only opposing the French characteristics of the uprising, but also drawing larger conclusions of a world-wide labor revolution. The Commune, more than simply an outbreak of discontents in Paris, was a movement of a rogue wing of the working class, having distinctly “terrible and grotesque French characteristics.”²¹ Like previous French revolutions, the author argued, the Commune would proclaim words of love, but perform deeds of death and destruction. Leaders in Paris had already declared belief in God a superstition of the past, and religion a

¹⁸ Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to 1976* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 24-25.

¹⁹ “Paris under the Communists,” *New York Times*, 28 March 1871, 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

²¹ “The Coming Revolution of Labor,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1871, 4.

chimera, and as a result, they had attacked churches and priests; however, the same leaders also issued proclamations gushing with expressions of universal philanthropy, love, and fraternity. While espousing these ideas of love and fraternity, the author declared the Communards would “mark every threshold with its bloody stain in an absurd civil strife, and shoot their own best countrymen who may be suspected of opposing their ambition.”²²

This would merely be the beginning, as the *New York Times* article warned that Parisian self-indulgence would soon officially pronounce marriage as brutality, government as tyranny, property as robbery, and religion as a sham, allowing each citizen of the new republic to be a law unto himself. More troubling than these essentially French features of this particular revolution were the wider, deeper, and more somber forces at work in Paris, the stirring of a “social storm which shall yet shake every capital of Europe,” and possibly beyond. The most disturbing consequence of the Paris Commune was the renewed conflict between capital and labor; hundreds of thousands of men in civilized countries, the author warned, had already organized, seeking to secure more of the prizes of life for themselves. The author did not necessarily begrudge the cause of the working class, writing that “all the wealth of the world has come from them, and they have had none of its benefits,” as century after century the wealthy continually suppressed workers. Nevertheless, the journalist cautioned against the ideas and excesses of the Commune, already making their way into British and American trade unions. The “bloody and

²² “The Coming Revolution of Labor,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1871, 4.

wild outbreak” in Paris represented only one explosion of the “vast, boiling, volcanic material” underlying European and American society; the “great revolution of labor,” predicted the author, “is still yet to come.”²³

When the Commune ended, the newspaper again supported the cause of the working class against capitalists, but decried the extravagances of Parisian socialistic democracy. The excesses of the Commune produced a profound impression of horror and disgust in Europe and the United States, so much so that the authors warned the “first demands of the laboring classes and the cities...will be confused with the wild ideas and savage crimes of the French Communists.”²⁴ One particular point of contention was that the insurrectionists were not rebelling against a tyrannical government at the height of its power, but at a moment when the country lay “bleeding and prostrate before a foreign invader.”²⁵ The leaders in Paris thus declared war against their country, as well as against property, religion, art, and civilization; in their struggle to crown all men, the working classes “attempted to destroy the city they could not govern...they defaced and burned works of immortal genius, and ruined and demolished what no wealth or culture can ever restore.”²⁶ With these excesses and crimes, the Paris Commune set the laborers cause back at least half a century, according to the author. The very names of “working men’s organizations” or “associations” or “unions” would,

²³ “The Coming Revolution of Labor,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1871, 4.

²⁴ “The Commune and Liberty,” *New York Times*, 31 May 1871, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

no matter their cause, “smell in the nostrils,” of the populace, arousing fear and suspicion in Europe and the United States for generations.²⁷

Many writers for national journals also held similar views to the *New York Times*. In May, *Every Saturday* published an article against the “hateful, foolish tyranny” of the Commune. This system, if successful, would not only slow the progress of the working class, whom the Communards claimed to benefit, but the progress of all humanity. Championing the rights of labor was merely an assertion that “laziness and incompetency should be on par with strenuous work and educated intelligence.”²⁸ The author declared France had never been so humiliated under any of its previous governments, and the Commune, comprised of the most contemptible of sneaks disguised as heroes, was condemned as the most impudent of all impositions.²⁹

After a short time had passed, the writers for *The Independent* reflected on the Paris Commune, offering lessons learned from the events to their readers. For the writers, the first and greatest lesson was that all men with a stake in society, who desired peace, who prized religion and civil government, could see the hideous extremes of fanatical socialistic revolution, and could be on guard against such uprisings.³⁰ Of note here as well, the authors compare the situation in the United States to that of France. First of all, they claimed America had a comparatively equal division of soil, which could be acquired

²⁷ “The Commune and Liberty,” *New York Times*, 31 May 1871, 4.

²⁸ “The Paris Insurrection,” *Every Saturday: A Journal of Choice Reading*, 13 May 1871, 450.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 450.

³⁰ “The Lesson of the Commune,” *The Independent*, 15 June 1871, 4.

fairly easily, and would prevent any serious agrarian disturbance. The only thing American citizens had to guard against were attempts to regulate wages by violence; however, the laws of political economy, which the authors call the laws of God, would prevail against any subversive efforts. If Americans learn these lessons from the French Commune, and about their own social and political situation, the authors declared an American Commune would never reach fruition.³¹

II. Paris as Seen From Chicago

As Americans nationwide opposed the Paris Commune, so too did many people of Chicago. The newspaper *The Advance*, established by the Congregationalist denomination and based in Chicago, published several opinion articles about the Commune during its two months of power, and provided a somewhat more balanced approach, at least in the beginning. While the editor, William W. Patton, ordained Congregationalist minister and president of Howard University from 1877-1889, certainly denounced the violence in the city, he drew parallels to the current situation in the United States, and seemed to have some sympathy for Parisians. Just days after the citizens declared the Commune, Patton wrote that his heart was heavy for Paris; he believed the French government to be deeply wrong in their war and subsequent peace with Germany, yet lamented the outbreak of bloodshed that accompanied the Commune. For him, the saddest part of the recent events was

³¹ "The Lesson of the Commune," *The Independent*, 15 June 1871, 4.

that they strengthened the argument for despotism in France, much to his consternation. Patton admitted the Communards had no self-control, made unreasonable demands, and were blood-thirsty in their hatred of all who opposed them. Nevertheless, the editor issued caution in overdoing the condemnation of the leaders of Paris. "The true remedy for the blind abuse of liberty," he wrote, "is not a return to despotism."³² Patton believed that, instead of abolishing liberty to punish the excesses, French leaders should institute universal education and perfect religious freedom; preachers and schoolmasters would do more to save France than autocrats or soldiers. Patton also drew comparisons between the Commune and the Ku Klux Klan, especially in the wake of their shared belief in violent revolution.

Over the course of the twentieth century, many leaders of popular political thinking would studiously avoid the similarities in tactics and language between communism and fascism. William Patton did not. While some southerners portrayed both entities in a positive manner, Patton denounced both the Commune and the Klan as expressions of anarchy. Following the Franco-Prussian war, the citizens of Paris developed "red republican organizations," and rushed into anarchical, murderous mobs; following the American Civil War, Patton claimed southern states also descended into anarchy with the appearance of the Klan. In comparing the two, the editor believed the American form of anarchy just as senseless, and more cruel and widespread than French anarchism. Patton urged caution

³² William W. Patton, "Notes and Comments," *The Advance*, 30 March 1871, 1.

again, claiming that governments in both instances needed to be more balanced; as much as no one in France wanted the return of despotism in order to put down the Commune, so too did he fear the counsel of those whose only remedy for anarchy and violence in the south was the continuation of military rule.³³

In April, however, Patton reiterated his call for balance in the French government. The Commune had become the very picture of national desolation, with the world standing aghast at the events unfolding in Paris. While the French may have gained universal sympathy for their humiliating defeat, and subsequent peace, at the hands of Germany, the unspeakable acts carried out by the Commune served to end any such sentiments. Though he admitted the people had been wronged, Patton declared that anarchy was no solution; “better a despot than a mob,” he wrote.³⁴ The editor was so appalled by the events in Paris at the hands of the Commune, he claimed that order was more important than liberty.³⁵

Unlike Patton and other writers at *The Advance*, whose articles usually offered a more balanced approach to the events in France, authors and editors for the *Chicago Tribune* offered much more scathing denunciations of the Paris Commune. On 15 April 1871, a writer for the *Tribune* claimed the Commune to be in close sympathy with the *Internationale* and other bodies of workingmen, “ready to rise into revolution” at any time. He fashioned the leaders as the

³³ Ibid., 1.

³⁴ William W. Patton, “French Ruin – the cause – the lesson,” *The Advance*, 13 April 1871, 4.

³⁵ Ibid., 4.

antithesis of aristocracy: instead of culture, they had ignorance; instead of property, squalor; instead of law, universal plunder.³⁶ One of the more dangerous aspects of the Commune was that it represented a revolution without a country, without national boundaries, capable of spreading across borders. In this Commune, the author claimed, murder was a pastime, and debauchery a coveted emancipation from superstitions; therefore, assassinations of priests and general execution of religious order could happen at any time. Never before had a revolutionary movement been as base and dangerous as the Paris Commune.³⁷

Chicago's large immigrant working class helped to establish new forms of labor organization, and for the authors of the *Tribune*, these trade unions presupposed communism. Dismissing the idea that the purpose of the Commune was Parisian autonomy, one author claimed the rebellion was a "grand trades union strike, directed from London, the upshot of whose effort will be to abolish all rights of property, and to substitute for a republic the government of trades."³⁸ Chicagoans, and Americans, perhaps needed to use caution, but otherwise had little reason to fear, for the workingmen's organizations were far stronger in England, France, and Germany than they could ever be in the United States.³⁹

Owing in large part to the editorials of the *Tribune*, fear of the Commune and the spread of its ideas reached Chicago rather quickly. In June, following

³⁶ "The Dream of the Commune," *Chicago Tribune*, 15 April 1871, 1.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁸ "The Paris Rebellion," *Chicago Tribune*, 21 April 1871, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

the end of the Commune, a correspondent for the *Tribune* began to make comparisons of recent resolutions adopted by a gathering at Turner Hall in Chicago to the “disgraceful doings of the late Paris Commune.”⁴⁰ The resolutions in question were regarding the new Sunday Saloon Law, designed to curb excessive drinking on Sundays, when more people had free time to spend drinking if they chose. The largely German crowd denounced the new laws as imposing religious, specifically Christian, belief on Chicago’s populace. In response, the correspondent for the *Tribune* inferred the criticisms of the saloon laws were an attack on all laws recognizing any system of religious belief, and compared the actions of the crowd at Turner Hall to the Paris “reds,” striking fear into the heart of Chicagoans.

A small number of letters to the editor of the *Tribune* provide evidence that some Chicagoans felt very differently about the meetings at Turner Hall, and were offended that such protest was considered “un-American.” Anonymous letters to the paper especially suggested the inherent dangers of speaking out in defense of the demonstrations. In one such letter, published soon after the June gathering, an author simply listed as “An American,” decried the comparisons between the actions of the Commune and that of the crowd at Turner Hall. This citizen inquired as to what kind of analogy could be reasonably made between the “outrages of civilization, committed by a virulent mob, and the protest of a body of peaceable, conservative-thinking, and liberty-

⁴⁰ “The Sunday Question,” *Chicago Tribune*, 13 June 1871, 1.

loving citizens against the violation of their rights.”⁴¹ Speaking pointedly and explicitly as “*an American*,” the author formally stated his protest, “against any such stretch of imagination or – as, perhaps, is more proper – bigoted view of the case.”⁴² Those assembled at Turner Hall were simply expressing a determination to enjoy the rights of free citizens, not evidence of sedition inspired by French radicals.⁴³ The previous article in the newspaper compared the group of Chicagoans to the Parisian communists, claiming they were attempting to force their views upon an unwilling nation. In response, “the American” claimed that the *Tribune’s* correspondent was ignorant of the fact that the United States was not a nation made up only of believers in the tenets of Christianity; the freedom to worship also embraced deists, free-thinkers, atheists, Jews, and others who also lived in the city, and were subjected to the new laws as well. In concluding his letter to the editor, the author urged the newspaper’s reporter to improve his comparisons and attain a broader view of the rights of men under a free government.⁴⁴

In 1872, the *Catholic World*, a politically conservative but theologically liberal publication established by Father Isaac Hecker,⁴⁵ published an article entitled “The Duties of the Rich in Christian Society,” which, in light of the

⁴¹ Ibid.,1.

⁴² Ibid., 1.

⁴³ Ibid.,1.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1.

⁴⁵ For more information on Father Isaac Hecker and *The Catholic World*, please see: O’Brien, David T., *Isaac Hecker: An American Catholic*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992; Mislin, David, “According to his Own Judgment: The American Catholic Encounter with Organic Evolution.” *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*. Vol. 22 No. 2 (Summer 2012), 133-162.

excesses of the Paris Commune, warned its readers against communism and the coming war between the laboring class and the wealthy. The adherents of Communism, according to the article, threatened the wealthy class with a war of extermination, and those belonging to the upper class needed to understand what the “fanatics of revolution” were preparing.⁴⁶ The bloody orgies of the Paris Commune disclosed the true character of the enemy that threatened the privileges, possessions, and lives of the wealthy. The great evil of society was the hostilities between the upper class and the laboring class, and the journal warned its readers the very fabric of American politics and culture would face dissolution when the masses took up arms against the aristocracy. In order to defeat the nefarious plots of the revolutionaries, the wealthy classes needed to ensure their children were educated against such ideas and how to combat them, and to use their own wealth, intellect, social influence, and political power to avert the dangers, and to promote a solid American society.⁴⁷

By the time the *Catholic World* published their article, Chicago was beginning to buckle under the strain of a waning economy, a rapidly growing city, and an increasingly displaced workforce. Years after its rise and fall, the Paris Commune continued to cast a long shadow over Chicago politics, as economic, social, and political crises unfolded in the city in the early 1870s, summoning the memories and fear of radicalism in the city.

⁴⁶ “The Duties of the Rich in Christian Society,” *The Catholic World*, February 1872, 578.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 578.

III. The Shadow of Economic Crisis

From 1870-1890, as Chicago became more important as a center of commerce and industry in the United States, the city's working class continued to grow exponentially. By this time, the Chicago labor force consisted more and more of the native-born children of immigrants.⁴⁸ Some of these workers, especially those belonging to the German-American middle-class, would turn their back on their immigrant pasts as a way of proving their patriotism; however, for others, their experience of the United States as a nation of immigrants led to a different set of political beliefs and allegiances under the American banner.

In the 1870s, Chicago's economy had reached maturity, as evidenced by the distribution of workers in various professions. While mechanics and manufacturing employed the largest number of people in the city, large numbers also worked as bankers or brokers, highlighting the city's importance as a growing trading center.⁴⁹

Even before the panic of 1873, the working class was economically insecure, and especially concerned about wages lagging behind inflation. In the 1870s, food prices soared 50-100% higher and the overall cost of living increased between 15-40%, while wages remained relatively stagnant at an average of \$5.00 per day for skilled workers. Despite these conditions, laborers flocked to Chicago, largely because of the booming economy, especially the

⁴⁸ Bessie Louise Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3: The Rise of a Modern City, 1871-1893* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 234.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

construction industry, following the Great Fire. Skilled workers arrived in the city from as far away as Great Britain on the promise of \$5.00 - \$7.00 a day wages.⁵⁰ In reality wages in Chicago, even for the skilled workers, were far below that of other American cities, partly because of the increase of available laborers. For example, though they arrived in the city believing they would receive higher pay, the maximum bricklayers were paid in Chicago was \$4.00 or \$4.50 per day, with carpenters only earning \$3.50 per day, in both cases far less than they would receive in either Philadelphia or St. Louis.⁵¹

Political and social conditions in Chicago were similar to those of other large American cities, yet citizens of Chicago seemed to be in greater open conflict than Americans elsewhere, owing to the discrepancy in wages and the wide gap between the workers and the wealthy. In 1872, on the eve of the economic crisis, the city appeared, at least to some of its residents, to have risen successfully from the ashes of the ashes of the Great Fire, and asserted itself as a major urban center, erasing the last enclaves of village life.⁵² Some outside observers saw only the surface: magnificent new stone buildings along State Street and Michigan Avenue, the palatial estates of wealthy families such as the Fields, Armours, Pullmans, and the Hibbards. This vision of the city ignored the direct contrast between these great monuments to wealth and the shacks in the Fourteenth ward. These unstable structures were far more common; they had no foundations or plumbing; entire families were forced to

⁵⁰ Ibid., 240.

⁵¹ Ibid., 240 n.

⁵² Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*, 233.

live in one-room dwellings. Some who today would be classified as homeless would find meager shelter in alleyways and closets.⁵³ Not all of Chicago's working class lived in such dire conditions. But even skilled workers who lived in small cottages made ends meet only because their children also worked. By 1872, up to 5,000 children between the ages of ten and fifteen worked full-time in furniture factories, print shops, packinghouses, and dry goods stores.⁵⁴

In 1872, as news of the Paris Commune continued to flow into the city, workers in Chicago attempted to exercise their power to improve their working conditions. On Saturday, 21 September 1872, members of the Carpenters' Union in Chicago ceased work, informing their employers of a resolution demanding \$4 per day, and giving their bosses all day Sunday to decide whether or not to pay the higher wages.

When the carpenters returned to their workshops on Monday morning, many of their employers met them with the decision that no concessions would be made, telling the workers they must accept the current pay or find work elsewhere. A few employers, however, especially those working under commission, agreed to pay the higher wages. The *Chicago Tribune* estimated nearly 2,000 carpenters, most of who belonged to the union, subsequently went on strike.⁵⁵ Other trades' unions from Chicago supported the carpenters, pledging to raise funds to support the workers. Writers of the *Tribune* seemed to agree with the employers, who stated the strike would not last more than

⁵³ Ibid., 234.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 234.

⁵⁵ "Four Dollars a Day," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 September 1872, 1.

one week. While the more prudent carpenters had money saved for such a purpose, the majority had very little, and could not remain on strike for long without the fear and danger of starvation.

Since the strike had been planned for some time, newspapers in the east advertised it, causing reporters for the *Tribune* to expect hundreds of carpenters to arrive from all over the country, stepping into the positions of the striking workers. The problem, however, would be that many of these new arrivals would be unable to find work during the upcoming winter, causing unnecessary distress and suffering, for which only the striking workers were to blame.⁵⁶ Writers for the newspaper predicted the strike would assuredly fail, as all the others in Chicago had, and would be forgotten about within one week's time, except by those workers who lost their jobs and could no longer provide food for their families.

The evening the strike started, nearly 1,500 strikers gathered at Turner Hall to discuss the events and induct new members. Mr. Owens, the President of the Association, called the meeting to order and stated that for the first time in the era of trades' unions in Chicago, the press had acknowledged the justice of their demands. On other occasions, Owens remarked, Chicago's press had misrepresented and vilified the carpenters, but in this instance, they had been treated fairly. Owens claimed that the solidarity of the union was the only way to get their voices heard and their demands met, also issuing a challenge that

⁵⁶ "Four Dollars a Day," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 September 1872, 1.

other trades' unions were looking to the carpenters in this crisis to pave the way in the case of future fights over low wages.⁵⁷

While in the first days of the strike, the *Tribune* seemed supportive of the strikers, though pessimistic about their chances of success; by 25 September the editors called for the carpenters to abandon any further effort to gain higher wages.⁵⁸ The paper did not begrudge the members of the union for attempting to obtain higher wages, but told their readers that the laws of supply and demand meant the carpenters were fighting a losing battle. While union members were on strike, the *Tribune* recounted the high number of buildings in Chicago still being constructed, with workers willing to receive between \$2.75 and \$3.50 per day. In visiting these work sites, employers universally stated that good workmen were abundant, further validating the editors' arguments.⁵⁹

Despite the calls for the carpenters to end their strike, the union's work stoppage continued for several more days. In the beginning, the strike was fairly quiet, with no violent attacks or demonstrations. The *Tribune* commended the carpenters for carrying out the strike without "turbulent gatherings or intimidating procession," thereby setting an example worthy of imitation.⁶⁰ Within days, however, the paper reported on a number of attacks on working carpenters. An effort was made on 27 September to intimidate the carpenters on the Portland Block, and to those working at the Michigan

⁵⁷ "Four Dollars a Day," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 September 1872, 1.

⁵⁸ "The Carpenters' Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 September 1872, 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁰ No Title. *Chicago Tribune* 25 September 1872, 4.

Southern Railroad Depot. The majority of men continued working throughout the day, but many were assaulted as they made for home.⁶¹

The carpenters' strike ended quietly within the first days of October. Quite suddenly, then, on 5 October, while the people of Chicago were congratulating themselves on the end of the carpenters' strike without causing serious setbacks to the rebuilding of the burned-down district, members of the bricklayers' union also went on strike throughout the city. The reason for the strike was the announcement by contractors of reducing wages from \$5.00 to \$4.50 per day.⁶² Citizens of Chicago did not seem to sympathize with the bricklayers' strike as they had with the carpenters, expressing a vast amount of dissatisfaction that a problem of this nature had once again erupted between employers and employees, especially in a profession which threatened to halt the progress of the rebuilding of the city.⁶³ Throughout Chicago, citizens seemed more frustrated with the strike as it became associated with the eight-hour movement. While editors did not seem to fear a socialist uprising with these strikes, the *Tribune* was quick to point out many of the workers were German, labeling them hot-heads, "rife with a spirit of mischief," and claiming union leaders had to do everything in their power just to keep their members out of trouble.⁶⁴

The United States faced an economic depression from 1873-1878, resulting in great hardship for Americans, and provoked mass demonstrations

⁶¹ "The Carpenters' Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 September 1872, 6.

⁶² "The Bricklayers' Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 October 1872, 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁴ "The Masters Speak," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 October 1872, 3.

of the unemployed workers for relief of their dire situations. This crisis hit American cities particularly hard, as during the first winter, 1873-1874, unemployment rose to 25% in urban areas.⁶⁵ In New York City, at least 14,000 of the city's homeless slept in police stations at night, while upwards of 2,000 were turned away each evening. In 1873, workers held demonstrations in Detroit, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Chicago, where one of the city's largest labor meetings occurred. The Democratic editor of the *Chicago Times*, Wilbur F. Storey, and like-minded Chicagoans were deeply concerned about these mass meetings, prompting the *Times* to ask if Chicago were in the hands of the Commune, and warned if that were the case, the Commune would perish, not the city.⁶⁶ In Chicago, and other American cities, police action to disperse unemployment demonstrations became commonplace, highlighting the public's fear. In 1874, many people were injured in St. Louis when local police attempted to stop a socialist demonstration, and the following year in Chicago, officers dispersed a crowd of unemployed who were begging for relief from charitable organizations. Law enforcement in New York City began attending all labor and socialist meetings, intimidating workers who attended, and forcing others to stay away from the gatherings.⁶⁷

By 1873, the industrial growth of Chicago, much of which had been spurred on by the rebuilding of the city, came to a crashing halt. In the wake of

⁶⁵ Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America*, 27.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

this economic downturn, banks closed, costing many Chicagoans, even the wealthy, their life savings. Chicago's city council faced the new dilemma of a depleted treasury with little or no possibility to obtain further loans. The conditions forced city leaders to cut expenses while workers began to demand jobs and relief.⁶⁸ Trouble began in Chicago in June 1873, when the brakemen for the Chicago & Alton Railroad went on strike after a reduction of their wages from \$50 per month to \$45. In October, the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad failed to pay their workers for the second straight month, and 250 men in the shops at Halstead and Chicago Avenue walked off the job. The same month saw the Lake Shore and Michigan line reduce their mechanics wages by 10% and shortened working hours, and by December cut wages for engineers as well.⁶⁹

At this point, railroad workers began to take a united stand against their employers. Members of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers for some of the largest railways in the city, including the Illinois Central, Chicago & Alton, and Chicago, Burlington, & Quincy, declared they would accept no further reduction in their wages. When in the same month, the Pennsylvania rail system announced its own 10% wage cut, a general engineers' strike seemed imminent. Frightened of the militancy of the engineers, most railroads yielded to their employees, and while they could give increases in pay, the workers were able to hold the line against further wage reduction.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 240-241.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 243.

On 21 December 1873, thousands of Chicago's workers representing the Socio-Political Union, the Workingmen's Union, the Carpenter's Union, and several others, met at Turner Hall to stage a demonstration and pass a number of resolutions seeking work or relief from the city council. At the meeting, they called for all workers of the city to coalesce into a single organization, in order to present a united front to Chicago's political leaders. The workers then presented their list of demands: work for all able-bodied persons with sufficient wages; relief in money or provisions from the city treasury; fair dispensation of relief; in case of insufficient cash, the city should call upon their credit and obtain loans for the relief of the unemployed.⁷¹ A reporter for the *Tribune* interviewed Carl Klinck, member of the Socio-Political Workingmen's Union and a speaker at the meeting, to clarify the workers' demands. Klinck reiterated that the people wanted work, not charity, and to be paid enough wages to support their families. The reporter then began inquiring about the organization's ties to communism and the First International. Klinck was adamant that his group was in no way associated with those favoring mass redistribution of wealth. He was more vague about the union's affiliation with the International. During the course of the article, the reporter clearly stated the movement of workers, including Klinck's union, had been confined only to the non-English speaking citizens of Chicago, and claimed that many among their number believed in the foundations of Communism.⁷²

⁷¹ "The Unemployed," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 December 1873, 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 1.

The following day, prominent liberal lawyer Francis Hoffman, Jr., also present at the workers' meeting, arrived at City Hall with a large crowd to address the council on the demands of the unemployed. Hoffman was the son of Francis A. Hoffman, Sr., a well-known, politically conservative German-American who served as the land commissioner for the Illinois Central Railroad, and as the Lieutenant Governor of Illinois from 1861-1865.⁷³ Hoffman, Jr., however, did not share his father's political ideas, and appeared to advocate socialism and the rights of workers. Despite his public support for the working class, some Chicagoans, especially the conservative German-language daily the *Illinois Staats-Zeitung* criticized Hoffman, claiming his adherence to socialism was simply a product of expediency, and that he planned to use his newly found political prominence to gain a seat in the state legislature.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Hoffman publically took a strong stand for Chicago's workers. At City Hall, the lawyer told the council that he and the workers understood the city's treasury was nearly depleted, but questioned the wisdom of the recent decision to pay interest to bondholders instead of offering relief to the breadless and homeless of Chicago. Hoffman recounted the workers' requests, emphasizing again that they did not come as beggars, but as men willing to work. He cautioned the council against the slander and propagation of rumors regarding the meeting at Turner Hall, and questioned the council's

⁷³ J.H.A. Lacher, "Francis A. Hoffman of Illinois and Hans Buschbauer of Wisconsin," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* Vol 8, No. 4, June 1930, 327-328.

⁷⁴ Sawislack, *Smoldering City*, 352.

decision to “invoke the strong arm of the police in order to keep down what they supposed would be a riotous mob.”⁷⁵ Instead, the crowd of 20,000 standing outside City Hall was silent, and Hoffman declared the day had not yet come when poverty and crime were synonymous.

The members of the City Council had varying responses to Hoffman’s speech. Alderman Louis Schaffner stated the council was willing to help, but the workers should not ask for the impossible, nor should they make incendiary speeches. In contrast to Schaffner, Alderman Woodman offered the workers something tangible – bread. The council member was connected to a bakery which had the capabilities of baking 10,000 extra loaves of bread every day, and told Hoffman the shop would do so for the next sixty days for only the cost of flour. Chicago’s newly inaugurated mayor, Harvey Colvin, claimed he knew nothing about the meeting of workers at Turner Hall, but would have been honored to attend to listen to what the people had to say. Without offering any practical solutions, Mayor Colvin suggested he would make every effort possible to help the suffering.⁷⁶

In response to the gathering of workers and subsequent petitions at City Hall, there is evidence that some Chicagoans were somewhat sympathetic to the protesters and were not convinced that the entire crowd adhered to communist ideals. What they did appear to be rather certain about, however, is that the demands from the workers were essentially un-American. While the

⁷⁵ “At the Common Council,” *Chicago Tribune*, 23 December 1873, 5.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

economic crisis affected nearly every industry across the country, many in Chicago believed it to be temporary, and were astonished at the trouble the crisis had caused. The perils of the unemployed appealed to citizens' sympathy, but not at the cost of altering the foundation of American government.

One opinion piece asserted the system in the United States was not paternal, that the government did not take the earnings of its people, and then in turn provide them with shelter, food, and clothing. The one government in America that had been similar was the antebellum south, under which the entire system of human labor was taken by a few, who in return, fed, clothed, and housed the laborer. Recently, however, Americans had repudiated this system of feudal slavery and recognized the personal freedom of the individual citizen and his or her exclusive right to their entire earnings.⁷⁷ The precise difference between citizens of the United States and other countries was this freedom, and people immigrated to the U.S. for the possibility of attaining and possessing that freedom. With no other recourse, many in Chicago, realizing the city's lack of funds, suggested the unemployed seek help from the Relief and Aid Society.⁷⁸

In fact, when it appeared the city council could not aid the suffering, Hoffman himself turned to the Chicago Relief and Aid Society, asking them to distribute the remaining fire relief funds among the poor, which he estimated to be between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000. The society refused Hoffman's

⁷⁷ "Demand for Work," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 December 1873, 4.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

request, but did promise to help the destitute, disbursing \$4,000 in one day to those who needed it most.⁷⁹

Over the next several years, hardships continued in Chicago, causing the working class to become bitter and desperate. The economic situation in the city allowed many radical movements to gain converts. At yet another labor meeting in June 1875 at Turner Hall, the workers present began to accept the prophecy of John Simmens, who stated that if the ruling classes continued to suffocate the labor movement, a proletarian revolution and all the terrors that accompanied it would soon reach Chicago. John McAuliffe, an English-speaking socialist in Chicago, joined with Lauritz Thorsmark and William Jeffers to condemn the arrogant capitalists of the employing class. During this era, men like August Spies and Albert Parsons, who would later rise to prominence in the 1880s, began to turn toward new, seemingly radical ideas. The summer of 1876 was filled with anxiety and trouble for Chicago, as employers and employees debated over wages, hours, and the closed shop, causing many in Chicago to declare workers were a “parcel of blatant Communist demagogues” acting specifically on behalf of a new Commune.⁸⁰

IV. The Shadow of the Great Strike

In this economic atmosphere, the prospect of better times continued to appear further and further out of reach for many workers, especially for those employed by the nation’s railroads. While owners acknowledged many of their

⁷⁹ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 242.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 243-244.

men were underpaid, the reality of additional wage cuts loomed in the near future, and these owners believed the decreases, and dismissals, to be their only means of survival. Workers, on the other hand, considered the management of the railroads to be wasteful, and the wage cuts unnecessary and arbitrary.⁸¹ In mid-July 1877, when the railroads announced another 10% drop in pay, between twenty-five and thirty workers in Martinsburg, West Virginia walked off the job. Once this group of men decided to strike, the railroad company put new workers in place immediately; however, the strikers interfered, preventing the men from starting the train engines. A large mob then assembled at the depot, and believing a riot to be imminent, the mayor, Colonel A.T. Shutt, commanded policemen to arrest the leaders; nevertheless, the crowd grew larger and protected the men from incarceration. With new workers intimidated in Martinsburg, the freight trains fell dormant, though passenger lines were permitted to pass.⁸² Within two days, Governor Henry Matthews of West Virginia ordered two companies of militia to protect the men that wanted to work for the railroads, but the striking men were able to overcome the companies of soldiers, causing the public to believe a general strike was imminent.⁸³ This seemingly small strike spread very quickly to Baltimore, Maryland, where on 16 July, forty firemen and brakemen of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad freight line refused to work. Here, the strike escalated to violence immediately, as the replacement workers were taken

⁸¹ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 243-245.

⁸² "Railroad employees on a strike," *New York Times*, 17 July 1877, 1.

⁸³ "Serious railroad strike," *New York Times*, 18 July 1877, 5.

from their engines and severely beaten. Three strikers were arrested later that day and charged with attempting to incite a riot.⁸⁴ The men in West Virginia and Baltimore unknowingly ignited a violent national strike, affecting railroad traffic, commerce, and workers in nearly every major American city, and causing widespread fear and panic of the laborers and their intentions.

By 17 July, President Rutherford B. Hayes issued a proclamation acknowledging a state of domestic violence in West Virginia, which authorities were unable to suppress. Hayes commanded all persons engaged in “unlawful and insurrectionary proceedings” to disperse by noon on 19 July, with the threat of military action should the strikes continue.⁸⁵ Taking their cues from Hayes’ labeling of the violence an “insurrection,” newspapers and journals nationwide referred to the disturbance as a rebellion or revolt, a “direct defiant war against society.”⁸⁶ The media also began drawing comparisons to the Paris Commune, striking fear into the hearts of their readers. As early as 21 July, the *National Republican* published an article entitled “The American Commune,” claiming the strike that began in West Virginia had the most portentous consequences and threatened the very foundation of law, order, and society.⁸⁷ The author looked first of all at the causes of the strike, and did concede that part of the problem lay in the post-war economic boom, which allowed many men who had been poor to suddenly become wealthy, often by unscrupulous means. These conditions considerably demoralized the working classes, who

⁸⁴ “Railroad employees on a strike,” *New York Times*, 17 July 1877, 1.

⁸⁵ “Proclamation by the President,” *Inter-Ocean*, 19 July 1877, 1.

⁸⁶ Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*, 255.

⁸⁷ “The American Commune,” *The National Republican*, 21 July 1877, 1.

looked with envy upon the possessions of the wealthy, and became dissatisfied with their own lot. Under these conditions, the author was not surprised that these workers listened with favor to the radical ideas regarding the relationship between labor and capital. According to the article, communistic ideas, introduced by European laborers, were widespread across the United States, not only among the railroads, but in the mines and factories as well. Though the workers may have been justified in being dissatisfied with their plight, their demands were nothing more than an attempt to force the companies to employ them on the terms they dictated; further attempts to employ this principle would destroy all rights of property, and society would rapidly return to a state of barbarism. The publications called for every military force available to swiftly and decisively put an end to the reign of the bloody commune. These strikes, the author declared, were communism in its worst form, unlawful, revolutionary, and anti-American.⁸⁸

Within two days, the *National Republican* asserted the American Commune was triumphant, and that anarchy prevailed in Pittsburgh, where a fierce and bloodthirsty mob controlled the city. The writers for the newspaper did not blame the men that started the strike, but claimed the original laborers had been superseded by men that had never worked on a railroad and had no wrongs to redress. This mob of “robbers and assassins,” marched victoriously through the streets in search of victims and plunder.⁸⁹ In light of these events, in an “hour of common danger,” a subsequent article demanded all patriotic

⁸⁸ “The American Commune,” *The National Republican*, 21 July 1877, 1.

⁸⁹ “Anarchy!” *National Republican*, 23 July 1877, 1.

citizens to put aside past political differences and stand shoulder to shoulder in defense of law and order. The issue before the people was whether law or anarchy should prevail, and every true American had a responsibility to do his or her duty, in thought as well as action, to preserve the nation.⁹⁰

Other national newspapers warned of a radical transformation of American government and society, and especially compared the situation to the Paris Commune. In the early days of the strike, the *New Orleans Times* worried the United States would be taken over by a mob as barbarous and as bloodthirsty as the Communists of Paris. As the strikes continued, the paper declared the war between labor and capitalism had begun, telling its readers, "America's first experience with communism is now the most significant episode of the most extraordinary year in our political history."⁹¹ On 18 July, a reporter for the *New York Times* claimed he could not conceive of a more unjustifiable and unreasonable strike that had assumed such formidable proportions as that of Martinsburg, West Virginia. At this point, the strike appeared hopeless, and was to be regarded as nothing more than a "spiteful demonstration of resentment of men too ignorant or too reckless to understand their own interests."⁹² By the 23rd, the *New York Herald* claimed the nation had not been confronted with such a grave condition of affairs since the dark and threatening hours of 1861 when the Civil War still in its infancy. The spark ignited at Martinsburg had expanded with frightening speed to

⁹⁰ "Outlook," *National Republican*, 24 July 1877, 1.

⁹¹ "Growth of Pauperism in Massachusetts," *New Orleans Times*, 18 July 1877, 4; Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*, 226.

⁹² "The Baltimore and Ohio strike," *New York Times*, 18 July 1877, 4.

include five states, with at least sixty-one killed and many wounded in different struggles. The *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* simply stated while the strikes started with the railroad men, the communists took advantage and were making most of the trouble.⁹³

The *New York Tribune* plainly told its readers that communists had undertaken to govern the United States. The works of these communists had been well known since the events in Paris years earlier, which the author described as the blackest page in the history of the nineteenth century. The undertaking of the mob of communists involved violating the rights of other men who were willing to work for the wages proposed, warfare upon all the interests in society, and would only end in in wild rapine and the murder of those who defended public order.⁹⁴

Despite the press immediately blaming radicals for causing or perpetuating the strike, communists in the United States only numbered around 4,500 in total, though they did make their voices heard often. J.P. McDonnell, editor of the *Labor Standard*, made very clear that communism had never been the goal of the workers, and the strike spread because railroad men in West Virginia felt the same oppression by their employers as they did in New York, Chicago, or St. Louis. McDonnell's publication denounced the charges of communism as the "base and wicked inventions" of the media.⁹⁵

⁹³ "Those who are making trouble," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, 24 July 1877, 4.

⁹⁴ "The Commune in the United States," *New York Tribune*, 25 July 1877, 4.

⁹⁵ Bruce, *1877: Year of Violence*, 228-229.

From the beginning of the strikes, Chicagoans feared the labor unrest would reach their city as well, and their recent history and status as the railroad center of the nation caused the people to feel more vulnerable than elsewhere. As the strikes spread across the country, Chicagoans nevertheless seemed somewhat divided in the beginning. For one reporter the reduction of wages by twenty percent during the past year for the railroad workers, the basis of the strike, had a very clear cause – the Panic of 1873 and resulting economic depression. The laborers, therefore, needed to understand that every other worker across the country had been forced to live on less wages, and that employers suffered along with their employees.⁹⁶ In response, a citizen of Chicago asserted the necessities of the railroad owners were nothing compared to the workingmen who attempted to provide for their families on less than \$10 per week. Inherent in the idea of general welfare was that the wages of labor should be enough to furnish families with bread, and allow the workers to share in the results of civilization, which could not transpire on \$1.50 or less per day. In this letter to the editor, the man who only identified himself as “Slug Six” questioned whether or not the workers were truly free, insinuating that for the second time in the 19th century, the United States contained a lower class of people who were “steeped in dirt, ignorance, and brutishness.”⁹⁷ By 22 July, while the dissatisfaction among the railroad workers had extended to the city, no a strike appeared imminent, largely because the men remembered the results from the previous unrest in Chicago.

⁹⁶ “The Railroad Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, 20 July 1877, 4.

⁹⁷ “The Great Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, 22 July 1877, 3.

Despite the quiet, some warned that communists and tramps were pushing for a strike as an excuse for riots and plunder.⁹⁸

The possibility of the strikes reaching Chicago escalated during the next two days. A small meeting of railroad employees occurred on the evening of 22 July, where the men discussed the situation, and generally accepted the brakemen and switchmen of the Michigan Central and Rock Island lines would strike first, but disparaged any violence, except toward those who decided to work at the lower wages.⁹⁹ In the meantime, the Chicago chapter of the Workingmen's Party of the United States issued a call printed on fliers and distributed throughout the city for a mass meeting of laborers on the 23rd in Market Square. The language of the pamphlet was quite defiant, claiming America was taking its first steps toward the suppression of liberty and the institution of a monarchy. While they still had time, the Workingmen's Party told the people for the sake of their families and children and their own self-respect, to organize immediately.¹⁰⁰ That evening, thousands of workers met at the designated location in the heart of the industrial area. Albert Parsons and John McAuliffe were among the speakers at the gathering, criticizing the government and the railroad owners; Parsons in particular encouraged the workers to strike, but strongly advocated obedience to law and order. McAuliffe, however, encouraged all workers to organize, take control of the government, and institute a system of public works, creating jobs to build a City

⁹⁸ No title. *Chicago Tribune*, 22 July 1877, 4.

⁹⁹ "Railroad Men," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 July 1877, 3.

¹⁰⁰ "Mass-meeting" *Chicago Tribune*, 24 July 1877, 5.

Hall, pave streets, construct sewers, and establish both bath and school houses. He also very clearly admonished local officials not to call in the militia in the event of a strike, as he believed the soldiers carried a natural prejudice against the workers.¹⁰¹ Despite McAuliffe's objections, Mayor Monroe Heath met with local militia leaders, and Major General Arthur Ducat ordered the armories in the city to be placed under guard, offering his services to the mayor.

Businesses such as the Field, Leiter & Co. armed the employees of their wholesale store, and the McCormick family ordered double guards at their reaper factory.¹⁰²

The first of Chicago's workers to strike were the switchmen of the Michigan Central, on the evening of 23 July, and it seemed likely men from other railroads would join the following day.¹⁰³ At this point, the reporters for the Chicago-based newspaper *Inter-Ocean* had no quarrel or complaint with the striking workers, asserting that the people of Chicago had no wish to obstruct any legitimate movement by the laborers for an increase of their pay. The danger in the strike, according to the paper, was the tendency of workers to become impatient and attempt to force their employers to concede. At this point, the writers believed a mob, consisting of communists and idle men, would join the strike, eager to riot, plunder, and commit murder. The citizens of Chicago did not expect those on strike to resort to such violence; however, the reporters at the *Inter-Ocean* charged the workers to confine their ranks

¹⁰¹ "Mass-meeting," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 July 1877, 5.

¹⁰² Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 247.

¹⁰³ "First," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 July 1877, 3.

exclusively to genuine railroad men, keeping them clear of demagogues, and severing any ties to communists.¹⁰⁴

The city seemed fairly quiet on the 24th, even though workers from more railroads joined those already on strike, and some endeavored to incite a riot. Executives for the railroads feared even more destruction of their property, and W.K. Ackerman, Vice President of the Illinois Central, wrote a telegram to Governor Shelby Cullom asking for help. The governor replied he was doing everything necessary to keep the peace and protect the property of the whole state, but offered no other aid or advice to Ackerman at that point.¹⁰⁵ Despite the concern of Ackerman, the *Tribune* declared the riots a failure and the danger of mob rule in the city had passed.¹⁰⁶ Where the *Tribune* saw the failure of the crowds, the *Inter-Ocean* only saw doom, denouncing the “rioting roughs” as communists who for some time had been secretly devising this scheme to “precipitate on the community a reign of disorder and pillage under cover of a railroad strike.”¹⁰⁷

The fears and warnings of Ackerman and the *Inter-Ocean* became a reality on 25 July when the strikes became more violent. While some businesses attempted to open and resume normal activities, the crowd forced the distilleries, brick kilns, soap works, and other shops to close early. The rioters numbered around 1,000 men and boys, described by the *Tribune* as

¹⁰⁴ “The Chicago Strike,” *Inter-Ocean*, 25 July 1877, 4.

¹⁰⁵ S.M. Cullom to W.K. Ackerman, 25 July 1877. Folder 76, Box 4, IC 3.4. Illinois Central Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

¹⁰⁶ “It is here,” *Chicago Tribune*, 25 July 1877, 3.

¹⁰⁷ “The Communists,” *Inter-Ocean*, 25 July 1877, 1.

vagrants, communistic loafers, and thieves, though thousands of others followed them, some in sympathy, some out of curiosity.¹⁰⁸ That evening the mob attacked the locomotives of the Chicago, Burlington, & Quincy line. Policemen arrived on the scene quickly, and exchanged gunfire with the crowd, resulting in the injuries of several men.¹⁰⁹

Chicago businessman Mark Morton wrote to his father Sterling Morton, who would later become the Secretary of Agriculture, to relate the situation in the city. The strikers, he claimed, had done a good deal of damage and had stopped all the railroad cars on the south side of the city on the 25th. The mob and the police had quite a fight, but Morton judged law enforcement had the upper hand as they took at least fifteen rioters into custody.¹¹⁰ As citizens began fearing for the city, Mayor Heath authorized any necessary expenditure to protect the city, and called on all good Chicagoans to enroll as special police. A Chicago veterans association equipped two companies with breech-loading rifles, and a group of Germans on the north side of the city organized their own militia, known as the Union Veterans. That evening, two companies of regular army troops arrived in the city and marched down Madison Street, giving further assurance to the frightened inhabitants, such as Mark Morton, who believed the arrival of soldiers would quiet the mob.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ "The Strikers and the Mob," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 July 1877, 4.

¹⁰⁹ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 249.

¹¹⁰ Mark Morton to J. Sterling Morton, 25 July 1877. Folder 5, Box 5. Morton Family Papers. Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.

¹¹¹ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 250; Mark Morton to J. Sterling Morton, 25 July 1877. Folder 5, Box 5. Morton Family Papers. Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.

The violence, however, reached new heights on the following day. Wearing by the events of the day prior, Chicago's law enforcement officers were quick to use clubs and pistols in response to the members of the crowd pelting them with rocks. Many confrontations between the police and the rioters took place throughout the day. Rumors, however, turned every dispute into a great bloody massacre. Citizens of Chicago believed the companies of militia and regular soldiers used Gatling guns against the mob, resulting in thousands of dead and wounded, and making Halstead and 16th streets run red with blood.¹¹² Ackerman wrote to a business associate that the Illinois Central offices and shops had survived the night of the 26th, though there had been two or three alarms of fire and a disturbance between the military and the mob, resulting in the shooting of at least one "Communist." According to Ackerman, the results for the mob were so severe he did not think they would revisit their line, although he did arm at least fifteen of his own men to protect the freight yard.¹¹³ The conflicts in the various places throughout the city were less deadly than supposed, causing Paul Morton, brother of Mark Morton, to write and reassure his mother in Nebraska that the reports of the number of deaths had been greatly exaggerated.¹¹⁴ Instead of the hundreds or thousands feared

¹¹² Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 251.

¹¹³ W.K. Ackerman to W.H. Osborn, Esq., 27 July 1877, Folder 76, Box 4, IC 3.4, Illinois Central Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

¹¹⁴ Paul Morton to Joy Morton, 27 July 1877, Folder 5, Box 5. Morton Family Papers, Chicago Historical Society, Chicago, Illinois.

dead in Chicago, the death toll stood at 13, with many more seriously injured.¹¹⁵

Violence continued in Chicago, and many citizens called for an immediate end to the strike, by whatever means necessary. The unrest escalated very quickly from a dispute between employers and employees into a lawless demonstration, led by what the press all called a communistic faction seeking to destroy everything the American people considered sacred.¹¹⁶ In response to the violence and accusations of communism, a reporter for the *Tribune* asked if the disturbances were in fact a rebellion. In this case, not only for Chicago but nationwide, businesses had been violently suspended, inter-State relations of citizens cut off by intimidation and assault, and the peaceful pursuit of life and livelihood interrupted. “Does not all this,” the writer asked, “constitute a rebellion against the United States government?”¹¹⁷

By the same token, both the *Tribune* and *Inter-Ocean* compared the events in Chicago to the Paris Commune. A reporter for the former claimed Chicago had been drifting into the condition of Paris during the Commune for some time. In Paris, the revolutionaries seized the government, made poor economic decisions, required all citizens to house their militia (not just the wealthy), and attempted to spread their “devouring system” throughout the country. Finally, the people and army of France marched against the Commune, restored peace and order, and executed a large number of the

¹¹⁵ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 251.

¹¹⁶ “Mob violence must cease,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 July 1877, 8.

¹¹⁷ “Is this a rebellion,” *Chicago Tribune*, 27 July 1877, 8.

insurrectionists. The difference between the Commune and recent events in Chicago, for the author, was simply the circumstances under which the two began. The purpose for the Parisians from the outset was to change the very structure of their government; in the United States, unrest began with workers who had a legitimate dispute with their employers, but one in which employees could not make their voices truly heard without warring against the community. The outcome of the current strikes, the writer argued, would be the same as the Paris Commune, with the citizens turning against the communists and joining with the army to stamp out further violence and restore order.¹¹⁸ For one reporter at the *Inter-Ocean*, the strikes evoked the same excitement, anger and fear as did the news that Ft. Sumter had fallen in the opening days of the Civil War. The events themselves, without parallel in the history of the nation, reminded the author of the frenzied days of the reign of terror in Paris. The same communistic feeling that worked to undermine the government of France years earlier, and which threatened Russia, Germany, and England had shown its face during these strikes in the United States. Claiming the workers had been used by nefarious elements, the author implored those on strike to put an end to the matter, before the city was completely overtaken and another Commune established.¹¹⁹

While the official end of the Great Strike would not be until September, law enforcement and militias restored order to Chicago by 27 July. Though the height of the violence lasted only a few days, especially for the city, the

¹¹⁸ "Plain words with strikers," *Chicago Tribune*, 27 July 1877, 8.

¹¹⁹ "Mob at home and abroad," *Inter-Ocean*, 24 July 1877, 4.

consequences were severe and far-reaching. Economically, businesses in Chicago lost \$2.3 million in livestock, grain, and other produce, wholesalers in various industries lost \$3 million, and factories lost \$1.75 million in goods not produced. Chicago's city council also allocated an undetermined amount of funds to call in the militia, auxiliary forces, and special police.¹²⁰ Highlighting the loss to the railroads, during the strikes, Ackerman, vice president of the Illinois Central, wrote to Illinois State Treasurer Ed Lutz to inform him of the economic devastation at the Illinois Central. The "lawless mob" had cut both main and branch lines, preventing the passage of freight trains in any direction. These acts resulted in the destruction of revenue for the railroad, at a loss of at least \$25,000 per day, and making it impossible for Ackerman to conduct business.¹²¹

One of the more intriguing consequences of the strikes was that citizens both nationwide and in Chicago began advocating a stronger military, a larger regular army, to be ready to overcome future labor disputes. The Board of Trade urged Congress to increase the standing army to 100,000, and Chicago, as well as other major cities, received a new armory, a tangible sign of the fears of the American people. Workingmen, in response, began to establish their own militias to ensure the protection of their rights. Turner societies maintained drill corps, groups originally designed for recreation, in order to provide security at their meetings against unnecessary attacks by local police

¹²⁰ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 251.

¹²¹ W.K. Ackerman to Ed Lutz, Folder 76, Box 4, IC 3.4, Illinois Central Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

or militias. While many considered these drill corps harmless, the majority of Chicagoans foresaw a greater possibility of a communist uprising in the city, and petitioned the state lawmakers to pass a bill restricting any unofficial body to deem itself a military company. The Illinois legislature passed the bill in 1879, despite, or perhaps because, of the armed protests of the Lehr und Wehr Verein, the Irish Labor Guards, the Bohemian Sharpshooters, and the Jager Verein, all workingmen's drill corps from Chicago.¹²²

Nationally, the long-term results of the strikes were to crystallize the fears of Americans against communism and radicalism in general. Workingmen's pleas were immediately dismissed as communist and un-American, effectually setting the labor movement back decades. With the events of the 1870s in mind, it is helpful to revisit the 1879 *Tribune* article, "The Aims and Ends of Communism," in which the journalist asserted that Communism was inimical to every hope and ambition of the citizens of Chicago. As the city's Communists attempted to gain support during the upcoming elections, the article warned a vote for the dangerous organization would mean economic stagnation and the suffocation of ambition that raises men above brutes. If allowed to gain a foothold, communism would reduce the United States to a condition of savagery. The author argued that the active, restless, thinking American people would never allow the radical movement to dominate the government or society, but citizens needed to address the question of communism immediately, or the nation would be forced to do so in

¹²² Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 252-254.

a troublesome manner.¹²³ Within the next decades, Chicagoans would be faced with new challenges, and armed with the memories of the 1870s, would continue to renegotiate the ideas of what it meant to be truly American, especially as anti-radical hysteria reached new heights in the 1880s.

¹²³ "The Aims and Ends of Communism," *Chicago Tribune*, 23 March 1879, 4.

Chapter 4

Ideology Precipitates Bloodshed, 1880-1889

In the early morning hours of 13 May 1884, wealthy inventor, businessman, and longtime resident of Chicago, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr., died in his palatial estate on the city's prestigious west side, just one block from the Fourth Presbyterian Church, on the corner of Rush and Superior streets, of which he was a faithful member.¹ Born in 1809 to Virginia farmers, McCormick began building labor-saving farm tools as early as age fifteen, but his breakthrough invention was the mechanical reaper, a machine that transformed life for American farmers. In 1847, McCormick moved to Chicago and opened the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, boasting some of the city's wealthiest men as his first investors. As his business grew, McCormick gained both national and international acclaim, winning awards from the American Institute, the World's Fair in London, and the Royal Agricultural Society of England. He was honored with membership into the French Institute's Academy of Sciences, which claimed he had, "done more for the cause of agriculture than any other living man."² Upon McCormick's death, newspapers throughout the country mourned the loss, often referring to him as

¹ John Frederick Lyons, "Cyrus Hall McCormick, Presbyterian Layman," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society (1943-1961)*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (March, 1961), 25.

² "The Long Roll," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 1884, 6.

“great,” or “genius.”³ Some journalists went to great lengths to defend McCormick’s works, decrying the writers who referred to his inventions as merely “mechanical.” A reporter for the *Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon), claimed that although McCormick’s genius did not lay in the ability to write beautiful sonnets or create artistic masterpieces, his reaper “robbed harvesting of nearly all its terrors,” and was just as worthy of admiration as poets and artists.⁴ Many newspapers also mentioned McCormick’s religious and political views, both as a devout Presbyterian and Democrat, who despite a losing campaign for mayor of Chicago in 1860, continued supporting the local and national Democratic party until 1878, when his declining health forced him to retire from political activities.⁵

Not every account of McCormick’s death was quite so positive. The *Worcester Daily Spy* (Worcester, Massachusetts) ran a short notice labeled simply “Death of a Capitalist,” not mentioning McCormick’s inventions, but referring to him only as one of the richest men in Chicago.⁶ The *Chicago Tribune* published several articles about McCormick’s death, including a lengthy and positive biography; however, even the editors of this well-known conservative publication noted that McCormick was ruthless in his business methods, practices that did not endear him to many of the workers in his

³ “Cyrus H. McCormick,” *New York Tribune*, 14 May 1884, 2; “Cyrus H. McCormick,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 14 May 1884, 5; “Cyrus H. McCormick,” *Kansas City Times*, 16 May 1884, 4.

⁴ “Cyrus H. McCormick,” *Oregonian*, 3 June 1884, 2.

⁵ “The Long Roll,” *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 1884, 6.

⁶ “Death of a Capitalist,” *Worcester Daily Spy*, 14 May 1884, 1.

factory.⁷ The McCormick family seemed to have feared the theft of their patriarch's body from its final resting place at Graceland Cemetery on 4001 North Clark Street; they hired a guard to watch over the body every night until a mausoleum could be completed.⁸ A watchman patrolled McCormick's resting place for nearly one year, though guards were doubled and extra precautions taken during a strike at the McCormick reaper works in April 1885.⁹

The strict and harsh conditions at the factory continued even after Cyrus H. McCormick's death, and workers staged a strike to demand better treatment. Trouble brewed for several years at the Harvesting Machine Company, leading to an incident in Chicago's Haymarket Square in 1886 that would instill fear into minds of Americans the country over. During the 1880s as Chicago's workers fought tirelessly against their wealthy employers, such as Cyrus McCormick and his descendants, and at times the general capitalist establishment, the term un-American began to take on new meaning, as many of the accused conspirators were no longer immigrants, but American citizens.

To his admirers, McCormick was an American success story, and this is principally how he has been remembered. At the time of his death, McCormick's legacy was fiercely contested. To many whose labor had made McCormick rich, his story was evidence of a dream gone awry, of the desperate

⁷ "The Long Roll," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 1884, 6.

⁸ The fears of McCormick's body being disturbed or stolen stemmed from the 1878 robbery of the body of Alexander Turney Stewart, a wealthy New York businessman. See "Ghouls in New York City: A.T. Stewart's Body Stolen," *New York Times*, 8 November 1878, 1.

⁹ "Guarding Cyrus McCormick's Body," *Kansas City Times*, 5 May 1885, 2.

need for a new economic and social order in which workers not only had greater pay but greater power in their work and in politics.

Two men who were transplants to Chicago, much like McCormick, stood in direct contrast to the business tycoon and his ideology, serving as voices for the laborers in the city. August Spies, a German immigrant, and Albert Parsons, an American southerner, identified themselves as both socialists and anarchists, and beginning in the late 1870s, staged protests and demonstrations on behalf of Chicago's working class, until their arrests for allegations connected to the Haymarket bombing in 1886.

In 1872, at the age of 17, August Vincent Theodore Spies left his home in Landeck, Germany to travel to New York. Spies was well-read in German history, and believed his ancestors to be a liberty-loving people; once he arrived in New York, he obtained a position in a German-owned upholstery shop, but soon left to join the wandering mass of young immigrants traveling the rails looking for their best chance.¹⁰ As a young man in rural Germany, Spies had little contact with laborers, and found those he met on his travels confusing. The workers seemed to be slaves to their work and employers, and Spies denounced them for not protesting their harsh treatment. He arrived in Chicago soon after, finding a position in the furniture business, a new and upcoming industry in the city. Spies became involved with the socialists of

¹⁰ James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: a story of Chicago, the first labor movement, and the bombing that divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Anchor Books, 2006), 60.

Chicago by 1875, when he heard what he would describe as a moving speech from a young mechanic about how wage earners experienced capitalism.¹¹

Unlike Spies, Albert Parsons was from the United States; he was born in Montgomery, Alabama in 1848, but grew up in Waco, Texas. He arrived in Chicago with his wife Lucy in 1874, the same year as Spies. While in Texas, Parsons learned the printing trade, allowing him to move across the country and find work even in times of economic downturns. Upon his arrival in Chicago, he quickly found a permanent position at the *Times*, and became a member of Typographical Union No. 16, where fellow workers had been involved in Andrew Cameron's eight-hour movement and still read the *Workingmen's Advocate*. Parsons first became interested in the socialist party during the debates over the misuse of funds by the Chicago Relief and Aid Society in the wake of the Great Fire; after his own personal investigations, he concluded the complaints against the Relief and Aid Society to be justified, and believed the socialists were the ones who were willing to protest on behalf of the workers.¹²

Both the labor movement and the socialist movement that Spies and Parsons joined were more complicated than the local newspapers described, simply labeling them all as radical or communist. The men at first became involved with the established socialist party, supporting party candidates for local elections. During this time, Parsons consistently worked with the smaller and more radical wing of the socialist party. Both men quickly became

¹¹ Ibid., 61-62.

¹² Ibid., 54-55.

disillusioned with the party that insisted the trade unions be mere auxiliaries instead of maintaining a more prominent role, and that rejected the paramilitary groups, which Spies and Parsons wholeheartedly supported.¹³ Eventually, Parsons renounced electoral politics entirely, believing the American labor system could not be reformed through the ballot, but only through revolutionary means.¹⁴ Though they would consistently continue to refer to themselves as socialists, Spies and Parsons accepted the anarchist label bestowed upon them by many citizens in the city, who denounced the men and their followers as enemies to all law and government.¹⁵

This chapter explores how this debate between Chicago's elite businessmen, such as McCormick and his descendants, and the city's working class, often led by Parsons and Spies, solidified "Americanism" as a sharp and effective weapon of ideological conflict.

I. Trouble at the Reaper Works

Near the end of January 1885, socialists in Chicago gathered for a seemingly quiet, routine meeting that was nonetheless vilified by both the local and national press. A citizen of Mobile, Alabama wrote a letter to the *Mobile Register* that was reprinted by the *Chicago Tribune* on 31 January. The concerned American argued that the socialists indulged in incendiary harangues and more than usual villainy against the established American way

¹³ Ibid., 90.

¹⁴ Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 111.

¹⁵ Bruce Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs: a social history of Chicago's anarchists, 1870-1900* (New Brunswick, NJ, Rutgers University Press, 1988), 154.

of life. Local authorities, the author wrote, were giving the “wretches” too much latitude, and law enforcement should intervene to crush the “devil’s spawn.”¹⁶ The writer made it very clear that these socialists were not from the United States. He claimed that in view of the power the radicals had in recent years to inflict infinite damage, “civilized” countries should consider it their duty to each other to stamp out the “whole devilish brood” of nihilists, socialists, anarchists, and terrorists.¹⁷ As the hand of the socialist was against every man, the socialist should not have been surprised, then that the hand of every man was against him. The author continued by condemning Mr. J.P. Dusey, a speaker at the meeting in Chicago, who declared private property must be abolished, even at the price of violence. Dusey, according to the writer, should have been arrested for inciting violence and murder, in order to insure the safety and peace of the citizens of Chicago. In concluding his letter, the author conceded that this talk may be pure “idle vapping,” but warned that fanatics and “demons in human form” would be inspired by these ramblings and commit fearful crimes. Reiterating the idea that no socialist could be American-born, the letter to the editor concluded: “It is a burning shame that wretches who find refuge in this country should turn, like the serpent warmed by the fire, and seek to strike with poisoned fangs their benefactors.”¹⁸

Over the next two months, a series of labor disturbances and strikes occurred in various industries, especially in both coal mining and railroads, and

¹⁶ “Chicago Socialists,” *Chicago Tribune*, 31 January 1885, 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

numerous locations throughout the country, prompting some to be concerned of a repeat of the Great Strike of 1877.¹⁹ Keeping in mind the recent socialist meetings, fear of radicals once again swept through Chicago; what began as a small strike at the McCormick reaper works quickly turned deadly. As the events at McCormick's unfolded, it was not immediately clear which side the Chicago media would favor; surprisingly, at the beginning of the turmoil, the press did not print negative reports of the workers. Ultimately, though McCormick would acquiesce to a few of the employees' demands, he won the most important battle – the hearts and minds of Chicago's leaders and citizens – as his opponents did not have the power to refute his characterizations of them, and in fact, began to accept and embody the label of dangerous radicals.

In January 1885, because of the nationwide economic downturn, Cyrus McCormick, Jr. cut pay for the factory workers by ten percent, for piece-workers by 15 percent; workers acceded to the decrease, as they believed their wages would be restored beginning on March 1st.²⁰ According to the local press, even with the decreased wages, the employees still earned more than workers at similar factories in the city. Nevertheless, when the deadline of 1 March came and went with no increase, the men demanded the restoration of their wages, which the company summarily refused. In response, between seventy

¹⁹ See "The Railroad Strike in the Southwest," *Wall Street Daily News*, 10 March 1885, 2; "The Missouri Strike," *New York Tribune*, 11 March 1885, 2; "Is 1877 to be repeated?," *Chicago Tribune*, 11 March 1885, 1; "Freight Standing Still," *New York Times*, 14 March 1885, 1.

²⁰ "Victory!" *The Alarm*, 18 April 1885, 1. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

and eighty molders walked off the job.²¹ Most of the day-to-day business of the company was not affected by the strike; the administration continued the works, running all other departments, but allowing the foundry to remain idle.²² Within just a few days, the strike took a violent turn. When two non-union men applied for positions at the factory, strikers severely kicked and beat the men, resulting in their admission to the County Hospital.²³ In the meantime, McCormick and his staff wrote to different agencies across the country, looking for molders to replace the men on strike; by April 1st, the company had found twenty-five non-union men willing to work, and in order to prevent a disturbance, sent the laborers to the factory by boat around 9:00pm, under the cover of darkness, on Friday, 3 April. According to McCormick, once the striking molders learned of this maneuver by the company, the men were greatly incensed and threatened violence upon the so-called “scabs;” taking the strikers at their word, McCormick then hired several Pinkerton agents to assist in watching the premises.²⁴

By this point, the strike at McCormick’s captured the attention of the city, and was the main topic of discussion at the Trades Assembly meeting on 5 April. For these Chicagoans, the “wretches” who threatened the peace and tranquility of the city were not immigrants seeking higher wages, but rather a

²¹ “Capital and Labor,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 March 1885, 7.

²² Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr. to Mrs. C.H. McCormick, 13 April 1885, 1. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

²³ “Capital and Labor,” *Chicago Tribune*, 28 March 1885, 7.

²⁴ Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr. to Mrs. C.H. McCormick, 13 April 1885, 1. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

“gang of nondescripts,” consisting of supposed ex-convicts and other “dubious characters” carrying pistols and knives. Who had brought these men to Chicago? The owners of large foundries, such as Cribben & Sexton and McCormick, hired them in efforts aimed at intimidating the molders. Such tactics inflamed the workers. In the emerging industrial order, the good faith of individual capitalists could not be trusted. It was no longer enough to appeal to the good sense and moral concern of Mrs. McCormick and her son. Perhaps, some argued, the McCormicks had been unaware of the terrible actions committed in their name, and they simply needed to be set straight.²⁵ George Schilling saw larger forces at work. The junior McCormick was nothing more than an “industrial prince” who gave thousands to charity, but would “turn a deaf ear to any measure calculated to help their employees.”²⁶ A worker at the McCormick foundry, Thomas Callahan, denounced the McCormick factory as a “perfect slave-pen,” worse even than the Joliet Penitentiary, where inmates were allowed to speak and to whistle without asking the permission of a foreman.²⁷

By Tuesday, 7 April, the molders convinced the remaining 1,200 workers to join them. Even the *Chicago Tribune* reported on its news pages that

²⁵ “The Trades Assembly Discussing the M’Cormick Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 April 1885, 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷ “The Trades Assembly Discussing the M’Cormick Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 April 1885, 8; “The Other Side of the Picture,” *New York Herald*, 7 April 1885, 3.

the molders did not intimidate the other workers, and none of the men were disposed to violence, describing them as quiet, orderly, and thrifty.²⁸

To McCormick, Jr., however, these men were thugs. In a letter he wrote to his mother on 13 April, McCormick claimed the molders arrived at the factory armed with revolvers, threatening the employees and preventing any of them from going to work. He wrote, "they stopped the street cars and omnibuses, turned out all the men and sent them home, and threatened they would shoot any man who went into the works, so that on Tuesday only the foremen of the different departments were in the works and no work was done."²⁹ Though McCormick told the press the men were only striking because it was an election day and would return the following morning, in private he hired more Pinkerton officers to insure the omnibuses would arrive at the factory without violence the next day, and hired Pinkerton detectives to infiltrate the workers to learn of their plans.³⁰

From the beginning of the full strike, newspapers across the country blamed the walkout on the decreased wages and attempts by the company to hire new non-union workers.³¹ While it appeared the molders began the strike for those reasons, the workers who joined later seemed to have more reasons

²⁸ "Capital and Labor," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 April 1885, 9.

²⁹ Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr. to Mrs. C.H. McCormick, 13 April 1885, 2. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁰ "Capital and Labor," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 April 1885, 9; Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr. to Mrs. C.H. McCormick, 13 April 1885, 2. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

³¹ See "Sixteen Hundred Strikers," *Kansas City Times*, 8 April 1885, 1; "The Other Side of the Picture," *New York Herald*, 7 April 1885, 3; Article 1, *Springfield Republican* (Springfield, Massachusetts), 8 April 1885, 3.

behind their dissatisfaction with McCormick's company. J.L. Nelson, one of the workers, wrote a letter to McCormick on 8 April, accusing the owner of depriving the men of the necessities of life while giving \$100,000 to charity.³² Another worker, who only identified himself as N.N., wrote a letter to the editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* to make known to the public what he termed the improper rules enforced among the workmen. First of all, similar to fellow worker J.L. Nelson, N.N. also questioned the owners on their generous donations to charities, while cutting the wages of their employees. N.N. particularly criticized the \$60,000 left to a seminary in the wake of the death of Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr., while the workers received "nothing, indeed nothing."³³ Much like Thomas Callahan, N.N. asserted the factory was worse than a prison; by six o'clock in the morning, the "hired slave" of McCormick's was already making his way to work through the cold and snow, while the prisoners were still stretching comfortably on their beds.³⁴ He certainly believed the prisoners would not willingly trade their lunches with the workers, who choked down "something indeterminable packed into the gut of a hog," a piece of bread, and unpleasant smelling black broth.³⁵ Something that seemed to cause great concern among the workers was the construction of a new water-closet for the men, upon which signs were posted in both English and German, informing the men that staying too long and talking were

³² J.L. Nelson to Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr., 8 April 1885, Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

³³ N.N. to the editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 5, Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

expressly forbidden. Additionally, the foreman appointed a watchman to keep track of both the amount of time the men spent in the restroom, and how many times per day each visited. No one was allowed to linger for more than two minutes; one day, a gentleman visited the water-closet three times, which the watchman reported to the superintendent, Mr. Averill, who promptly discharged the worker.³⁶ Because of these and other injustices, the workers began to not only demand the restoration of their wages, but the dismissal of their foreman, Mr. Ward. The mainstream newspapers did not publish these grievances by the workers, neither did Cyrus McCormick, Jr. write about them in his lengthy account of the strike; only the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, and the anarchist weekly, *The Alarm*, edited by Albert Parsons, included these accounts by the employees.

The strike was relatively quiet through Wednesday, 8 April. Nevertheless, McCormick still feared for the safety of the men working in his factory, and met with Chicago's mayor, Carter Harrison, and the Chief of Police to ask for police protection on the streets surrounding the factory, and claimed both were lukewarm to his request. In fact, when he returned to his office, he met a committee of twenty-five to thirty workmen from all departments of the company, making demands of increased pay, and carrying with them a letter from the mayor himself. In this letter, Mayor Harrison appealed to McCormick to talk with the members of the committee, many of whom he knew personally,

³⁶ N.N. to the editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 3-4; "Victory!" *The Alarm*, 18 April 1885, 1, Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

including the aforementioned George Rodgers and Thomas Callahan. Harrison claimed to have assured the men that McCormick was kindly disposed and desirous of doing what was right for both the company and its employees. The mayor ended his letter by reminding McCormick that few differences between men could be accomplished without reasonable compromise, and with his ardent desire that the two parties could come to a quick agreement that would benefit all.³⁷ McCormick, however, seemed suspicious of the committee, claiming two of the five men commended to him by Harrison were the primary movers in the disturbance, which shed a “rather peculiar light” on the mayor and his loyalties.³⁸

Unable to fight against McCormick’s characterization of dangerous radicals, the workers began to embody the stereotypes heaped upon them. On the following day, 9 April, the strike once again turned violent. Around 10:00am, six Pinkerton men arrived by omnibus to the Blue Island Avenue gate, where they encountered a crowd of 400-500 strikers. Tensions were high because of a collision between some of the men and the Pinkerton detectives the previous evening, and upon their arrival on Thursday morning, the crowd attacked the bus, seizing the bridles of the horses, and throwing stones at the officers.³⁹ At this point, the Pinkerton men fired shots, intending to frighten the

³⁷ Mayor Carter Harrison to Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr., 9 April 1885, Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁸ Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr. to Mrs. C.H. McCormick, 13 April 1885, 3. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

³⁹ “The McCormick Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 April 1885, 8.

crowd according to McCormick, and severely injuring one of the men who was hit in the leg. The man was rushed to a hospital, and early reports said he had been killed, but he made a full recovery. A second incident occurred later that day, in which workers mistook a subsequent omnibus, this time filled with Captain O'Donnell and members of the Chicago Police Department, to be carrying more Pinkerton agents. The crowd attacked the driver of the bus, beating him badly, detached the horses, seized the rifles on board, and burned the carriage.⁴⁰ At this point, both local and national newspapers disagreed on which side to blame for the incidents. The earliest reports from the *Chicago Tribune* called the mob "reckless," and the *Cleveland Plains Dealer* labeled them as "riotous."⁴¹ In contrast, the *New York Herald* claimed that although the Pinkerton detectives were frightened, they used their revolvers recklessly.⁴²

While the crowds were boastful of their seeming victory, the following two days of the strike were fairly quiet. On 11 April, McCormick met with an old friend of his father's, Mr. Phillip D. Armour, the meatpacking industrialist. Armour counseled McCormick to settle the strike, as it appeared public opinion was against him, and even suggested McCormick himself was to blame, as no incident of this kind had occurred at the reaper works during his father's

⁴⁰ Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr. to Mrs. C.H. McCormick, 13 April 1885, 4. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁴¹ "A Reckless Mob," *Chicago Tribune*, 10 April 1885, 3; "Riotous Strikers," *Cleveland Plains Dealer*, 10 April 1885, 7.

⁴² "Firing into a Crowd," *New York Herald*, 10 April 1885, 7.

lifetime.⁴³ McCormick believed Armour to be exceedingly kind and friendly, and took his advice to heart. The following day, after talks between the Superintendent Averill and the workers' committee, McCormick agreed to the restoration of wages at ten and fifteen percent, although he refused to dismiss the foreman Mr. Ward. With the strike thus settled, McCormick wrote a lengthy letter to his mother, detailing the strike and the reasons he believed the company was unsuccessful. First of all, he believed the majority of workers did not want to strike, but were terrorized and frightened by a small number of molders, whose threats became more open and malignant by the day. Secondly, McCormick believed the coincidence of the beginning of the strike with an election day meant that no policemen could help with the crowds, claiming they could have overcome the entire matter without a full work stoppage. The third unfortunate occurrence that turned opinion against the family and the company was the large donation to the seminary, which appeared to have taken money from the workers. While McCormick asserted this was not the case, he believed the public sympathized with the workers because of this reason. The final obstacle to their success was a strike of the Malleable Iron Works in Chicago, which started after the walkout at the reaper works, and an increase was granted to them within one hour.⁴⁴ Because of these reasons, McCormick believed he had no other option but to grant the strikers the majority of their demands.

⁴³ Cyrus H. McCormick, Jr. to Mrs. C.H. McCormick, 13 April 1885, 5. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Following the end of the strike, a large mass meeting, held under the auspices of the International, gathered in Chicago to discuss the strike at the McCormick reaper factory. Albert R. Parsons, editor of the socialist monthly publication *The Alarm*, was the first speaker at the meeting, praising the workers for the sudden and successful termination of their strike, and asserted lessons could be learned from this struggle. The most important lesson, he claimed, was the fierce armed resistance of the workers, which had forced McCormick's hand. While this was an important victory, Parsons warned those assembled that this was not the end of the war, as McCormick himself stated earlier that day.⁴⁵ Parsons claimed, therefore, that McCormick had only been temporarily defeated and still retained the absolute power, as the owner, to "throw into enforced idleness, by discharge, every one of the 1,600 wage-slaves in his employ."⁴⁶ Parsons thus used the remainder of his time to speak to the crowd regarding the future of the working class, excitedly regaling the crowd with the merits of socialism. This system, he claimed, meant land for the landless, homes for the homeless, food, shelter, and clothing for the destitute, and peace and happiness for all, something worth struggling and dying for. Foreshadowing the incidents to follow in just over one year's time, Parsons ended his talk by accepting the labels of communist, socialist, anarchist, and even dynamiter; according to this speech, Parsons especially accepted latter term, claiming dynamite to be the ultimate peace-maker. He asked the workers

⁴⁵ "Victory!" *The Alarm*, 18 April 1885, 1. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

what would have become of their strike if they had not been able to use force, and asserted that the men surely would have lost. "Where there is no force," Parsons declared, "there is no power."⁴⁷

II. Anarchy Reigns

The end of the formal strike did not end the conflict between capital and labor, as the clashes continued on new occasions and in new venues. In the two weeks after the workers at the McCormick factory returned to their posts, the city of Chicago readied itself for the celebrated grand opening of the Board of Trade building at the foot of South LaSalle Street. The Executive Committee of the Board of Trade, including H.C. Avery, J.B. Kitchen, Frank R. Spear, and F. A. Crittenden spared no expense in planning the three-day event, with Republican Congressman Ransom Williams Dunham as one of the scheduled speakers. The Board of Trade sent some 6,000 invitations to business leaders from around the world, expecting attendees from New York, Boston, Philadelphia, St. Louis, Montreal, Toronto, and Liverpool.⁴⁸

The events of the first day of celebration, 28 April 1885, were disrupted by a demonstration of members of the International Working People's Association and the American Group of Chicago Anarchists. Starting a few blocks away in Market Square. Albert Parsons, one of the leaders of the rally, and editor of the socialist weekly newspaper *The Alarm*, began the

⁴⁷ "Victory!" *The Alarm*, 18 April 1885, 1. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁴⁸ "The Board of Trade," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 April 1885, 9.

demonstration with a speech to a crowd of 1,000, denouncing the celebrations, the Board of Trade, and its new building, which he called the “grand temple of Usury, Gambling, and Cut-Throatism.”⁴⁹ Parsons continued his remarks against the Board of Trade, claiming the structure was being dedicated to the God of Mammon, and would be used exclusively for the robbery, plunder, and destruction of the people, and hoped his speech might serve as a warning to the revelers.⁵⁰ He further declared American workers were not privileged to live in a free and open society, and in order to protect their freedom from predatory institutions such as the Board of Trade, workers might be forced to take up arms in rebellion.⁵¹ In fact, Parsons claimed that if workers wanted to achieve their liberation from economic bondage, every man would need to set aside part of his wages and purchase a Colt’s navy revolver, a Winchester rifle, and ten pounds of dynamite to learn to make and use.⁵²

Once Parsons and other leaders, including Samuel Fielden, concluded their speeches, the crowd marched toward the Board of Trade, carrying both red and black flags, which Fielden claimed had been misinterpreted as representing revolution and anarchy, but he believed symbolized the common blood of humanity and starvation. At the front of the procession, with flags in hand, were a number of women including Lucy Parsons, wife of Albert Parsons,

⁴⁹ “They Want Blood,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 April 1885, 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵¹ Carl S. Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 114.

⁵² Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 114; “They Want Blood,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 April 1885, 2.

and Lizzie Holmes a member of the American Group of Chicago Anarchists. A brass band also accompanied the crowd, striking up the Marseillaise, to which many of the crowd sang along in French. The marchers were eventually halted by a detachment of city police, called to protect the building and its visitors from threats. Two of the police officers, Captain Frederick Ebersold and Lieutenant William Ward, prevented the crowd from reaching the Board of Trade, forcing them to retreat to 107 Fifth Avenue, which housed both *The Alarm* and the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. At this point, Parsons once again addressed the crowd, as did August Spies, editor of the German language *Arbeiter-Zeitung*. A reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* claimed Spies rambled on for about ten minutes, “murdering” the German language, in an attempt to prove that “dynamite, bloodshed, and rapine were the only means by which the starving masses could obtain their rights.”⁵³ The journalist also reported that after the speech Spies showed some friends a large piece of alleged dynamite and a long fuse, which Spies said he intended to place under the new Board of Trade building if he had been permitted to get close enough. Though the crowd had been forced to retreat before reaching their destination, the men seemed to be in high spirits, showing the reporter around their headquarters, and especially revealing their weapons. These included six-shooters, cartridges half filled with nitroglycerine used by thieves to blow open safes, and larger cartridges the men referred to as “car-splitters.”⁵⁴

⁵³ “They Want Blood,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 April 1885, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

By carrying the red and black flags, the demonstrators set themselves apart from the other citizens of the city. These men and women knew Chicagoans would recognize the red flag in particular, and would associate it with the Paris Commune, though some fourteen years earlier, still fresh in their minds. These seemingly insignificant banners relayed to observers of the protest that the group rejected traditional "American" ideals, emphasizing the foreignness of their language and thought.

In fact, the local media did respond to the discordant and alien signals and symbols presented by the protesters. Following the incident, newspapers condemned the demonstrations, accusing the whole crowd of being anarchists out for blood. In general, the papers did not understand the meanings of the protests; one reporter viewed the "ignorant and excited crowd" as being solely against the construction of the new building.⁵⁵ A few years earlier, the Board of Trade found its quarters on Washington Street growing too stunted for its increasing business, and decided to build new accommodations at the total cost of \$1.8 million. According to the article, hundreds of laborers had employment for two full years, many of whom the journalist speculated to have been members of the "Communist International Association" or belong to the class whose "interests it pretends to represent."⁵⁶ The reporter also claimed two-thirds of the money spent on the project went to the working class, laborers were paid at the highest market rate, and no labor disputes arose during the entire construction process. The capitalists who invested in this building were

⁵⁵ "The Socialist Demonstration," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 April 1885, 4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

not forced to do so, as they just as easily could have spent a fraction of the cost on a plain brick structure in which to conduct their business; however, Chicago's laboring class would have lost one million dollars in wages. Here, the reporter claimed he was confused, and asked the workingmen why they demanded labor when the Board of Trade had provided employment at the prices the workers requested. Instead of being grateful for work, the laboring class had decided to menace the lives and property of their employers, parading in the shadows with red and black flags, and threatening with dynamite the very buildings they themselves were paid to construct. In light of these seeming contradictions, the *Tribune* reporter labeled Parsons and Spies as inconsistent, unreasoning, and ignorant.⁵⁷

Another journalist looked at the demonstrations as a protest against the Board of Trade in general. An article in the *Tribune* declared the "American-speaking leader of the communistic mob in his harangue stigmatized the Board of Trade as an association of thieves, usurers, and gamblers," prompting the author to explain to his readers the business of the board.⁵⁸ The reporter claimed the members of the board engaged in buying marketable agricultural products from the Great West, selling those products to the East, and arranging the transportation from one to the other, thus, the author assured, giving employment to thousands of laborers in warehouses, docks, trains, and steamers.⁵⁹ According to the *Tribune*, labor leaders such as Parsons and Spies,

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁸ "What the Board of Trade Does," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 April 1885, 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

therefore, did not really want to work, for if they did, the city of Chicago, with help from the Board of Trade, had plenty of jobs to fill. Instead, the author declared the discontented men to be mostly aliens who came to the United States seeking relief from political and industrial oppression; he could not understand why their first act was to strike at the men who furnished the sources of labor they sought out. The article concludes rather bluntly, telling immigrants to return to the “delightful conditions” they left behind if they did not like those who could provide them with the means to improve their plight.⁶⁰ Despite the claims that the demonstrators were not Americans, many leaders, especially the aforementioned Albert Parsons, were born in the United States.

By the beginning of 1886, only twelve percent of Chicago’s labor force was organized, despite the efforts of the numerous trade unions, the Knights of Labor and the Central Labor Union. Each of these three camps represented different groups and varied interests. Anglo-American skilled workers generally comprised the Trades and Labor Assembly, Irish-American reformers led the Knights of Labor, and the remaining European immigrants, led by socialists and anarchists, broke away from the previous two and created the Central Labor Union. While the very presence of these groups suggested the fragmentation of ethnicity and ideology of the city’s labor movement, they did interact with each other, as membership often overlapped.⁶¹ These

⁶⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁶¹ Nelson, *Beyond the Martyrs*, 50.

interactions between the organizations were evident during the renewal of labor disputes at the McCormick Reaper Works that began in February 1886.

On 10 February, a flyer, written in both English and German, was distributed among the workers at the McCormick factory. It announced a meeting of employees at Dooley's Hall on 21st and Pauline Streets. All members of the Knights of Labor and Trades Unions were invited to discuss the subject of Superintendent George Averill and Mr. Ward, the foreman McCormick refused to dismiss the previous year.⁶² Upon receiving news of the meeting, Averill sent a copy of the flyer to a fellow employee, a Mr. Butler, with a letter in which Averill stated he did not know how the company would fare at the gathering, but expected there to be trouble.⁶³

According to members of the molders' union, when the strike had been settled the previous year, the company promised all the men employment once the works restarted after their usual summer break. Once work resumed, however, the men returned to work to find that between fifteen and eighteen machines had been installed, each one having the capacity to do the same work as ten men. The men claimed Superintendent Averill, therefore, refused to rehire the returning, skilled laborers and instead employed unskilled non-union men to run the molding machines. While only a few union members

⁶² Notice to McCormick workers, 10 February 1886, Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁶³ George B. Averill to Mr. Butler, 10 February 1886, Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

were hired at the factory, many left after learning wages had dropped significantly, and realizing they would be working with non-union employees.⁶⁴

At first, it appeared McCormick and the appointed committee of molders came to an understanding without staging a strike.⁶⁵ However, days later, the dissatisfied men met with McCormick to voice individual complaints of unfair treatment and to present the owner with a list of demands. The workers requested the restoration of wages to that of the previous spring for all skilled laborers, the salary of \$1.50 for un-skilled workers, and that those who had been discharged for being union members and advocates of the rights of honest labor be rehired and treated with decency and respect by their foremen.⁶⁶ McCormick complied with the first two appeals, but denied the third, although he did claim workers would not be discriminated against because of their nationality, color, religion, politics, or union or non-union membership. In responding to the committee, McCormick said he now left the matter in the hands of the men, fully believing they would not interrupt the regular progress of the factory. Should the workers decide otherwise and walk out, McCormick made it very clear he would be obliged to close the works immediately. Later that evening, members of the Knights of Labor, Molders' Union, and Metalworkers Union met to discuss the situation, and were generally displeased with McCormick's compromise, specifically mentioning Foreman William Ward and his insistence on hiring only non-union men. While the

⁶⁴ "Objecting to Non-Union Men," *Cleveland Plains Dealer*, 11 February 1885, 2.

⁶⁵ "Labor Matters," *Dallas Morning News*, 12 February 1886, 2.

⁶⁶ "McCormick's Men," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 February 1886, 2.

majority of the men at the meeting wanted to strike immediately, cooler heads prevailed and they decided to make one more effort the next day, attempting to have the company dismiss the current five non-union men from the reaper works, before staging the walkout.⁶⁷

McCormick made certain that the men would not have the chance to strike. Upon reading the news of the committee's decision, McCormick ordered the factory to be shut down at 9:30 am on 16 February. McCormick told a reporter for the *Tribune*, "As soon as we learned of the result of last night's meeting we determined to close down. I did not anticipate that such action would be necessary when I conversed with the committee yesterday...the action of last night's meeting, however, left me no alternative but to close down, as I had intimated the previous day."⁶⁸ McCormick went on to place the blame entirely at the feet of the workers, believing he granted every reasonable concession they requested, and declared the committee's insistence on firing the non-union men to be unjust. The factory, McCormick announced, would remain closed indefinitely to all 1,400 employees, until the workmen were ready to accept the wages offered without questioning the right of the company to hire whom they wished.⁶⁹

The local press sided with McCormick, claiming the demands of the workers to be unreasonable, and an infringement upon the freedom of the company. For the previous thirty years, the company insisted upon this right,

⁶⁷ "McCormick's Men," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 February 1886, 2.

⁶⁸ "Locked Out," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 February 1886, 1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

and insisted their supervisors gave no regard to age, nationality, color, union membership, or even gender when considering the best people to employ. McCormick also allowed his workers the liberty to join unions if they wished, and were simply demanding the same freedom of action with this lockout. An editor for the *Tribune* claimed if the workers were intelligent, they should consider whether they could truly afford to take this course of action regarding the basic rights of the company.⁷⁰

As news of the lockout reached other parts of the country, everyone seemed to be anticipating serious trouble, remembering the bloodshed of the previous year.⁷¹ Despite the lockout lasting for two weeks, the situation remained relatively peaceful, except for one incident with William Ward, the same foreman the men had been accusing of mistreating the workers for over one year. On 25 February, Ward approached the factory in his buggy, and was met with resistance by a crowd of workers who seized his horse and attempted to prevent his passage. Ward then drew his revolver, demanding the men let him through, and in response the men drew their weapons as well. With the assistance of an officer, Ward was able to reach his destination without further incident; however, later that day a crowd accosted several plain-clothes officers, hired to mingle with the men to keep order, and several men were arrested.⁷²

⁷⁰ "The McCormick Lockout," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 February 1886, 1.

⁷¹ "McCormick's Reaper Works," *New York Times*, 17 February 1886, 1.

⁷² "The Big Lockout," *Chicago Tribune*, 26 February 1886, 3.

Seeming to have reached agreement with the workers, without acceding to the demands of firing the non-union laborers, the McCormick Reaper Works re-opened on 1 March with roughly 300 men, and within days the number reached 800.⁷³ The remaining workers, largely members of the Molders' Union or the Knights of Labor, continued the strike, deciding to wait it out until McCormick finally complied with their requests. McCormick appeared to be unyielding; however, he did state he would gladly rehire anyone that wanted to work, with the understanding the company could employ whom they wished, as he asserted before the lockout.⁷⁴ Dissension among the men became evident when 1,000 workers met to discuss the situation later that evening. Some of the men wanted to return to work, but feared their future positions in the union. As one disgruntled worker claimed, "I for one would like to go to work there, but if I did I suppose I would lose all connection with the Knights and be branded a 'scab' to my detriment in the future."⁷⁵ Despite the disunity, the men decided to leave the matter to be arbitrated by the Knights of Labor. Over one month later, on 12 April, a committee from the Knights of Labor called on McCormick to reinstate the 800 men, and when the owner refused, the committee declared their intention to have the executive board declare a boycott against the company.⁷⁶

⁷³ "Work and Wages," *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, 9 March 1886, 5; "The Strike at McCormick Works," *New York Times*, 5 March 1886, 1.

⁷⁴ "Will Stick It Out," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 March 1886, 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷⁶ "The Discontented," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 13 April 1886, 1.

While the Knights of Labor negotiated with McCormick, the Trade and Labor Assembly, the Eight Hour League, the Central Labor Union, and other organizations across the city began to unite in order to once again demonstrate for eight-hours a day for workers. George Schilling, former McCormick employee and current member of the Eight-Hour League, asked for the support of local ministers, but their views were quickly denounced by speakers who were labeled rabid Socialists by the *Tribune*.⁷⁷ At these meetings, the members of the various groups agreed to hold a mass demonstration on 1 May.

Once the day arrived, some 30,000 laborers from various industries gathered and paraded through the streets of Chicago, advocating eight hours of work for ten hours pay. While the procession was relatively peaceful, the *New York Times* reported some of the number to be carrying the red flag of socialism, and others made incendiary speeches. The *Times* also described a second parade of 10,000 “Bohemians, Poles, and Germans” employed in and around the lumber yards, carrying red flags and singing; some of their number suggested the crowd proceed to apply torches to the lumber yards, but the crowd made no such moves.⁷⁸

What was supposed to be a one-day demonstration stretched into three, and by the third day became violent, once again surrounding the McCormick factory. A group of 7,000 to 8,000 men, whom the *New York Times* labeled as “anarchists and tramps maddened with free beer and free speech,” stormed the reaper works, on the suggestion the employees would continue working ten

⁷⁷ “The Eight Hour Boom,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 April 1886, 1.

⁷⁸ “Western Labor Parades,” *New York Times*, 2 May 1886, 2.

hours instead of demanding eight; unbeknownst to the crowd, McCormick met with his own men earlier that day and adopted the eight-hour system.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Fritz Schmidt, a socialist from the Central Labor Union, wearing red ribbons, urged the crowd to fight for liberty with revolvers and dynamite, and attack McCormick's. As soon as the mob reached the gates they stoned the workers and looted the gatekeeper's house. The guards employed by McCormick since the trouble had begun in February, attempted to stave off the rioters by firing their pistols in the air. The crowd was not intimidated and made no move to end their attack, even when a wagon of Chicago policemen arrived on the scene. Once the twelve police officers appeared they were pelted by stones, and began to exchange fire with the throng. When the dust settled, five strikers and four policemen were shot, resulting in at least one fatality, a young 18 year-old lumber yard worker, Joseph Vojtek.⁸⁰

That evening, August Spies wrote an editorial in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in which he declared that the blood of the workingmen shot down at McCormick's cried out for revenge. He compared the members of the established order, capitalists and law enforcement officers, to tigers on the prowl, glaring murderously at the workers. "Absolute necessity," he warned, "forces the cry: To Arms! To Arms! If you do not defend yourselves you will be torn and mutilated by the fangs of the beast."⁸¹ Spies further declared any retreat to be cowardly, and would only result in the bitter yoke of continued slavery. The

⁷⁹ "Bloodshed in Chicago," *New York Times*, 5 May 1886, 1.

⁸⁰ "Strike Riots in Chicago," *Manchester Guardian*, 5 May 1886, 8; "Bloodshed in Chicago," *New York Times*, 5 May 1886, 1.

⁸¹ "Anarchists Called to Arms," *New York Times*, 5 May 1886, 1.

editors of the *Chicago Tribune* were incensed at Spies' call to arms, blaming the mob inflamed with whisky and communistic harangues, for making an unprovoked assault upon the McCormick factory. Instead of fighting for the rights of the workmen, the crowd attacked them, and according to the *Tribune*, the police quelled the riot, only administering a slight punishment in comparison to the crimes committed. The editors questioned why the rioters were at the reaper works in the first place, claiming no members of the crowd were employees or former employees of the company. Once again assuming the thousands of strikers were all immigrants, the authors declared citizens of Chicago to be patient and long-suffering, asserting that such utterances by anarchists in their home countries would result in jails filled to capacity.⁸²

The following day, 4 May, socialist leaders called for a meeting at the Old Haymarket on the corner of Randolph and Halstead Streets, in close proximity to the lumber yards, packing houses, and factories such as McCormick's. Though the square had the capabilities of holding up to 20,000, only a somewhat disappointing 1,500 gathered. August Spies arrived around 9:00pm, climbing aboard a wagon to address the crowd, denouncing capitalism and denying any involvement in the previous days' activities. Albert Parsons then gave such a mild speech that many of the crowd began to dwindle away.⁸³ The tone of the proceedings changed dramatically, however, when Sam Fielden spoke, his rhetoric becoming more and more violent. Believing Fielden's speech to be too incendiary, the policemen gathered at the square ordered the

⁸² "Article 1," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 May 1886, 4.

⁸³ "Dynamite in Chicago," *Chicago Tribune*, 5 May 1886, 1.

crowd to desist and disperse. At this point, a bomb exploded near the line of advancing policemen, and in the confusion exchanged gunfire with the mob.⁸⁴ Immediate reports about the casualties were contradictory, but in the end, the incident resulted in the death of seven officers, one member of the crowd, and an unknown number of injuries.

Following the bombing, the State's Attorney Julius S. Grinnell, gave the Chicago Police Department the approval to conduct a round-up of the radical activists, resulting in a blatant disregard for individual rights and due process of law. Once such arrest was of Vaclav Dejmek, who testified that police entered his home on the evening of 7 May 1886 without cause or warrant, and when asked to show their credentials, abused Dejmek and his wife. The officers then ransacked the house, roused the Dejmek children from their beds, seized the pillowcases from the beds simply because they were red in color. Dejmek swore before the courts he took no part in the troubles in the preceding days, yet was beaten, threatened, and jailed without counsel for many days, though promised immunity if he would testify against the bomb-throwers and anarchist leaders.⁸⁵ While officers arrested many men such as Dejmek looking for information, police focused on ten anarchist leaders in connection with the crime including Rudolph Schaubelt, William Seliger, Albert

⁸⁴ "Rioting and Bloodshed in the Streets of Chicago," *New York Times*, 5 May 1886, 1.

⁸⁵ Vaclav Dejmek, Affidavit before the Cook County Court, 14 April 1893, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

Parsons, August Spies, Samuel Fielden, Michael Schwab, Oscar Neebe, George Engle, Adolph Fischer, and Louis Lingg.⁸⁶

III. Reactions to Haymarket in Chicago and Beyond

The bombing in Chicago's Haymarket Square captured the attention of the world. Local and national newspapers reported on the incidents and helped to shape the how the riots and the government's response to them were understood.⁸⁷ In the days after the affair, the *New York Times* published an article profiling four of the anarchist leaders, Spies, Parsons, Schwab, and Fielden. The *Times* immediately related that Spies hailed from Germany, and just a few years after his arrival to Chicago became a willing follower of fellow German John Most and his anarchistic doctrines. Prior to this point, Spies had been a socialist and the editor of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, but gradually changed the politics of the paper until it became, "a mouthpiece of dynamiters and the most dangerous classes," with which he lashed the workingmen into rebellion.⁸⁸ Editors for the *Times* described Spies as unmarried, well-dressed, and gentlemanly in appearance. As for Michael Schwab, the newspaper did not mention he too had been born in Germany, but made sure to point out that his wife and her brothers were political exiles from their native Austria. The unsettled nature of these people's opinions was not the only characteristic which caught the attention of the media. Their physical appearance was

⁸⁶ Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 121.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁸⁸ "Three Anarchist Leaders," *New York Times*, 6 May 1886, 1.

highlighted as confirmation that they were unclean. Schwab was described as untidy with seldom-combed hair, a thoroughly competent editor for the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, and personally as meek as a lamb. The *Times* did not describe Parsons in such a positive light, labeling him as lazy and unwilling to work. Parsons' weekly newspaper, *The Alarm*, was characterized as the English sideshow version of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, in which he published the same principles as Spies, including the dangerous instructions on how to manufacture and handle dynamite and other explosives. In describing Parsons, reporters also engaged in selective omission. Parsons is nowhere described as American born, other than to say he previously lived in Texas. The portrayal of Fielden seemed to be added as an afterthought, as he was almost completely dismissed by the authors, and even the title of the article was "Three Anarchist Leaders," instead of four. Fielden was identified as a fat, lazy American (though he was born in England), who seldom worked and spent the majority of his time translating the speeches and doctrines set forth by Spies in German. The *Times* recognized Fielden had accomplished some dangerous work by organizing English-speaking anarchist groups, but otherwise called him unremarkable.⁸⁹

Following the sketches of the anarchists, a subsequent article in the *Times* claimed that since the war of rebellion, no disturbance of the peace in the United States had so captured public sentiment as the murder of policemen in Chicago on 4 May. The use of the term "murder" was very carefully chosen,

⁸⁹ "Three Anarchist Leaders," *New York Times*, 6 May 1886, 1.

with the editors declaring it silly to speak of the incident as a riot, as all evidence proved the perpetrators deliberately planned and coolly executed what they defined as a premeditated and highly organized crime. The dictates of justice, the safety of society, and the safety of the brave men who keep that society from harm, required that the cowardly savages who plotted and carried out this murder should suffer the death they deserved. The editors went on to suggest the lesson for every city having labor problems or an active anarchist element, was to increase the strength of the police and have them strongly and promptly backed by the military. Taking this idea a step further, the *Times* advocated the use of rifles and Gatling guns against anarchist disturbances.⁹⁰

Across the country, newspapers made their opposition to the anarchists known in no uncertain terms. The *Detroit Tribune* declared the men to be a loathsome and hideous set of law-breakers and murderers who should be dealt with by the government of the United States with all haste. Similarly, the *Duluth Tribune* proclaimed the red-mouth devils who made the inflammatory speeches wanted violence, anarchy, ruin, and bloodshed, but accused them of hiding in the shadows once the bullets started to fly.⁹¹ The editors for the widely distributed *New York World* wrote that the display of the red flag in Chicago had backfired, solidifying national opposition to their cause. The authors warned that anarchists had no place in American society, and

⁹⁰ "The Chicago Murders," *New York Times*, 6 May 1886, 4.

⁹¹ "Voice of the Press," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1886, 9.

workingmen should beware of the red flag and have no affiliation with those who created labor disputes as a pretext to rob, deface, and revolutionize.⁹²

Many papers described the perpetrators as immigrants or aliens. In Rochester, New York, the *Democrat* claimed most of the men arrived in the United States because their ideas would not be tolerated in Europe. The *Blade* in Toledo, Ohio argued that those who threw the dynamite were not honest workingmen, and very few of them were Americans. According to these editors, the anarchists should be hunted down without mercy, in order to show to the nation that Americans have no affiliation or sympathy with the scoundrels.⁹³ In Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, the *Commercial* expressed their astonishment that the “wild and ignorant mobs of foreigners” had the audacity to drive American-born citizens from their work.⁹⁴ The Hartford, Connecticut *Courant* claimed that workers, whether native-born or foreign-born, who believed in God and were law-abiding American citizens had nothing to do with the alien anarchists and their red flag. From the southern half of the state of Illinois, the *Alton Telegraph* asserted the “foreign invasion of the dregs of humanity, opposed to law, to order, to every principle of American liberty, must be stamped out swiftly and sternly,” or social chaos would result; communism and anarchism, the editors insisted, must be exterminated without remorse or delay.⁹⁵

⁹² “Voice of the Press,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1886, 9.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

Several papers not only opposed the anarchists, but also at least laid some of the blame on Chicago's city government and its mayor Carter Harrison. The *Mail and Express*, from New York City, declared Americans would finally understand the peculiar feature of the labor troubles in Chicago, where an inefficient and disreputable municipal government had tolerated yearly parades of socialists whose mottoes and speeches threatened war against property and against every institution that native-born Americans regarded as sacred. The Brooklyn *Eagle* offered a scathing denunciation of Chicago's government, claiming the city had long been notorious for the influence of elements that found no tolerance in Brooklyn. In Chicago, the widely advertised indifference to scruples of morality, especially in the rum shops open every day of the week, led many Chicagoans to delight that their city was "as free as Paris;" while that might be the case, the editors for the *Eagle* reminded its readers that it was in Paris that the Commune wrought its most dangerous work, and that Chicago contained some elements that invited the parallel. Additionally, the authors suggested if the current atmosphere was allowed to continue in the city, men like McCormick could decide it was not worthwhile to live in constant fear of his business being attacked, and could leave the city altogether, moving his company further west, and likely taking upwards of 20,000 Chicagoans with him.⁹⁶

The *Christian Union*, a weekly publication in New York that would later be renamed by its more recognizable *Outlook*, published an article from its

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Chicago correspondent claiming that Mayor Carter Harrison believed his leniency and favor had been abused, and would insure the enforcement of law. In this case, the correspondent wholeheartedly believed the incident necessary, for without it, Chicagoans would not have understood the true intentions of the anarchists. When describing the four leaders, the reporter made sure to note all were born in Europe save for Parsons, whom he labeled as the son of a Rebel General from Texas. In light of the bombing, the correspondent concluded, that in the future it would be dangerous for an anarchist or communist to express their views in Chicago.⁹⁷

An author for the *New York Evangelist* believed Mayor Harrison's defense of non-interference with instigators of riots and destruction, with the politician claiming the public would have condemned him for breaking up the meetings and processions as violations of free speech. While that may have been the case, the author denounced Harrison for recognizing, honoring, and rewarding the agitators by appointing their leaders to important city offices, and allowing their seditious newspapers to be printed. The article strongly condemned Harrison, asserting his actions to be hardly less than criminal in light of recent events.⁹⁸

The *Maine Farmer* also partially blamed Chicago's government for the bombing. Describing Chicago as the hot bed of sin and corruption, the editors claimed that instead of crushing the life out of the vipers in their incipiency, city officials allowed them to be nursed into vigorous life, developing anarchy

⁹⁷ "In and About Chicago," *Christian Union*, 13 May 1886, 6.

⁹⁸ "The Effect of a Single Bomb," *New York Evangelist*, 20 May 1886, 4.

and murder. The article also launched into a discussion of the true form of American liberty. No room existed, the authors maintained, in the United States for the stars and bars of disunion or the red flag of communism; the stars and stripes formed the only standard of the true citizen's allegiance. When immigrants sought out the United States for asylum from the oppressions of their homes, they should not have been allowed to, "bring with them for transplanting in the virgin soil of free America the doctrines or the weapons of bandits, communists, anarchists, and the offscourings of Europe."⁹⁹ Declaring unbridled and unrestrained license was not true liberty, the article asserted that under the guise of freedom of speech, no man or body should be authorized to advise the murder of men, women, and children, or the destruction of American cities. The authors concluded by stating socialism was the ultimate enemy of the republic, and demanded its destruction at any cost.¹⁰⁰

Attitudes in Chicago were fairly similar to those across the country, denouncing the anarchists and the atmosphere in which they were allowed to thrive. The *Chicago Times* published an article condemning not only the radicals, but the established labor organizations as well, many of which the paper claimed promptly criticized the "socialistic bandits" that used the name of labor as a pretext for murder and pillage; for these condemnations, the public applauded the labor unions. The article asserted, however, that the protests of the organizations would have held more weight had they not

⁹⁹ "Under the Red Flag," *Maine Farmer*, 13 May 1886, 2.

¹⁰⁰ "Voice of the Press," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1886, 9.

engaged in unlawful practices themselves. While denouncing the violent methods of the foreign disciples of the red flag, the same committees visited factories and workshops, commanding peaceable and satisfied workmen to lay down their tools and join the strikers, under threat of personal injury.¹⁰¹ These threats and menaces by the American trades' unions violated the law, if only to a lesser degree than the attack of the socialist mob upon the McCormick factory, and subtracted any virtue in their abhorrence of the anarchist "barbarians." The only section of the labor force deserving of merit, according to the *Times*, were the non-union men, workers that had not abdicated their individuality or merged their personal liberty in a collective body, that refused to relegate themselves to the limits of a caste, and "asserted resolutely their personal liberty and right as free American citizens against every form and mode of organized tyranny and lawlessness."¹⁰² In a private letter to the *Times*, an unnamed gentleman, who apparently gained a high social status through hard work without the aid of labor organizations, claimed that every non-union man was a jewel and should receive recognition and encouragement; such men were "true to the core" and fit to exercise and enjoy the rights and privileges of citizenship in the American republic.¹⁰³

In two separate articles published in the same edition, just days after the bombing, the *Chicago Tribune* made very clear statements about who should be considered American, and what should be considered American ideas. The

¹⁰¹ "The Noblest Workers are the Non-Union Men," *Chicago Times*. Reprinted in *Wisconsin State Journal*, 21 May 1886, 3.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3.

first piece, titled "Stamp Out the Anarchists," claimed the mobbing, murder, and assassination by dynamite were necessary to arouse the Americans and "Americanized foreigners" of Chicago to the dangers of continuing to tolerate public teaching of imported nihilism and communism. The city had been a hotbed for the propagation of anarchistic doctrines for too many years; under the leadership of Parsons, Spies, Fielden, and Schwab the bloody-minded radicals in Chicago urged the destruction of American ideas and sent out their followers to encourage social and political revolution. In accordance with what the article called the "popular but delusive and misplaced notions about the sacredness of free speech and free print," the municipal authorities permitted the anarchists to advocate murder, pillage, and arson as a means to overthrow American government and society, and made no moves to drive out, suppress or interfere with the radical organizations.¹⁰⁴ The general attitude of Chicagoans toward the anarchists in the beginning seemed to be that the madness would run its course without bloodshed, but the events of the previous days demonstrated the citizens of the city could not expect to escape the effects if they tolerated the cause. Similar to other national newspapers, the *Tribune* referred to the anarchists as immigrants driven out of their native countries, such as Germany, Bohemia, and Poland, as intolerable enemies of law and order. The United States welcomed had these men despite their alien origins and political ideas; it had offered education for their children and cheap land on which these families could make a new start. Finally, they had been

¹⁰⁴ "Stamp Out the Anarchists," *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1886, 4.

given the gift of full citizenship, and been endowed with all the rights of native-born Americans. These protesters were not exercising a right of citizenship—they were political outlaws who had turned the American right to free speech into a license to advocate dynamite, the torch, and insurrection. The editors then proposed changes in Chicago, declaring that no more social desperadoes should be harbored in the city. In what would be considered clear violations of freedom of press and the right to assemble, the *Tribune* suggested that the police suppress incendiary anarchical newspapers, break up any nihilistic meetings in public parks, and forbid the flaunting of red or black flags in the streets of Chicago. In concluding their article, the editors wrote, “let the anarchists understand that they must seek some other place to preach and practice their hellish doctrines, and while they remain here they must at least show outward respect for American laws and institutions.”¹⁰⁵

A subsequent article in the *Tribune*, published the same day, made very clear the distinction regarding who should be considered American or un-American. The article titled “The Un-Americanized Element” suggested the intensity of unreasonableness in the demands of the labor force and the expectation for realizing those demands through the illegal agencies of menace, bulldozing, and mobbing were in exact proportion to the alien and un-American elements in the working population of the city. On the other hand, the Americans and “Americanized” immigrants in Chicago made reasonable demands on their employers, and sought to settle their grievances by

¹⁰⁵ “Stamp Out the Anarchists,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1886, 4.

arbitration and peaceful, business-like methods. In order to distinguish between the four categories of his creation – Americans, Americanized immigrants, aliens, and un-Americans – the author chose to examine the workers of Philadelphia in contrast to those in Chicago. The article described Philadelphia as a vast hive of manual industry with a population of close to 1 million, whose masses possessed much wealth. The workers in Philadelphia were largely skilled laborers, intelligent, industrious, and thrifty, with tens of millions both in savings and stocks and bonds; at least 100,000 mechanics owned their own homes, and those that did not were new to the labor force and would soon join the ranks of home ownership. In Philadelphia the workingmen were American or immigrants who had become Americanized, with few aliens and no communists among them; in the case of needing higher wages, the workers in the eastern city presented their requests when commodities increased in price and business was good. Because of these respectful practices, Philadelphia had seen little excitement over the eight-hour question, and nearby cities such as New York and Boston followed their lead. Although the workforce in New York and Boston held many immigrants, the author asserted these populations were comprised mostly of Americanized Irish, who held no sympathy for communism or anarchism. By contrast Chicago, with a population roughly equal to that of Philadelphia, contained businesses that offered good wages to vast numbers of raw, unskilled laborers. As a result, the city became the rendezvous for the worst elements of the “socialistic, atheistic, and alcoholic European classes,” an ignorant,

unreasonable multitude easily led by such scoundrels as Spies, Parsons, Schwab, and Fielden.¹⁰⁶ These demagogues persuaded the workers in Chicago that capital was their enemy, that employers should be killed, property destroyed, and law be throttled and overturned. Employees in the city believed their employers could be compelled to accept any hours and wages demanded, and workers would not hesitate to threaten companies with violence or boycotts should these unreasonable requests not be met. This alien and un-American element, blind and vicious, flaunted the red flag and the black flag of dynamite in the midst of the hardworking American citizens of Chicago. The author also claimed several other cities across the country were suffering a similar fate to Chicago, especially Milwaukee, East St. Louis, and Cleveland, where largely immigrant workers committed crimes and defied the laws. Nevertheless, these workers – whether alien or native-born with un-American ideals – were now recognizing the need to abandon anarchist principles and adapt themselves to the American way or suffer the consequences of their criminal conduct.¹⁰⁷

IV. True Americans

The subsequent trial of the accused anarchists also captured the attention of Americans nationwide. Of the ten sought in connection with the riot, Rudolph Schaubelt, the one accused of actually throwing the bomb, escaped the country prior to his arrest, and William Seliger testified for the

¹⁰⁶ “The Un-Americanized Element,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 May 1886, 4.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

state; the remaining eight – Parsons, Spies, Fielden, Schwab, Neebe, Engle, Fischer, and Lingg – were arrested and put on trial together rather than separately. Judge Joseph E. Gary’s court appeared to be unfair and unjust. Despite several eyewitnesses, some of which were paid by the prosecution, claiming to have seen Spies light the bomb and Schaubelt throw the weapon, State’s Attorney Grinnell was forced to admit he could not conclude with certainty which, or if any, of the accused threw the bomb. What Grinnell attempted to prove, however, was that the inflammatory rhetoric of the anarchists had wrongfully and with malicious intent caused the deaths of the seven policemen, an argument that turned sedition into murder.¹⁰⁸ The judge, jury, and majority of the nation, agreed with Grinnell; Oscar Neebe was convicted and sentenced to fifteen years hard labor, while the remaining seven were convicted and sentenced to death.¹⁰⁹

The men appealed to the proper courts over the next year, but when the Supreme Court decided not to hear the case, asked Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby for clemency. Local and national newspapers, and therefore American citizens, took keen interest in Oglesby’s decision, with many writing to the governor with their opinions. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, several urged

¹⁰⁸ Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 122-123.

¹⁰⁹ Historian Timothy Messer-Kruse in *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), provides a different look at the trial. Contrary to previous historians, Messer-Kruse claims the accused Chicago anarchists were indeed part of an international network, and conspired to attack police with bombs and guns during that first weekend of May in 1886. Messer-Kruse asserts that by the standards of the time, the trial was fair, and the prosecution provided overwhelming evidence that proved the guilt of most of the defendants (8).

Oglesby to either pardon the men, or commute their sentences to life in prison. A large gathering of citizens of St. Paul, Minnesota asked the governor to use his prerogative as chief officer of the state to prevent the executions. The Minnesotans believed the decisions of the courts were unduly influenced by an inflamed public sentiment, eager to join with the capitalists to restrict the rapid and peaceful growth of the labor movement. Additionally, the group asserted the trial before Judge Gary's court was unfair and impartial, and therefore the verdict rendered was unjust.¹¹⁰

Other Americans across the country, with less overt political agendas than the group from Minnesota, also wrote to Oglesby asking for clemency for the accused. One gentleman, H.A. Coffeen of Brighton City, Wyoming, wrote a lengthy letter telling the governor he believed the teachings of the anarchists to be wrong. Nevertheless, Coffeen wrote that wrong teachings could be overcome by natural methods, and by teaching correct doctrines. Administering death on the scaffold to the advocates of every incorrect doctrine would only serve to emblazon and strengthen their cause.¹¹¹

F.S. Montgomery, the Post Master for Shepard, Ohio, wrote to Oglesby, asserting he was no anarchist and had no particular sympathy with their ideas, but nonetheless beseeched the governor to commute the sentences of the seven men to life in prison, for surely that would be punishment enough, even

¹¹⁰ Citizens of St. Paul Minnesota to Governor Richard J. Oglesby, Albert Parsons Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹¹¹ H.A. Coffee to Governor Richard J. Oglesby, 20 November 1886, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

if they were guilty as charged.¹¹² In a more strongly worded letter, Grace Courtland of Boston, who signed the correspondence as the “witch of Wall Street,” warned Oglesby that history would link him with Charles V of Spain if he permitted seven men to hang for the crime of free speech.¹¹³

Although some across the country asked the governor for clemency, numerous articles in the press, and the overwhelming majority of letters Oglesby received, implored him to continue with the executions as scheduled. The *Chicago Times*, *New York Tribune*, *Western Rural* (Chicago), *Pioneer Press* (St. Paul, Minnesota), and *Boston Journal* all published articles demanding Oglesby show no mercy and asserting the reds must hang.¹¹⁴ In addition, countless Americans from across the country wrote to the governor for the same purpose, often emphasizing the ideas of Americanism and true American citizenship.

C.C. Merrick of Illinois declared the men were given a fair and impartial trial, were convicted by a jury of their peers, confirmed by the state Supreme Court, and therefore no course of action should be taken to reverse those decisions. Remembering the Civil War, Merrick declared that when the flag of secession imperiled the nation’s existence, a loyal people with one thought and desire, with the power of the military, reestablished throughout the country the

¹¹² F.S. Montgomery to Governor Richard J. Oglesby, 21 September 1887, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

¹¹³ Grace Courtland to Governor Richard J. Oglesby, 6 November 1887, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

¹¹⁴ See newspaper clippings, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

civil law which secession had overthrown. Therefore when the black flag of socialism and anarchy threaten to imperil the existence of civil law, a loyal people must rally to the support of the governor, in order to aid and strengthen his hands in the enforcement of such decrees. Clemency to these individuals, Merrick claimed, would be a menace and danger to all law abiding American citizens.¹¹⁵

W.S. Gould, Superintendent of the Sales Department at the Detroit Free Press, wrote to Oglesby as an “American citizen and a jealous lover of our institutions,” to raise his voice in favor of no mercy for the cowardly assassins who themselves showed no mercy in their desire to destroy American law. Gould declared that Oglesby had a golden opportunity to not only deal a death-blow to anarchy in America, but to win for himself an enviable place in the hearts of true American citizens.¹¹⁶

In a letter simply signed “an American,” a citizen from New York declared that the seven men were guilty of inciting murder, and were justly convicted, validating their death sentences. The American trusted Oglesby to show “true American blood” by hanging the seven parasites from Chicago. Imploring the governor not to yield, the he claimed the eyes of the world were

¹¹⁵ C.C. Merrick to Governor Richard J. Oglesby, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

¹¹⁶ W.S. Gould to Governor Richard J. Oglesby, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

upon Oglesby, to see if he would stamp out anarchy and show the fearlessness and valor that had always been the characteristic of the American people.¹¹⁷

Governor Oglesby, in the end, only commuted the sentences of Fielden and Schwab, because they appealed directly to him. The executions were scheduled for 11 November 1887, though that morning Louis Lingg committed suicide by setting off a smuggled dynamite cap in his mouth; the remaining four – Parsons, Spies, Engle, and Fischer – were executed as scheduled.¹¹⁸

The convulsive labor troubles in Chicago in the 1880s culminated in the violent incident at Haymarket Square. While we cannot know with any certainty what Chicagoans who did not have ready access to a printing press believed, it is clear that the Haymarket riot was used by those who did have such avenues to voice their opinions to sharply limit that political conduct which could be legitimately claimed as “American.” The political culture of Chicago was thus changed. This can be seen in local politics in immediate aftermath of the riot. Consider the mayoral election of 1887, which pitted Republican John A. Roche against Robert S. Nelson, who ran for the Union Labor Party. In a widely distributed flyer embellished with a red flag and a very prominent American flag, Nelson was asked if he would permit socialists to carry the red flag through the streets of Chicago. Nelson allegedly replied, “I happened to be passing a Catholic church the other day when a procession of little children came out from some festival, carrying banners and symbols, and

¹¹⁷ An American to Governor Richard J. Oglesby, 6 November 1887, Series 101.22, Governor John Peter Altgeld Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 124.

singing songs. I saw no stars and stripes in that procession, yet it was harmless, and I see no reason why societies and social unions, of men who have banners and flags of different pattern from that of the Nation should not have equal privileges with those little children.”¹¹⁹ When he learned of Nelson’s position, Roche proclaimed, “The trouble with Mr. Nelson’s position is this: The flags he describes are simply emblems of a religious faith, all in harmony with law and order, while the red flag is a symbol of a society, the main object of which is the overthrow of our laws and our government.”¹²⁰ The flyer then announced its conclusions that, if Nelson were elected, anarchists would have the same right to carry the red flag that Sunday Schools had to carry their banners; by contrast, if Roche became mayor, he would not permit red flags to be carried in the streets of Chicago.¹²¹ Perhaps in a testament to the lingering fears of a reprisal of violence in the city, the Republican Roche was elected in 1887 and served as mayor for the remainder of the decade. In the years to come, the labor troubles and anarchists riots of the 1880s would continue to weigh upon the hearts and minds of Chicagoans and Americans in general, informing their reactions to events and ideas during peacetime and eventually, during times of war.

¹¹⁹ “Take Your Choice!” 5 April 1887, Albert Parsons Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

Chapter 5

Un-Americanism becomes Institutionalized, 1890-1919

The Haymarket bombing and its surrounding events provoked a concerted response from the political establishment in the form of what they called “Americanism.” To be “American” was, first, to be native born. As important as that was, however, it was far from sufficient. According to this small but powerful cluster of people, to be an “American” was fundamentally a matter of ideological belief in free market capitalism unhindered by public regulation. The state was to serve public order by serving the interests of the most successful capitalists. To step outside this consensus, even for those who held public office, was to become “un-American” and lose much effective power and influence. Between 1890 and 1919, further economic turmoil and a calamitous Great War allowed the powerful advocates for this Americanism to institutionalize their ideas in such a way that, no matter who actually won public office, they would still be able to regulate political debate and conduct. This chapter looks closely at the events in Chicago from 1890 to 1919 that contributed to the institutionalization of these ideas.

Less than ten years after Chicagoans endured the Haymarket bombing and its aftermath, the city would once again be at the center of a serious labor dispute with national repercussions. What began as a local strike at the Pullman Palace Car Company resulted in a nationwide boycott halting railway traffic and affecting business across the country. In the early days of the strike,

some Chicagoans seemed somewhat sympathetic to the workers. In *Twenty Years at Hull House*, Chicago reformer Jane Addams wrote about the conflict, claiming that the “Pullman strike afforded much illumination to many Chicago people. Before it, there had been nothing in my experience to reveal that distinct cleavage of society, which a general strike at least momentarily affords.”¹

As the strike wore on, however, citizens of the city became increasingly impatient; ultimately many blamed strike leader Eugene V. Debs, president of the American Railway Union, and accused both Debs and his followers of promoting anarchism, which was considered the greatest threat to public peace and order. With these labor disputes fresh in their minds, Chicagoans entered the 20th century with apprehension, ready to eradicate any semblance of conflict. When the teachers of the city attempted to unionize in 1915, inhabitants grew fearful, believing the organization to be incredibly dangerous. Just two years later, on the eve of American involvement in the Great War, Albert Briggs, a wealthy Chicago advertising executive, met with Hinton Clabaugh, division superintendent of the Bureau of Investigation, to propose the creation of a volunteer organization to aid the bureau in case the United States declared war on Germany. This newly established American Protective League would be comprised of citizen spies, searching out not only pro-German activities, but any activities considered “un-American,” resulting in the arrests of thousands, many of whom were found guilty and incarcerated. In this way,

¹ Jane Addams. *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: McMillan, 1938), 214.

Chicago once again was at the center of perceived radicalism with serious national implications, as businessmen in the city helped to shape what it meant to be an American. In the years that are at the center of this chapter, influential Chicagoans used both the specter and the reality of continued labor strife to institutionalize the detection, monitoring, and punishment of political dissidents branded as “un-American.” In this campaign, it must be said, these elites had significant popular support when they needed it most. World War I provided the final act in a long drama meant to make it both socially unacceptable and illegal to be “un-American.”

I. Trouble in a Model Community: How should Americans live?

As a result of this labor upheaval, the name Pullman became even more famous—indeed infamous—as a symbol of the exercise of iron-willed corporate power against workers. However, before we can understand this result, some additional historical and biographical context is needed.

George Pullman established the Pullman Company in Chicago in the 1860s, manufacturing and marketing an improved railroad car that “enhanced the quality and comfort of railroad travel.”² Not content to allow the car to sell itself, he marketed it as a “palace car” fit for royalty, and so changed the name of his business to the Pullman Palace Car Company. Pullman soon expanded his business to include sleeping cars, giving each traveler their own personal

² Janice Rieff and Susan E. Hirsch, “Pullman and Its Public: Image and Aim in Making and Interpreting History,” *The Public Historian*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (Autumn 1989), 100.

attendant, a Pullman porter. Pullman continuously promoted his products, offering free excursions to businessmen and journalists, and displaying his cars at every major fair across the country. By the 1880s, the Pullman Palace Car Company was synonymous with luxury travel.³ Like many successful businessmen of the late nineteenth century, Pullman believed he could apply his skills in management to the social problems that plagued the city of Chicago. In 1880, he thus began construction of the company town of Pullman, Illinois, fourteen miles south of Chicago to house his employees.⁴

Pullman intended this to be a “model town,” complete with all the benefits of urban life, but excluding the vices and trappings of the city. Compared to Chicago’s unpaved streets littered with trash, rows of shacks, numerous saloons, and poor water and air quality, the town of Pullman seemed a welcome respite with its brick homes boasting indoor plumbing, paved roads, clean air and water, parks, stores, churches, a library, a theater, and a bank.⁵ In the beginning, the model town appeared to be a success. During the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893, 10,000 tourists visited Pullman, commending not only its architecture and cleanliness, but Pullman’s attempt at social planning.⁶

³ Ibid., 101.

⁴ Jonathan Bassett, “The Pullman Strike of 1894,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Winter, 1997), 34; Richard Schneirov, “‘To the Ragged Edge of Anarchy:’ The 1894 Pullman Boycott,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 27.

⁵ Jonathan Bassett, “The Pullman Strike of 1894,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Winter, 1997), 34; Richard Schneirov, “‘To the Ragged Edge of Anarchy:’ The 1894 Pullman Boycott,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 27.

⁶ Jonathan Bassett, “The Pullman Strike of 1894,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Winter, 1997), 34.

Years prior to the World's Fair, American economists examined Pullman to determine its success or failure as a social experiment. In the February 1885 edition of *Harper's Weekly*, economics professor at Johns Hopkins University, Richard T. Ely published his study of the model town of Pullman. He began his exposition by explaining that the terms communism, socialism, and nihilism were "international words" that inhabitants of both hemispheres understood, and were evidence of a momentous social movement.

The genesis and popularity of these terms expressed a widespread discontent with the emerging modern social order. Ely claimed the "pretty dream of a perfect, natural order of things brought about by the free play of unrestrained social forces" had vanished.⁷ Modern socialism, he wrote, was much more than the political movement of the same name; the idea itself was practical, a determination to change dire social circumstances. While he acknowledged the many manifestations of socialism, Ely chose to focus on the attempts by the wealthy businessmen to step in-between those in their employ, and the unrestrained power of existing economic forces as harnessed by George Pullman. His model company town was an extension of a deep faith in capitalism left to its devices.

In his study of the town itself, Ely began by discussing the aesthetics and construction of the buildings and homes. The town filled him with a pleasing impression of general well-being. Rather than typical laborer's quarters,

⁷ Richard T. Ely, "Pullman: A Social Study," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* Vol. 70 (1885), 452. Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

characterized by dilapidated doorsteps and broken windows, the streets of Pullman were kept in perfect condition, and the brick homes and buildings were unexpectedly charming to Ely's critical eye.

Mr. Pullman's adherence to the "commercial value of beauty" was carried out faithfully in the model town, as he endeavored to surround workers with objects of beauty and comfort.⁸ Ely asserted the wholesome, cheerful surroundings not only enabled the laborers to work more efficiently, but also contributed to their overall good health and few industrial accidents.

Perhaps these surroundings were intended to compensate workers for the less than ideal conditions within the town. Comprising around one-fourth of the workers at Pullman, unskilled laborers earned only \$1.30 per day, comparable to the wages paid for the same work elsewhere. Men in skilled positions, particularly mechanics, usually earned \$2.50 to \$2.75 per day, although they could receive \$3 to \$4 per day, or more in some cases.⁹

At these wage rates, living in Pullman was not cheap. Workers paid rent for their dwellings to the company, which owned all the homes and buildings in the model town. The cheapest homes in Pullman were the two room flats that rented for \$4.50 per month excluding water, which typically ran \$0.80 per month. Rents for homes of average size were as little as \$14, and as much as \$100 per month, though the popular two-story five-room cottages rented for \$17 per month.

⁸ Ibid., 461.

⁹ Ibid., 462.

Life was particularly difficult for the immense numbers of unskilled workers. These families were crowded together in the cheapest flats, kept hidden from plain sight. Though vastly better than the tenements of New York City, Ely noted these dwellings hardly constituted a satisfactory model of how human beings should be housed.¹⁰

Ely listed numerous other problems at Pullman, particularly the repression of any expressions of individuality. Not only were strikes regarded as the ultimate social sin, so too was any other worker-led initiative. For example, several men wanted to form a mutual insurance association to insure themselves against loss of time worked in case of an accident, but the idea was frowned upon and silenced by the authorities. Additionally, a female worker attempted to establish a charitable organization to care for the poor and needy, but company officials discouraged the association, fearing the outside world might suppose pauperism existed in Pullman.¹¹

For these reasons, Ely declared his own unavoidable conclusion “that the idea of Pullman is un-American.”¹² Instead of being the American ideal, the model town was a benevolent, well-meaning feudal society, desiring the happiness of the people, but only insofar as it pleased the authorities. Pullman was no “brave new world.” In fact, Ely compared the situation of Pullman to that in the worst of the old world--Russia under Czar Alexander II, who wanted his people to be happy, but desired their happiness to emanate from himself.

¹⁰ Ibid., 460, 461.

¹¹ Ibid., 465.

¹² Ibid., 465.

He freed the serfs and allowed reforms, until his people showed determination and attempted to govern themselves, to which the Czar responded by stopping the work of reform and considering himself deeply wronged by the people. In a foreshadowing of future events, Ely warned his readers that the “fatal weakness of many systems of reform and well-intentioned benevolent projects was the loss of authority and distrust of the people.”¹³

Some journalists across the country agreed with Ely’s condemnation of Pullman. The *Buffalo Express*, upon learning only one church was allowed in the model community of at least 8,000, declared the town had sunk into the deepest depths of social slavery. The inhabitants may have had some of the amenities of freedom, but in reality were little more than chattel. Change in the town would only come if the “lords of the manner” willed it, since if an employee or family member dared raise a finger of protest against the company policies, against the “gilded manacles which impede free movements,” the community would view them as an outcast.¹⁴

Of course, Pullman was not without supporters in the mass media of his time. Several newspapers praised George Pullman and his model town. In a reaction against Ely’s study, one of Chicago’s fairly conservative newspapers, the *Inter-Ocean*, published an article titled “Social Experimentation,” that applauded George Pullman for his work in building the model town for his employees. The author began by claiming the socialists, communists, and

¹³ Ibid., 465.

¹⁴ “One Church for Thousands,” *Buffalo Express*, 8 February 1885. From Pullman Company Scrapbooks, Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

nihilists were not the only groups in Chicago, or the nation, anxious for a change in American society. No one, he asserted, believed the present conditions in the United States were ideal; this discontent was not necessarily wrong, as everyone should strive to better his or her condition. Nevertheless, the author dismissed many of the attempted social experiments as immature, misconceived, and impractical.

On 11 January 1885, 2,500 socialists gathered at Turner Hall in Chicago, a meeting which the article in the *Inter-Ocean* described as a dull, dreary mess attended by an ill-looking crowd comprised of mostly unskilled laborers. The author was incensed by the speakers that uttered sensational threats against society and dared defend the “tramp” who began life with the idea that the “world owes him a living.”¹⁵ At this meeting, the socialists offered no plans to improve homes or make families happier; the writer claimed the speeches were not only full of atrocities and absurdities, but malice beyond expression. The article then offered a contrast for Chicago’s socialists to ponder – the “splendid industrial and social experiment” in the model town of Pullman. The genius of George Pullman created a successful business enterprise, and a masterful attempt to realize a distinct economic and social ideal. Lauding it as one of the famous wonders of the West, the author praised the town of Pullman for its systematic blending of the useful and beautiful, and for its lack of saloons.

¹⁵ “Social Experimentation,” *Inter-Ocean*, 17 January 1885. From Pullman Company Scrapbooks, Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

In his essay, Ely proclaimed that Pullman was not an ideal city; the author of the *Inter-Ocean* article went much further and actually defended the city as a pragmatic accommodation to capitalist necessities. Instead of being an association of idealists, the Pullman Palace Car Company was a manufacturing giant, honestly invested in the effort to provide the best living conditions for its 4,000 employees. The article in the *Inter-Ocean* declared that Pullman was the exact opposite of socialism, as democracy did not exist in the model town; nevertheless, this noble scheme allowed the workers to share in many valuable advantages secured by the company's resources, which they could not have done if, "left to the haphazard devices and inclinations of individuals."¹⁶ Posing the possibility of five thousand "socialistic tramps" building a town on any thousand acres of prairie with all the democratic liberty they wanted, the author suggested the workers would not be able to provide happier or nobler living conditions than those found in Pullman. George Pullman deserved immense credit for the "illustrious spirit of sincere philanthropy" that influenced him to create this social experiment; by providing for the workers and their families, the author claimed Pullman partially solved one of the great problems of society – a diffusion of the benefits of concentrated wealth among those instrumental in creating that wealth.¹⁷

The great expansion of railroads during the late nineteenth century produced both profit for men like Pullman and chaos, which led to rising costs. The combination of overproduction, high amounts of debt, and inflated stock

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

prices led railroad officials to compete with each other for business to cover the high operational expenses.¹⁸ Labor added to the soaring costs as well. In order to attract unionized engineers, brakemen, firemen, and other skilled laborers to relocate to the sparsely populated West, railroad owners were compelled to pay premium wages. When the rail companies attempted to circumvent the burgeoning craft federations and brotherhoods to adopt individual pay schemes, Eugene V. Debs, former official for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, established the American Railway Union (ARU) in 1893, comprised of railroad workers of all skill levels and positions. The union grew quickly, and within one year 150,000 workers joined, making the ARU the largest labor organization in the nation.¹⁹

In 1893, a severe economic depression was especially crippling to the railroad industry. For Chicago, the World's Fair held in the city that year helped to delay the downturn. Once the Columbian Exhibition had closed, however, Chicago's economy fell dramatically, as the increase of people into the city led to mass unemployment. Soup kitchens fed the hungry, but many lost their homes and were forced to sleep on the steps of City Hall at night, prompting one reporter to describe his visit to City Hall as a "potter's field of unburied dead."²⁰ Although city officials attempted to downplay the problem, claiming that most of the homeless were merely tramps or vagrants passing

¹⁸ Richard Schneirov, "'To the Ragged Edge of Anarchy:' The 1894 Pullman Boycott," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁰ Carl S. Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 233.

through town, reports circulated of well-dressed men sweeping the streets for three hours in exchange for food and a bed for the evening.²¹

The Pullman Palace Car Company was especially hurt once the economic crisis hit Chicago with full force. Because of overproduction, Mr. Pullman reduced wages by thirty-three percent, but did not lower the rent on the homes in town, or the prices charged by the company store.²² By December 1893, the *Chicago Times* reported that great suffering prevailed in Pullman, creating among the people bitterness and resentment at the conditions under which they were forced to work and live. The company's economic situation improved somewhat by the following spring, resulting in the addition of new workers; however, instead of increasing pay, the work was spread among the laborers, with continuing decreases in wages.²³

At the end of April 1894, many employees at Pullman joined the recently formed American Railway Union, and, by the beginning of May, had formed a grievance committee to demand that the company restore their wages to 1893 levels. Prior to the economic troubles, Pullman employees earned an average of \$2.50 per day, but the company had since reduced wages to \$1.85 per day. At a city-wide labor meeting held at Turner Hall on 5 May, Thomas Heathcote, chairman of the Pullman worker's committee, declared the employees found it, "utterly impossible to sustain life and clothe ourselves on present reduced

²¹ Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 233.

²² Richard Schneirov, "'To the Ragged Edge of Anarchy:' The 1894 Pullman Boycott," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 27.

²³ Smith, *Urban Disorder*, 234.

wages.”²⁴ Mr. Wicks, Vice-President of the company, when asked about the call for pay increase, claimed the conditions of the business could not justify the restoration of the previous years’ wages; similarly, in response to rent remaining the same despite the income reductions, Wicks asserted rent for the homes in the model town were as low as the company could consistently make them.²⁵

Several days later, when Pullman officials fired three members of the grievance committee, including F. Peterson, Charles E. Hasty, and Louis Peterson, two thousand employees walked off the job both in solidarity, and for the restoration of their wages.²⁶ Despite the allegations, Pullman managers insisted the committee members were not fired, but were only laid off for a day or two, with the explicit direction of returning to work on Monday. The company also insisted the policies regarding rent were quite flexible, offering examples of one worker who earned nearly \$140 in wages between 15 Feb and 1 May, but only paid a total of \$14 in rent during the same period, and another who had paid no rent for several months, telling the company his daughter was getting married. George Pullman himself claimed the strike was a “most unpleasant surprise,” and seemed to believe the trouble had been averted and cooler heads had prevailed the previous evening. Mr. Pullman declared the company had been operating at a loss for some months, but wanted to stay open as long as possible because, as he claimed, he was “exceedingly anxious”

²⁴ “Strike is Imminent,” *Chicago Tribune*, 6 May 1894, 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Pullman Men Out,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 May 1894, 1.

for the welfare of his workers; nevertheless, in response to the strike, Mr. Pullman closed the plant at the model town immediately.²⁷

The early days of the strike were quiet, and to many it seemed that the laborers would return soon; however, several Chicagoans spoke out against the workers. At a service in Pullman's "Green Stone" church (so named for the green hue of the serpentine limestone used to build the structure), however, the pastor, Reverend Christian Oggel chastised the workers and reminded them that one-half loaf of bread was better than no bread, and in his judgment, the employees were getting as much as two-thirds of a loaf. He deplored the strike, likening the men to "people who marry in haste and repent at leisure."²⁸ Oggel stood firm to his reprimands and declared that no industrial community in the country paid as well as the Pullman company, but the men were free to try their luck elsewhere if they so desired. No strike for higher wages should be undertaken without reasonable hope of success, and therefore, the pastor admonished the walkout was unreasonable.²⁹ Similar to Reverend Oggel, the *Chicago Evening Post* claimed the strike was, "especially erratic and foolish."³⁰ Likewise, reporters for Chicago's *Inter-Ocean* wrote the affair was, "a most

²⁷ "Pullman Men Out," *Chicago Tribune*, 12 May 1894, 1-2.

²⁸ "Chided by Pastor," *Chicago Tribune*, 14 May 1894, 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ "An Unjustifiable Strike," *The Chicago Evening Post*, 12 May 1894. From Pullman Company Scrapbooks, Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

senseless strike,” that the men engaged in the walkout lacked common sense, and declared the men could not force the Pullman Company to work at a loss.³¹

As the strike wore on through May and into June, it appeared that many Chicagoans were sympathetic to the Pullman laborers. Chicago’s mayor John P. Hopkins helped to arrange relief for the employees in the amount of \$100 cash and \$1500 in groceries through his own firm of Secord & Hopkins, which kept a general store in the neighboring town of Kensington.³² Reporters for the *Tribune* claimed starvation threatened the families of Pullman, and wrote very plainly that the majority of the people were proud Americans who had worked hard for their meager earnings. These conditions had been present for over one year, with men having only two or three pieces of dry bread for their lunch, and entire families going hungry at night.

The attitudes of Chicagoans began to turn against the workers once the American Railway Union became more heavily involved in the strike. When the workers walked out on 11 May, George Howard, Vice-President of the ARU, addressed the men, telling them they had the support of the union, and letting them know they had a great work to do, and they needed to complete that work like American citizens, with no threats, intimidation, or violence.³³

The affair started to pick up steam on 15 June when the ARU convention and its president, Eugene V. Debs, demanded an immediate settlement of the differences existing at the Pullman Palace Car Company. When officials from

³¹ “The Pullman Strike,” *Inter-Ocean*, 12 May 1894. From Pullman Company Scrapbooks, Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

³² “He Gives Them Food,” *Chicago Tribune*, 17 May 1894, 1.

³³ “Pullman Men Out,” *Chicago Tribune*, 12 May 1894, 1.

the company declined arbitration, the ARU called for a boycott, asking railroad employees across the country to refuse to handle Pullman sleeping cars, or to allow them to be attached to passenger trains, a decision which affected both travel and commerce nationwide.³⁴

For the first week, the boycott appeared both peaceful and successful; Debs cautioned the workers to avoid any riots, and Illinois Governor John Peter Altgeld was reluctant to intervene with state militia. The Chicago-based General Manager's Association (GMA), comprised of railroad owners and managers, called upon their friends in Washington, D.C. to order an injunction against the boycott, as it violated the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, and it interfered with the delivery of the US mail. Despite the protests of Governor Altgeld, on July 2nd, President Grover Cleveland dispatched federal troops to Chicago to enforce the injunction. During the next several days, the troops clashed with the strikers, resulting in the destruction of railroad property and several casualties.³⁵

Public opinion in Chicago and across the country, once sympathetic to the Pullman workers, immediately turned against the laborers, the boycott, and especially Debs himself. Whereas Pullman may have been responsible for poor living and working conditions, Debs and his allies were charged with

³⁴ "Acts on the Strike," *Chicago Tribune*, 16 June 1894, 3; "Sleeping Cars to be Tied-Up," *Chicago Tribune*, 24 June 1894, 28.

³⁵ Jonathan Bassett, "The Pullman Strike of 1894," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Winter, 1997), 34; Richard Schneirov, "'To the Ragged Edge of Anarchy:' The 1894 Pullman Boycott," *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 28.

something believed to be far more threatening to the nation: ideologically inspired chaos.

In an article from 9 July titled, "It is Anarchy," the *Tribune* quoted national newspapers and their negative opinions of Debs. The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* declared that the nation would not "indefinitely brook this potential paralysis of trade and travel that arises whenever some crank or union autocrat chooses to give a public exhibition of his folly and power."³⁶ The Philadelphia *Inquirer* explicitly called Debs an anarchist, at war with the law and free institutions of the United States. Many journalists called upon the honest, law-abiding workingmen to turn away from Debs and the ARU to end the strike. The *Record*, from Osceola, Nebraska, claimed that organized labor posed a greater danger to the general welfare of the United States, and was more threatening to the rights and best interests of the laboring classes than organized capital had ever been. Labor organizations, the article proclaimed, had fallen into the hands of agitators like Debs, who actually harmed the working class, and were utilizing the unions only to undermine the very foundation of American government.³⁷

Much of the criticism of Debs and the ARU stemmed from the disruption of travel and commerce. The newly renamed journal *Outlook*, previously known as the *Christian Union*, asserted the issue of the strike was no longer about the Pullman Company and its employees, but whether the American Railway Union could determine "when, under what conditions, on what railways, and in what

³⁶ "It is Anarchy," *Chicago Tribune*, 9 July 1894, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

sort of cars the people of the United States may travel.”³⁸ The article strongly suggested to Congress that all the questions currently facing the nation – tariffs, income tax, silver, and women’s suffrage – were insignificant compared to the boycott, as the ARU was essentially holding the nation hostage to its own whims. Riding in freight cars, cattle cars, or not riding on trains at all, would be preferable to the writers in the *Outlook* than to live under a social system that determined how the American people could ride by an irresponsible organization that formulated its decrees by secret committee and enforced them by mob violence. “We can live without railroads,” the article professed, “as our fathers did before us, but we will not live without liberty.”³⁹

Further questioning Debs and his control over members of the American Railway Union was the *Detroit Free Press*, who likened the workers to serfs or even slaves under the domination of Debs, who was seeking to exert a kind of monopolistic control over the workers. George Pullman may have been a hard master, even a tyrant, but the railroad owner could not order his employees to stop work at the risk of starvation for themselves and their families; Pullman could fire his laborers, but could not prohibit them from working for another company. Debs, on the other hand, had the power to order thousands of men to stop working altogether without pay. If Pullman was a tyrant, Debs was even more so because of his absolute power over railroad

³⁸ “Debs’ Rule or American Liberty,” *Chicago Tribune*, 10 July 1894, 7.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

workers.⁴⁰ This rhetorical symbol of Debs as a tyrant proliferated in newspapers across the nation.

In Philadelphia, the *Times* published several articles in July, labeling both Debs and the strikers as anarchists and enemies of the United States. The writers asserted Pullman's employees were paid well, and the strike not only unjustified, but a "wicked, causeless disturbance of the industry and commerce of the nation...done simply in obedience to the teachings and commands of anarchy."⁴¹ Chicago should be promptly placed under martial law, the articles demanded, and steps to be taken toward the impeachment of Governor Altgeld, whom the paper claimed was in "open sympathy with anarchy."⁴² Subsequent articles in the *Times* proclaimed the strikers as public enemies and outlaws who had levied war against the government of the United States, and must be taught a lesson with bullets and bayonets.⁴³

A non-union workingman and resident of Chicago, identifying himself only as E.D.A., wrote to the editor of the *Tribune*, giving his opinion on the strike and Debs. E.D.A. began his letter by proclaiming George Pullman to be a rasping, selfish, and unjust man, and that the, "whole system of the Pullman

⁴⁰ "Which is the Worse Slavery?" *Chicago Tribune*, 13 July 1894, 1.

⁴¹ "Anarchy Must be Killed!" *The Times* (Philadelphia), 8 July 1894. From Pullman Company Scrapbooks, Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ "The Strikers are Public Enemies." *The Times* (Philadelphia), 10 July 1894. From Pullman Company Scrapbooks, Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

Company at Pullman is wrong and un-American.”⁴⁴ Debs and George Howard (Vice-President of the ARU), however, were rotten and corrupt, working for their own political gain instead of helping the workingman. E.D.A. implored the *Tribune* to research and publish Debs’ financial records, asserting if the workers knew how Debs lived in luxury while they toiled and starved at his orders, they would see how they had been duped and would stop lending him their support. With honest labor leaders, however, slave-drivers such as Pullman would fall in line and give the workers what they were entitled to – honest pay for honest work – and would rise in both political and social standing, with the ability to feed their wives and children instead of having them cry with hunger.⁴⁵

By 9 July 1894, the federal troops in Chicago protected those who were willing to cross the picket lines, allowing railway traffic to return to nearly normal levels. Two days later, Debs and other ARU leaders were arrested for contempt, and while demoralized, the strike in Pullman continued. Believing the federal government put down a peaceful boycott, workers contacted Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor for support, but the national organization cautioned against any further action, not wanting to become involved in a failed cause. The strike continued in Pullman until the beginning of September, when the remaining 2,000 workers surrendered.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ E.D.A., “What an American Wage-Earner Says of the Strike,” *Chicago Tribune*, 11 July 1894, 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Richard Schneirov, “‘To the Ragged Edge of Anarchy:’ The 1894 Pullman Boycott,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Spring, 1999), 28.

Nearly one year after the strike began, *The Washington Post* reported on a regular meeting of the National Statistical Association in which Dr. Joseph Nimmo spoke on the status of labor organizations in the United States, some of which were practical, others like the American Railway Union had outlived their usefulness, and yet other labor unions clearly advocated revolution and State socialism. In reviewing the Pullman strike, which many called the “Debs Insurrection,” Nimmo described it as a “gigantic blackmailing conspiracy against the railroad corporations and the commercial and industrial interests of this country.”⁴⁷ He denounced the conduct of Debs and other strike leaders as cowardly, and contrasted these actions with the “patriotic course” pursued by President Cleveland, the courts, and the Army, all of whom according to Nimmo, “gained the approbation of all patriotic citizens.”⁴⁸ Chicagoans would hold similar attitudes toward labor unions following the Pullman strike, hindering organization efforts in the years to come.

II. Teaching “Americanism” to the Teachers

In the United States and Europe, workers formed unions to counter a basic change in the nature of work itself. In the aftermath of the Pullman strike, however, unionism of all kinds was branded as “un-American.” According to the editorialists at the *Chicago Tribune* the idea of such collective action was

⁴⁷ “Pullman Strike Reviewed,” *The Washington Post*, 10 April 1894. From Pullman Company Scrapbooks, Pullman Company Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

not “born in America.”⁴⁹ The proletarian unions were “un-American” because they acknowledged the supremacy of individual leaders whose dictum was supreme and irrefutable, even if those demands included violence and destruction of property. Members of unions, the article asserted, lent themselves to disorder, riot, and anarchy and therefore no longer loved the nation and were unfit for American citizenship.⁵⁰ These attitudes became a regular part of political language even when there was no specific crisis to bring them out. Thus, when a moment of labor conflict arose, these advocates for Americanism were well rehearsed and ready for action. The next important moment in the creation of Americanism came in 1915, when the Chicago Teachers’ Federation, under the leadership of Margaret Haley, attempted to join forces with the Chicago Federation of Labor.

In the United States, industrialism pressed forward simultaneously with another movement: the establishment of an effective system of compulsory education. Prior to the late nineteenth century, formal education had not comprised a large part of an American’s daily life. Such schooling ended for most children before adolescence. Public schooling became more institutionalized, enabling the school system to enter the cauldron in which “Americanism” was being created.

For women in particular, access to education was inseparably linked to concerns about the power of schooling and its effect on changing women’s roles in American culture. In the early 19th century, while elementary and

⁴⁹ “Un-American Spirit,” *Chicago Tribune*, 2 June 1894, 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

secondary schools opened their doors to women, few universities followed suit; however, some women used these limited resources to enter new professional fields, especially teaching. The effects of the Civil War accelerated women's entry into higher education, the workforce, and public life.⁵¹ The Morrill Land Grant of 1862 required the sale of public lands in order to support state universities, allowing students who could not afford the higher tuition rates at private schools to have access to higher education. Both parent and teacher associations argued that these state-funded schools should open their doors to women, especially for teacher education.⁵²

Once women gained admittance to universities and completed their studies, many of them questioned what they should do next. Though they found some acceptance in professions such as nursing, social work, law, and journalism, the field of education provided women with the greatest access to a professional career. Nevertheless, teachers in public school systems, especially in urban areas, experienced the difficulties of "paternalistic, authoritarian supervision by male principals and superintendents alongside the demands of growing numbers of immigrant school children."⁵³

⁵¹ Lynn D. Gordon, "Education and the Professions," in *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed Nancy A. Hewitt (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 227.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 227. By the 1870s, women could attend universities in the Midwest and West, but private universities in the East, and many state schools in the South remained closed to women. In fact, the University of Virginia did not admit women until 1970; however, private universities for women flourished in both the East and the South in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (228).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 234-35. For other works regarding women educators and the problems they faced, please see: Michael W. Apple, *Teacher's and Texts: A Political*

As this school system became more formal—and more intrusive upon family life—the content of public education became a newly contentious issue. In 1875, for instance, German groups opposed the idea of prayer and Scripture readings as the opening exercises of each school day, and later the same year, the Chicago Board of Education acceded to the demands. For years to come, however, powerful dissenters agitated for the restoration of these practices, believing them an effective weapon against the temptations of life and a fortification against the inroads of communism.⁵⁴

During the labor disputes in the 1880s and 1890s, citizens feared that the solid pillars of society might crumble under the onslaught of radicalism. In response to this perceived threat, popular leaders came forward and promoted programs to increase an understanding of American institutions and to stimulate a belief in their own definition of patriotism. In 1888, Victor F. Lawson, owner of the *Chicago Daily News*, offered the Board of Education an annual income of \$10,000 to invest in medals for essays on patriotism written by elementary and high school students. While these training programs included an understanding of citizenship and the meaning of American government, less emphasis was placed on history and civics; instead, students studied more current events and politics to better understand the present.⁵⁵

Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education (New York: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1986); and Michael W. Apple, *Cultural Politics and Education* (New York: Teacher's College, Columbia University, 1996).

⁵⁴ Bessie Louise Pierce, *A History of Chicago: The Rise of a Modern City, 1871-1893* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 388.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 388.

This drive added an explicitly ideological mission to public schooling, and thus brought teachers themselves under scrutiny.

Teachers lived on inadequate pay with little hope for security. Consequently, following the precedent of other workers, Chicago's teachers unionized in 1897, pursuing such matters as salaries, tenure, pensions, and other material improvements. In the beginning, it seemed that the Chicago Teachers' Federation (CTF) received much of what it had asked for; however, by 1900, the number of teachers decreased significantly, school rooms became overcrowded, and the Board of Education cut salaries and instituted a secret marking system that "humiliated, harassed, irritated, and terrorized," the teachers.⁵⁶

Two years later, under the direction of Margaret Haley, the CTF joined the larger Chicago Federation of Labor. In their "Report showing the results of fifteen years of organization," the teachers laid out the reasons why they made such a move. According to their report, published in 1902, Chicago's teachers were considered by law to be political nonentities, classed with the insane, criminals, Native Americans, and children. The laws of the city and state declared the teachers were unfit to exercise the duties of citizenship, yet charged them with the responsibility to train American citizens. The teachers asserted the necessity of using their own limited resources to oversee the honest collection of school fund taxes. Above all, Chicago's teachers were

⁵⁶ "Report, showing results of fifteen years of organization, to the teachers of Chicago" (Chicago: The Chicago Teachers' Federation, 1908), 11-12.

forced to sue the Board of Education on behalf of 2,300 educators whose wages had been withheld.⁵⁷

In November 1902, members of the CTF received an invitation to affiliate themselves with the Chicago Federation of Labor, in order to promptly and effectively take up the cause of teachers and children. After some debate, the organization decided to accept the offer later that month, primarily to secure relief for themselves, for the children, and for the community from the intolerable conditions in Chicago's schools.⁵⁸ Margaret Haley, leader of the CTF, specifically believed the teachers had much to gain politically from joining the labor movement. She wrote in her autobiography, "the teachers were a body of non-voters trying to cope with the political situation with no political power. Affiliation with a large group of voters...was a very much needed element of strength to the teachers in their struggle."⁵⁹

Immediately after the affiliation with the Chicago Federation of Labor, it seemed to the teachers that the public woke up and began taking their demands seriously. Within two months, elementary teachers were given a pay raise of \$50 per year, and citizens of the city voted for an elected Board of Education.⁶⁰ The pay raise was a misleading clue to the future. The same body that voted for the one-time salary increase worked diligently to undermine the Chicago Teachers' Federation.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁵⁹ Wayne J. Urban, *Why Teachers Unionized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 81.

⁶⁰ "Report, showing results of fifteen years of organization, to the teachers of Chicago" (Chicago: The Chicago Teachers' Federation, 1908), 16.

The acknowledged leader of the anti-labor faction of the board was Jacob Loeb. In August 1915, a committee chaired by Loeb recommended that any teachers who belonged to an organization affiliated with the labor movement not be employed.⁶¹ Additionally, the following year, Loeb obtained a court reversal of the tenure provision, allowing the board to not rehire sixty-eight teachers for the 1916-1917 school year, thirty-eight of whom belonged to the Chicago Teachers' Federation.⁶²

From 1915 to 1916, many Chicagoans spoke out in favor of these actions of a Board of Education whose membership they had chosen by their votes, with Mr. Loeb serving as their spokesman.⁶³ Loeb called Haley and other Federation leaders "lady labor sluggers" who assassinated the character and reputation of their opponents with a "poisoned tongue."⁶⁴ He continued to attack the CTF, claiming teaching was a profession not a trade, and the Federation was a curse to Chicago's school system. Loeb also asserted that although male labor leaders sometimes physically attacked those who did not join their ranks, female labor leaders were much more deadly. Injuries would heal; however, the weapon of choice for women labor leaders was to assassinate reputation, an affliction not easily recovered from. By utilizing this as their main tactic, Loeb declared the CTF intimidated and coerced teachers to join. In fact, he testified regarding recent interviews with teachers,

⁶¹ Urban, *Why Teachers Unionized*, 83.

⁶² Urban, *Why Teachers Unionized*, 84.

⁶³ P.B.P., "Mayor and School Board," *Chicago Tribune* 1 April 1915, 8.

⁶⁴ "Union Teachers Scored As 'Lady Labor Sluggers,'" *Chicago Tribune* 22 July 1915, 15.

commenting not just on the fear, but “utter terror” of the Federation.⁶⁵ At Loeb’s urging, the school board passed new regulations, prohibiting any teacher from maintaining membership in a labor union or organization.⁶⁶ At that point, the board gave the teachers three months to resign from the CTF, or forfeit their employment in Chicago’s school system.⁶⁷

Chicago’s new mayor, William H. Thompson wholeheartedly agreed with the new regulations passed by the Board of Education. In a statement to the *Chicago Tribune* the mayor claimed the people of Chicago, who recently elected him, were convinced the public schools had not been managed properly. Mayor Thompson reminded the people of Chicago that the city’s police force attempted a similar organization some years earlier, but the union was stopped. City employees, he declared, should be prohibited from any federation that sought to operate against the municipal government.

These same workers also violated the law if they attempted to influence votes of the city council or any other legislative body; Mayor Thompson relayed at least one instance in which members of the Teachers’ Federation appeared on the floor of the city council to lobby for votes on a school tax question. Thompson made it clear that he supported the teachers of Chicago, believing they should be paid well for the important service they provided. Nevertheless,

⁶⁵ “Union Teachers Scored As ‘Lady Labor Sluggers,’” *Chicago Tribune* 22 July 1915, 15.

⁶⁶ “Teacher Union Must Dissolve, Trustee Edict,” *Chicago Tribune* 24 August 1915, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the mayor declared he would continue to oppose any further interference by the Federation in the decisions of the city council and school board.⁶⁸

Despite this opposition, the Federation did garner support throughout Chicago. Margaret Haley's own publication, the *Bulletin*, supported the organization as its members faced the gravest crisis of their careers. The attack upon teachers, she claimed, was not a local fight, but part of a nationwide campaign against the rising tide of democracy.⁶⁹ The Chicago-based Socialist newspaper *American Socialist*, with a subscriber base of 50,000, also supported the Chicago Teachers' Federation. In September 1915, prominent socialist reporter, editor, and leader, J.L. Engdahl praised the educators of Chicago, labeling them pioneers among school teachers in the country, and lauding their bravery and courage. Undaunted and fearless, he wrote, the members of the CTF realized the need to join the growing ranks of the labor movement.⁷⁰ The actions against Haley and the Federation could not be allowed to stand, Engdahl asserted, because if successful, similar decisions would spread through every public school system in the United States, and it would also mean the destruction of trade unions, leading to unlimited power for capitalists.⁷¹

Chicago Alderman Robert Buck received letters from organizations such as the Chicago Federation of Labor, the Trade Workers' Union, the Cigar

⁶⁸ Charles Wheeler, "Mayor Dooms Teacher Union and Haley Rule," *Chicago Tribune* 26 August 1915, 1.

⁶⁹ "Miss Haley's 'Bulletin' Backs Teachers' Union," *Chicago Tribune* 27 September 1915, 16.

⁷⁰ J.L. Engdahl, "Chicago Teachers Pioneers," *American Socialist* 11 September 1915, 1. Folder 3. Robert Buck Papers. Archives and Manuscripts. Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

Makers' Union, and the Office Employees' Association, among others, that urged the councilman to support the Teachers' Federation. In a letter dated 29 September 1915, Agnes Weston, President of the Trade Workers' Union, claimed that teachers could not perform their duties to the best of their abilities while distracted by a fight for their constitutional rights. In order to maintain democracy, she wrote, free citizens could not be taught by subservient educators. Weston, therefore, urged Buck not to infringe on the constitutional rights of the teachers of Chicago.⁷²

In October 1915, the Chicago Federation of Labor sent a letter to Alderman Buck, outlining recent resolutions passed by the organization. Claiming a membership of 250,000, one third of Chicago's population, the Federation appealed to the protection of rights of these American citizens. In this letter, Secretary E.M. Mockels urged Buck not to appoint any new members to the Board of Education unless such persons would agree not to interfere with the citizenship rights of schoolteachers to associate themselves with their colleagues in an organization for their mutual benefit and protection.⁷³ Buck received this exact letter from no less than thirty unions and organizations, supporting the Chicago Teachers' Federation, and urging the city council to restore the rights of educators.

Notwithstanding this support, the continued struggles nearly destroyed the Teachers' Federation by 1917. Membership dropped significantly from its

⁷² Agnes Weston to Robert Buck, 29 September 1915. Folder 3. Robert Buck Papers. Archives and Manuscripts. Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

⁷³ E.M. Mockels to Robert Buck, 1 October 1915. Folder 3. Robert Buck Papers. Archives and Manuscripts. Chicago History Museum, Chicago, Illinois.

apex of 5,000 members in 1915. Margaret Haley, faced with years of legal defeats and a demoralized membership, prepared for the unthinkable; in May 1917, the Chicago Teachers' Federation announced its intentions to leave the Federation of Labor. The following month, the Chicago Board of Education rehired the previously dismissed educators.⁷⁴ This can be seen as a test of strength between two opposing ideas of "Americanism," one which prized dissent as a sign of active and engaged citizenship, and another which believed that the preservation of the nation lay in strict ideological conformity with a free market ideology. This victory of conformity over dissent was hard to ignore.

Opposition to the Chicago Teachers' Union in the early twentieth century stemmed primarily from the organization's affiliation with the labor movement, causing many citizens of Chicago to question and criticize those teaching their children. This episode shows very clearly the public's continuing fear of labor uprisings and the possibilities of socialist rebellions in the United States. With the events of the previous decades still fresh in their minds, especially the Pullman strike and the troubles with the American Railway Union, Chicagoans began to link labor disputes with radical ideals, claiming those belonging to trade unions or those that participated in strikes were un-American. In the years immediately following the problems with the Teacher's Union, Chicago's business leaders would capitalize on these attitudes, helping to institutionalize their idea of "Americanism" nationwide during World War I.

⁷⁴ Urban, *Why Teachers Unionized*, 86.

III. Americanism Goes to War

As Europe descended into warfare in 1914 and became mired in a protracted conflict that had serious consequences for the political and social structures for the countries at war. In the United States, President Woodrow Wilson hesitated to involve the nation into the conflict, particularly as he considered the possibility that entrance into the war would cause the reversal of new progressive reforms.⁷⁵ To show his devotion to keeping the U.S. out of the war, Wilson made the focus of his re-election campaign in 1916 a facet of “Americanism.” During the course of this bitter campaign, Republican candidate Charles Evans Hughes attacked Wilson’s labor policies, claiming the president’s record toward workers was inconsistent. Hughes denounced the passage of the Adamson Act, which mandated an eight-hour workday for railroad workers, as a shameful, opportunistic move in order to win the support of the laborers.⁷⁶ Hughes saw Wilson’s alleged softness toward labor as part and parcel of the President’s inability to defend American rights and interests in Mexico and Europe. In response, Wilson’s camp did not hesitate to exploit the issue of “100 percent Americanism,” insinuating that Hughes was pro-German; those who accused Wilson of harboring pro-British sympathies

⁷⁵ David M. Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 11.

⁷⁶ Hughes himself believed that arbitration was a better solution to the disputes between the railroad companies and their laborers. James A. Henretta, “Charles Evans Hughes and the Strange Death of Liberal America,” *Labor and History Review*, Vol 24, No 1 (Spring 2006), 143-144.

were labeled as “disloyal Americans.”⁷⁷ The accusations coming from Wilson’s campaign could not have surprised the American public; since 1915, the president had been launching attacks against so-called “hyphenated Americans,” whom, he claimed, had “poured the poison of disloyalty” into the very arteries of American life. Even before American entrance into the war, Wilson had urged the government and public to crush these “creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy.”⁷⁸

In the midst of this politically charged atmosphere, these principles of Americanism became institutionalized through federal legislation. It was now a federal crime to criticize the government, punishable by imprisonment. Furthermore, Wilson’s wartime administration encouraged both law enforcement officers and civilians to report those suspected of such disloyal or criminal activity. Exactly what was meant by “disloyal activity” was left to the eye of the beholder.

President Wilson’s rhetoric and the conduct of his administration during the Great War underline the extent to which “Americanism” exposed the American political culture as a closed ideological system; closed, that is, to the genuinely free exchange of ideas. Leaders in neither of the two major political parties sought to answer this call to ideological uniformity with a strong appeal to those national traditions which held dissent to be an American right—integral to one’s identity as a citizen.

⁷⁷ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

A small group of businessmen in Chicago would help lead the way in this nation-wide institutionalization of Americanism. During the war, what began as one Chicagoans' desire to aid a struggling Justice Department became a quasi-official organization of more than 250,000 ordinary Americans attempting to seek out enemy spies in their midst. Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory praised the group, known as the American Protective League (APL), for their investigations, which resulted in the uncovering of serious enemy schemes, the detection of draft evaders, and the prosecution of those individuals involved in various "disloyal" activities. Despite the official dissolution of the organization following the war, in late November 1918, the Attorney General implored the former members of the league to persist in their careful watch of activities considered harmful to public morale, as a withdrawal from this work would "involve serious consequences."⁷⁹

The work of the American Protective League began just before the United States declared war on Germany in early 1917. The organization was the brainchild of Albert M. Briggs, a Chicago advertising executive who was a pioneer in outdoor billboard designs with the world renowned J. Walter Thompson agency. Briggs, originally from Buffalo, New York, entered the New York State National Guard at the age of 19 in 1893, where he was promoted to Second Lieutenant, and volunteered during the Spanish American War in 1898,

⁷⁹ "Watch out for Foes at Home, Gregory Warns," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 November 1918. 5.

participating in combat in Cuba.⁸⁰ After the war, he relocated to Cleveland, becoming involved in the advertising industry and formed his own firm, the A.M. Briggs Company, in 1911; Briggs subsequently moved his burgeoning business to Chicago where he soon merged with several other companies to establish the Poster Advertising Company in 1916. He handled several large national accounts, such as Liggett & Meyer Tobacco, Aunt Jemima Flour, Gold Dust Powder, Fisk Tires, Saxon Motor Car, and Chalmers Motor Company, and chaired a committee devoted to placing religious posters throughout the United States and Canada in order to promote church attendance. The success of his advertising firms gained Briggs considerable wealth and influence, as he conducted business with executives from some of the nation's largest companies, providing him with membership in the exclusive clubs and associations where a reactionary Americanism was being conceived and nurtured.⁸¹

In February 1917 Briggs met with Hinton G. Clabaugh, division superintendent of the Bureau of Investigation, at the offices of the U.S. Justice Department in Chicago with an extraordinary proposition.⁸² Since the beginning of the war in Europe, the Justice Department had been caught in the crosshairs between a public concerned about persons in the country pushing the United States to enter the war, interdepartmental conflict, and a seemingly indifferent Congress. As the nation attempted to remain neutral, Germany

⁸⁰ Bill Mills, *The League: The true story of average Americans on the hunt for WWI spies* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2013), 8.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 9.

encouraged immigrants from India and Ireland, whose home countries were fighting for independence from Great Britain, to block munitions shipments from the United States and continue to agitate for America to stay out of the war, thereby allowing England to be defeated; on the other hand, the British government pushed immigrants from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland to do just the opposite, hoping for American entrance into the war. Concerned citizens demanded the Justice Department arrest or deport these conspirators, but Attorney General Gregory claimed he could take no action, as the foreign agents were not committing treason because the United States was not at war. Since no federal law prohibited espionage or sabotage outside of military zones during peacetime, both Gregory and President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for legislation to handle the problem. In December 1915, the president urged legislators to enact laws to protect the United States from persons who, "poured the poison of disloyalty in to the very arteries of our national life...who have sought to bring the authority and good name of our government into contempt, to destroy industries...for their vindictive purposes...to debase our politics to the uses of foreign intrigue."⁸³ Congress did not listen to Wilson's plea. In fact, the entire Department of Justice, especially including the Bureau of Investigation, was underfunded and short-staffed, and its officers believed they were therefore not wholly equal to the task before them. Briggs' proposition to Clabaugh would help alleviate both problems of funding and investigators. Believing war with Germany was inevitable, Briggs

⁸³ Joan M. Jenson, *The Price of Vigilance* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), 10-11.

told Clabaugh, "...although I'm now physically unable to join the fighting forces, I would like to help in some way. It occurred to me that a volunteer organization might be of great assistance to an investigating bureau such as the one with which you are connected. I will pledge all of my time and resources to such an organization, and I earnestly hope that if you can think of any way in which I can be of assistance to this bureau that you will command me."⁸⁴ Briggs offered Clabaugh financial support, and suggested some investigative techniques used to collect data for advertising could also be used to gather intelligence on individuals and groups hostile to the United States.⁸⁵

When first presented with this suggestion from Briggs, Clabaugh did not appear interested. Later the same month, however, in February 1917, the newspapers announced that German submarines torpedoed an American ship. With the nation now braced for war abroad and sabotage at home, Clabaugh called Briggs to inform him an organization of volunteers would greatly aid the Department of Justice. Briggs set to work immediately and recruited trusted businessmen from Chicago to help him lead his army of citizen spies.⁸⁶

Two of the Chicagoans Briggs enlisted were Charles Daniel Frey and Victor Elting. Frey, a native of Denver, Colorado, was also a successful member of the advertising industry, having worked in the art and advertising department of the *Chicago Evening Post* before starting his own advertising firm. When Briggs recruited him, Frey was only 31, but already incredibly

⁸⁴ Mills, *The League*, 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 11-13.

⁸⁶ Jenson, *The Price of Vigilance*, 25.

prosperous, both financially and socially, belonging to many exclusive clubs, including the Chicago Press Club, the Navy League, the Freemasons, and the Republican Party.⁸⁷ Frey would begin his stint with the American Protective League as the organization's chief in Chicago. Victor Elting, like Briggs, was a native of New York, where he attended Columbia University before obtaining a law degree from the University of Michigan. Elting was drawn to Chicago's prospects as a growing industrial center, and relocated to the city to practice law in 1894. He attempted to combine his law practice with civic reform, and served on the Board of Trustees for the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, the Bureau of Public Efficiency, the National Housing Association, and the City Homes Association, as well as maintaining membership in numerous clubs and the Republican Party. As the American Protective League grew, Briggs decided to move the organization's headquarters from Chicago to Washington, D.C., with himself, Frey, and Elting sharing power as a triumvirate – Elting managed the D.C. office, Frey served as the liaison with the War Department, and Briggs remained in the field, inspecting local league chapters, and recruiting new members.⁸⁸

In the beginning, the purpose of the American Protective League was to work closely with federal and local law enforcement, seeking out pro-German spies and activities, turning over information that could lead to arrest and conviction for those considered to be guilty of treason. Because the league served as a quasi-official arm of the Department of Justice, Bruce Bielaski, Chief

⁸⁷ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 86-87.

of the Bureau of Investigation wrote a letter on 22 March 1917 to all special agents and local officers nationwide, introducing Briggs and explaining the APL. Bielaski informed his agents that Briggs had the full support of the Department of Justice to organize a confidential volunteer committee of citizens to inform the department of “activities of agents of foreign governments or persons unfriendly to this government, for the protection of public property, etc.”⁸⁹ According to Bielaski, the goals of the league were to supply local agents with information and to assist them in any way possible. The Bureau chief assured his agents and officers that Briggs and the members of the league were fully aware of the confidential nature of their assignment, and would take great care to insure nothing was done to unnecessarily alarm immigrants, or cause them any apprehension as to the fair manner in which they would be treated, and most importantly, that no arrests would be caused except after consultation with federal authorities. In concluding the letter, Bielaski urged the agents and officials to take advantage of the assistance and cooperation Briggs and the American Protective League had to offer.⁹⁰

League officials made it very clear to their local chapters what agents could and could not do. In writing to a league member, Mr. Wilbur Cherry of Lima, Ohio, Victor Elting stated, “under no circumstances should any of our members approach a man and try to arrest him or even threaten such a

⁸⁹ Bruce Bielaski to Special Agents and Local Officers, 22 March 1917. Box 8, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

thing.”⁹¹ The purpose of the league, Elting asserted, was to obtain information and determine whether that intelligence was enough to lead to a warrant, and at that point, an officer of the law would carry out the arrest. Elting did, however, relay to Cherry exactly what he could do as an APL agent. If a member heard anyone – German, American, or any other nationality – making seditious comments, the agent should make a full report, including the offender’s name, home address, business address, social activities, and statements by others who heard the comments or made the complaints.⁹²

In addition to observing and gathering information on those suspected of disloyalty, league members also had limited access to obtain information from local telephone companies on matters passing over their lines. At the time, the Department of Justice had a confidential arrangement with telephone companies to furnish agents with any information regarding matters of war. The Department wanted this arrangement to be kept out of public knowledge as much as possible, but advised the league officials to speak with telephone companies themselves, utilizing the records sparingly. Overuse would lessen the likelihood of obtaining information, and inevitably lead to the public at large learning about the practice, and in so doing embarrass the entire department. Bielaksi instructed the APL that the telephone records should

⁹¹ Victor Elting to Wilbur Cherry, 9 January 1918. Box 8, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

⁹² Ibid.

only be used in matters of extreme importance, and reminded the officials that no information obtained in that manner could be used as evidence in court.⁹³

The American Protective League recruited members and established local chapters nationwide. In one memorable response to an APL recruitment letter, C.W. Hamilton of Ellsworth, Kansas claimed his town was a rather small farming community of 2,500, though it served as the county seat, and had a sizeable German population, 75% of which he asserted to be “pro-German.” The citizens of Ellsworth had already begun to organize, calling themselves “Home Guards,” to “smoke out” the pro-German faction using Red Cross and YMCA campaigns. Hamilton seemed satisfied with their local progress, and did not appear interested in joining the American Protective League; however, he did ask Briggs for a man from Chicago who could speak and look German, and was Lutheran, but was a “good American citizen” to infiltrate the local German community and turn over any evidence he might find. Hamilton stated he was certain if something of this ilk was not done in Ellsworth, the town would surely have trouble.⁹⁴

For the first year of American involvement in World War I, the American Protective League focused on discovering German spies and activities in the United States, but members were largely unsuccessful, unable to gather any

⁹³ Bruce Bielaski to the American Protective League, 17 May 1918. Box 1, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

⁹⁴ C.W. Hamilton to A.M. Briggs, 19 November 1917. Box 1, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

meaningful intelligence. The atmosphere across the country began to change, however, between April and May 1918, as Congress passed what would become known as the Sedition Act, making it legal to prosecute anyone, whether immigrant or American citizen, that spoke maliciously against the federal government.

On April 26, Briggs wrote a letter to John Lord O'Brian, Assistant Attorney General and head of the War Emergency Division of the Department of Justice, praising the decision, saying, "I believe that publicity of this character from our Department will have an excellent and far-reaching effect and, also, that we should put out as much of it as possible."⁹⁵ Briggs enclosed newspaper clippings from the *Chicago Tribune* from the previous day, which both explained and praised the new clauses of the Espionage Act. The article stated that some lawmakers, including Republican Senator Hiram Warren Johnson of California, disparaged the bill as a direct denial of free speech. However, the staff correspondent wrote in favor of bill, extensively quoting O'Brian himself, who said of the law, "The espionage act has proved a fairly effective weapon against propoganda, and if amended as requested by the department by making attempts to obstruct enlistments and recruiting punishable there is every reason to hope that it will be thoroughly effective."⁹⁶ O'Brian warned

⁹⁵ A.M. Briggs to John Lord O'Brian, 26 April 1918. Box 1, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

⁹⁶ "Free Speech in Spy Bill Raises Debate," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1918. Box 1, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

against those who attempted to slow down production of war materials, or spoke out against the war as one between the capitalists and the proletariat. Though the motive itself was not treasonous, propaganda of this kind produced serious results in Russia, and must be sought out and stopped in the United States. One of O'Brian's more interesting assertions was that, "the most dangerous type of propaganda used in this country is religious pacifism – opposition to the war on the grounds that it is opposed to the word of God...the statements used in it generally consist of quotations from the Bible."⁹⁷

The inaugural edition of the *Spy Glass*, the American Protective League's confidential members-only news bulletin was extraordinarily pleased with the newly amended espionage act. This law would open a new chapter for the league, allowing the organization to operate under a law broad enough in its scope to cover a multitude of once minor offenses as major crimes. Heavy penalties of up to twenty years in prison and \$10,000 fines also accompanied convictions for acts and speeches of disloyalty or pacifism by either "unfriendly or enemy aliens," or American citizens - no distinction was to be made between the disloyal talk of citizens and hostile speeches of aliens, enemy or otherwise.⁹⁸ For league agents, this meant a tremendous simplification of their labors, as the amended law clearly indicated the types of espionage and

⁹⁷ "Free Speech in Spy Bill Raises Debate," *Chicago Tribune*, 25 April 1918. Box 1, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

⁹⁸ "President Signs Espionage Act," *The Spy Glass*, 4 June 1918, 1. Box 8, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

propaganda members needed to combat, which included falsifying reports, obstructing bond sales, inciting or causing mutiny, obstructing enlistments, attacks on the U.S. government or American flag, encouraging resistance, defending or teaching disloyalty, and supporting the enemy. The bulletin warned against criticism of the war, recalling the story of millionaire Mrs. Rose Pastor Stokes from Kansas City, who was sentenced to ten years in prison for her letter to the editor of a local newspaper which stated, "No government which is for the profiteers can also be for the people and I am for the people, while the government is for the profiteers."⁹⁹ The judge who convicted her, Judge Van Valkenburgh, defined the line of criticism of the war, declaring that the military could only succeed inasmuch as it was supported and maintained by Americans; any statement made "knowingly and willfully" with the intent to promote and interfere with the operation and success of the military, that lowered morale, extinguished confidence, and slowed production, could cause insubordination, disloyalty, and munity, and must be punished as such.¹⁰⁰

With the passage of the Sedition Act in 1918, the American Protective League moved into the affairs of ordinary citizens. Based on O'Brian's warnings against religious pacifism, the APL investigated members of the Jehovah's Witnesses, then known as Russellites, who preached pacifism. Dr. Shirley Jackson Case, professor of early church history and theology at the University

⁹⁹ "Where War Criticism Must Stop," *The Spy Glass*, 4 June 1918, 4. Box 8, Charles Daniel Frey Papers (Collection 743). Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, University of California - Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

of Chicago wrote an article published in the *Biblical World* about the Russellites, who he declared assaulted not only the heart of Christianity, but also American patriotism. With the United States engaged in a “gigantic effort to make the world safe for democracy,” Case argued the Russellites readily lent themselves to the purposes of the Industrial Workers of the World¹⁰¹ and its anti-war propaganda.¹⁰² Because the Russellites adhered to the doctrine of pacifism, Case concluded that any member of the church had become the “pronounced enemy of democracy and a serious menace to the nation’s morale in this hour of need.”¹⁰³ The Chicago chapter of the APL conducted raids of the Russellites at the request of a Polish woman who was worried about her husband and his involvement in a strange new religious movement. During one of the services held on Chicago’s south side, league members arranged a raid, and law enforcement officers arrested the entire congregation, and confiscated copies of Joseph Rutherford’s book, *The Finished Mystery*, which

¹⁰¹ No labor organization took as much heat from the public or the government during the war as the Industrial Workers of the World, known as the “Wobblies.” Founded in Chicago in 1905, the organization sought to be the voice of those workers still underrepresented by the labor movement – African Americans, immigrants, and migrant farm laborers. From the beginning, the organization preached social and economic revolution, anti-militarism, and anti-patriotism; their message did not change once the United States entered the war in Europe. Their journals during the war urged workers not to volunteer for military service, and claimed it was better to be a traitor to the nation instead of a traitor to the working class. For these reasons, the I.W.W. became a primary target of the Justice Department and the American Protective League during the war. Please see: Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969).

¹⁰² Shirley Jackson Case, “The Premillennial Menace,” *Biblical World*, July 1918, 16, 21.

¹⁰³ Shirley Jackson Case, “The Premillennial Menace,” *Biblical World*, July 1918, 23.

was considered seditious under the new provisions of the Espionage Act. The evidence was enough to convict Rutherford, whose works provided the doctrinal basis for the denomination and who helped personally establish the church; considered a religious radical, he was sentenced to 20 years for conspiracy to cause insubordination, mutiny, disloyalty, and to obstruct recruiting and enlistment. He remained in federal prison at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas for eleven months after the war, when a federal judge reversed the decision.¹⁰⁴

Under the new federal regulations, the American Protective League primarily turned its focus toward socialists. One of the problems for the APL operatives was that by 1918, members of the official Socialist Party had come to be known as respectable middle class and working class American reformers.¹⁰⁵ With an official membership of 70,000 and garnering 600,000 votes for its candidate Eugene Debs in the election of 1916, the Socialist Party attracted many prominent Americans, including Upton Sinclair, Charles Edward Russell, Walter Lippman, and Florence Kelley, who believed the party offered an antidote to their alienation from American society.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, the socialists were thrown into an ideological confusion by American entrance into the war. In April 1917, at an emergency meeting in St. Louis, members declared their vigorous resistance to the draft, and to workers' right to strike.

¹⁰⁴ Jenson, *The Price of Vigilance*, 173-174.

¹⁰⁵ The APL contrasted the Socialist Party with the I.W.W., whom they considered to be bound together by a vague platform of anarchism, willing to engage in violence if necessary. Jenson, *The Price of Vigilance*, 172.

¹⁰⁶ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 26; Dubofsky, *We Shall be All*, 15.

This decision caused a split in the party, with some of the nationally known members, including those previously mentioned, dissociated themselves from the convention and announced their support of the war.¹⁰⁷

Despite the air of respectability, the APL still considered socialists as possible suspects, and classified them into two groups – the “true socialists” that supported American involvement in the war, and “foreign sympathizers” who opposed the war and could easily influence the others into disloyalty. Because these socialists were now interfering with the mobilization of manpower, the APL officials made it their goal to remove all dissident socialists from public office and public view, insuring their imprisonment with other so-called radicals.¹⁰⁸

With these goals in mind, the American Protective League certainly had little trouble in their attempts to remove socialists from public view, as newspapers and journals, both in Chicago and nationwide, continuously published articles labeling socialists as disloyal and un-American. In October 1917, in the middle of city-wide election campaigns, the writers at the *Chicago Tribune* warned the city’s inhabitants that socialism and “Germanism” were intimately associated, with a common political direction, especially pacifism. Unlike the socialists in France or Great Britain who were pro-French and pro-

¹⁰⁷ Kennedy, *Over Here*, 26-27. The split in the Socialist Party also caused problems with the American Federation of Labor and its outspoken leader Samuel Gompers. Gompers recognized the possible benefits for the war effort and announced his ardent support for the war effort, and at his urging, the AFofL proclaimed its loyalty to the American government. Gompers was so dedicated to the effort, he even denounced other labor organizations as disloyal for their opposition to the war. Please see Kennedy, *Over Here*, 27-29.

¹⁰⁸ Jenson, *The Price of Vigilance*, 173.

British respectively, the American socialists were anti-American; in fact, the authors claimed, every “conspicuous socialistic activity in relation to the war” was anti-American.¹⁰⁹ Though socialists in the United States may have been natural-born citizens, or may have acquired citizenship, the *Tribune* very clearly asserted they were disloyal, having no American instincts.¹¹⁰

Two of the most damaging pronouncements against the American Socialist Party during the war came from two prominent former members, William English Walling, and John Spargo. Writing for the *Independent*, Walling claimed the organization had become exclusively an anti-war party, with new supporters joining primarily for their stance on that issue. Far from the perceived respectable members of the middle class, Walling lamented the fact that the party had once more become as “wholly foreign as it was twenty years ago.”¹¹¹

According to Walling the organization was not only “un-American,” but “anti-American,” with its members rejecting two centuries of democracy in the United States as worthless. He predicted the Socialist Party would likely grow larger, especially if the war led to unexpected difficulties that fostered popular discontent, but warned that the organization had, “lost the support of all those who believe America stands for something important, something worth fighting for.”¹¹² The loss of these upstanding members of society meant that

¹⁰⁹ “The Socialists and the Judges,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 October 1917, 8.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ William English Walling, “Socialists: The Kaiser-Party,” *The Independent*, 10 November 1917, 302.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 302.

the party had to rely on the “un-Americanized” masses. Walling believed it may have been too late to counteract the German propaganda in the United States that the new Socialist Party disseminated; however, he urged Americans to stop the spread of this new brand of socialism by branding it, isolating it, and setting the rest of the nation against it.¹¹³

Similarly, John Spargo, a well-known member of the Socialist Party, whom the publication *Outlook* (formerly known as the *Christian Union*) called the most able American writer on socialism, resigned from the Socialist Party in June 1917. While making it clear that he was not renouncing socialism as a political idea or theory, Spargo asserted the party had “ceased to be an instrument for the advancement of socialism...and is probably the single greatest obstacle to the progress of socialism in America.”¹¹⁴ Loyal support to the nation during the war was of utmost importance, Spargo claimed; however, the new membership and leadership of the Socialist Party was “committed to a program essentially un-neutral, un-American, and pro-German.”¹¹⁵ With the support of the public, including former prominent members of the Socialist Party, by early 1918, the American Protective League focused its efforts on spying on those suspected of socialism and disloyalty, resulting in the arrest and incarceration of Eugene V. Debs, and other vocal socialist leaders.

With the three directors of the American Protective League hailing from Chicago, the city became the capitol of efforts to institutionalize “Americanism.”

¹¹³ Ibid., 303.

¹¹⁴ “Americanism and Socialism,” *Outlook*, 13 June 1917, 246.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 245.

Adjutant General for Illinois, Frank Dickson, informed Governor Frank Lowden of the official committees and auxiliary organizations working in conjunction with the State Council of Defense to uncover seditious actions or enemy activities. Dickinson's office created an Intelligence Bureau, consisting of selected and discrete men to report activities that affected public order, and to acquire any information necessary to the preservation of law in the state. Additionally, the American Protective League had several chapters across the state, working closely at the federal level with the Department of Justice in Washington, D.C.¹¹⁶

By January 1918, Dickson called for an additional 7,500 men to join the 25,000 American Protective League members already in the state. The *Chicago Tribune* warned all "slackers" – whether they attempted to evade the selective service law, or federal regulations regarding food, fuel, or light – to beware and be certain that "sharp eyes are watching you."¹¹⁷ According to the article, Department of Justice Division Chief in Chicago, Hinton Clabaugh, stated that the addition of more men to the league in the city meant that all violators would be under constant surveillance.¹¹⁸

In general, during the war, the *Chicago Tribune* rarely published articles regarding the American Protective League, unlike its equally conservative sister newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*, in which correspondents reported on

¹¹⁶ Frank Dickson to Frank Lowden, 14 May 1918. Series 101.027, Governor Frank O. Lowden Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

¹¹⁷ "Adds 7,500 Men to Local Force of Spy Hunters," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 January 1918, 3.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

local APL happenings nearly every day. Nevertheless, the *Tribune* can shed some light into APL activities in Chicago. July 1918, the APL investigated violators of the federal Fuel Administration's "lightless night" policy. As a way to conserve fuel, the administration ordered non-essential lights, including window lights in homes and display lights in business establishments, to be cut off at night; Chicagoans, however, did not heed the warning. In order to catch the violators, the APL sent 457 men to patrol the streets, levying fines on those caught with the lights on.¹¹⁹

Other aspects of city and state government revolved around APL principles. As early as December 1917, Chicago's City Council adopted a city ordinance providing that no person should be granted a license to conduct business, unless that person was a citizen of the United States, or who had formally declared their intent to pursue citizenship, as officially recognized by the American government. These city laws were in place until the following May, when the mayor, William Hale Thompson, informed the City Council the orders were a violation of federal treaties with foreign governments, which contained provisions relating to the rights and privileges of citizens or subjects of foreign countries within the United States. Having been informed of these national statutes, Chicago's City Council unanimously repealed their laws.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ "Lightless Rule Violators Face APL Vengeance," *Chicago Tribune*, 30 July 1918, 1.

¹²⁰ Mayor William Hale Thompson to the City Council of the City of Chicago, 6 May 1918. Series 101.027, Governor Frank O. Lowden Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

Perhaps the most violence in Illinois against those accused of sedition or disloyalty occurred along the state's western border, just a few miles across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri. In February 1918, John Metzen, a lawyer from Chicago, and Sezerion Oberdan, a leader for the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), were seized from their hotel rooms in Staunton, Illinois, thirty-eight miles northeast of St. Louis. The town of Staunton had been engaged in a fight to rid the city of men whom the American Protective League had marked as disloyal, with league members and city inhabitants stopping the accused, more than 100, on the street and forcing them to sign papers confirming their loyalty. Metzen was a member of the law firm of Metzen & Simons, located on the Reaper block in Chicago, and had appeared in the courts in defense of the I.W.W., stating he simply believed in progress. The citizens of Staunton captured Metzen and Oberdan, pulling the men from their hotel rooms and forcing them to march through the streets until they were one-quarter of a mile past the edge of town. Metzen and Oberdan were then stripped, tarred and feathered, and ordered to leave the vicinity.¹²¹

Another violent incident occurred in Collinsville, IL, thirteen miles northeast of St. Louis and twenty-seven miles southwest of Staunton. Robert Praeger, a German born Socialist and coalminer, attended a socialist meeting in nearby Maryville on 4 April 1918, where members of the community claimed he made a speech containing disloyal remarks against the United States government. When he returned home to Collinsville, Praeger was seized by the

¹²¹ "Tar and Feather Chicago Lawyer as an I.W.W. Aid," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 February 1918, 1.

local “loyalist committee” and forced to parade barefoot through the streets of town, kissing the American flag at different intervals.¹²² At this point, local law enforcement officers rescued Praeger, ensconcing him in the jail at the city hall for safekeeping. Later that evening, however, a mob of 300-400 men returned, dragging Praeger from his basement hiding spot, and forced him to march one mile outside of town, where he was hanged from a tree, to the cheers of the crowd carrying American flags.¹²³ Two months later, the eleven men who were arrested and tried for Praeger’s murder were found not guilty. Governor Lowden claimed that Praeger was guilty of sedition and other treasonous acts, but the crowd at Collinsville was just as guilty for its assault upon the principles of democracy. “If Praeger had lived for fifty years,” Lowden declared, “he could not have given as much aid and comfort to the enemy as that body of lawless men who took his life. Patriotism is a thing of such fine and purse material that it cannot be made the cloak for any crime.”¹²⁴ Despite Lowden’s criticism of the crowd, Illinois Attorney General Edward Brundage filed a report of the incident, labeling Praeger as both a citizen of Germany and a Socialist. According to Brundage, the evidence proved that in the five years prior to his death, Praeger made public speeches in which he expressed opposition to the war, stating the war was brought on by capitalistic interests and urged the laboring class to unite against the conflict. In light of the

¹²² “Illinoisan Lynched for Disloyalty,” *Chicago Tribune*, 5 April 1918, 1.

¹²³ “Germany Enemy of U.S. Hanged by Mob,” *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 5 April 1918. Series 101.027, Governor Frank O. Lowden Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

¹²⁴ “Mob that Lynched Praeger Aided Enemy,” *Chicago Tribune*, 7 April 1918, 7.

evidence against Praeger, Attorney General Brundage asserted the murder was brought about by a dispute between Praeger and the Coal Miner's Union, and without this feud, he would not have been molested; therefore Brundage relayed his opinion to the governor, that neither the state of Illinois nor the United States should not pay an indemnity for Praeger's death.¹²⁵

While many citizens from various backgrounds in Chicago and the state at large supported the American Protective League, others did not, and risked arrest, or worse in the case of Robert Praeger, in order to make their opposition known to the public. This opposition came from Socialists such as Praeger, but also from members of the Republican Party in Chicago and their publication *The Republican*. During the war, the newspaper ran articles weekly, with each edition expressing their views regarding American entrance into the conflict. Early on, in May 1917, the editors of the paper received letters from its readers, encouraging the writers to continue their work, while still others asserted it was the duty of the paper to refrain from criticism of the administration once war was declared; continuance in opposition to the government, the detractors claimed, was sedition and treason. In response, the editors wrote to the people whose "patriotic impulses" caused them to suggest the paper refrain from voicing their opposition, declaring Wilson to be on his way to a one-man government by silencing the Republican minority in the

¹²⁵ Edward Brundage to Frank Lowden, 23 August 1918, 8. Series 101.027, Governor Frank O. Lowden Correspondence, Illinois State Archives, Springfield, Illinois.

name of patriotism.¹²⁶ In a scathing article against Wilson and Congress, *The Republican* in December 1917 asserted that every good American was the backbone of the government, but that President Wilson and Congress would not be able to hold the support of the people unless the administration informed them the reasons for fighting. Because of the silence of Wilson and Congress, the newspaper declared “thousands upon thousands” of people were turning to the Socialist Party as a viable alternative, and would likely have control of Congress after the next election.¹²⁷ By branding good citizens as traitors because they did not agree with every move made by the government, Wilson’s administration succeeded in creating political enemies who would show their opposition through the ballot box. The majority of people opposed to Wilson, his administration, and the war chose to remain silent, according to the writers, because they were afraid of being arrested, like others who stood boldly for the rights of citizens, but were jailed by political enemies under the guise of patriotism.¹²⁸

During the nearly two years the United States military fought in Europe in World War I, Americans at home were concerned about possible German spies and German sympathizers interfering with the war effort. In order to discover these pro-German spies, businessmen from Chicago formed the American Protective League, an organization that would swell to include more than 250,000 members in every major American city and many in between.

¹²⁶ “Sustained by Public Opinion,” *The Republican*, 19 May 1917, 4.

¹²⁷ “The People are Thinking,” *The Republican*, 8 December 1917, 4.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

Finding no German spies, the APL in conjunction with the newly redesigned Espionage Act, turned its attention to socialists, radicals, violators of food and fuel regulations, and those who committed sedition or treason by voicing their opposition to the president and his administration. During the course of these investigations, law enforcement officials arrested 2,000 people, only 200 cases of which were heard by juries, the remaining decided solely by judges.¹²⁹ In December 1918, one month after the war officially ended, Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory and Assistant Attorney General John Lord O'Brian agreed that the American Protective League should be disbanded, as "civilian patriotic organizations were not to be used in peacetime for volunteer espionage."¹³⁰ The APL's publication the *Spy Glass* reported the reasons for the dissolution, pointing out the lack of funds, but primarily acknowledging the conditions of peace altered their status. League officials, however, were certain that many of its members would quite naturally turn to combating radical movements still considered hostile to the best interests of the country. Local divisions might become involved in cases concerning political heresy or industrial menace – volunteer involvement that the Department of Justice would not oppose.¹³¹ In Chicago especially, the birthplace of the APL, members believed radicalism was a grave concern, and as Gregory implored them, continued to watch for illegal activities harmful to the public morale during

¹²⁹ Jenson, *The Price of Vigilance*, 175.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

peacetime.¹³² Since the late 19th century, Chicagoans found their city at the center of yet another labor strike with serious national implications, and carried the fears of unions with them into the 20th century, balking at the insistence of the teachers of the city to not only unionize, but to join national labor organizations. With these conflicts still fresh in their memories, the United States became involved in the Great War, invoking the deep-seated sense of patriotism that caused many Chicagoans to step forward and volunteer their time in whatever way they could, even if that meant spying on fellow citizens. During the course of the war, as the focus of the American Protective League shifted from enemy aliens to citizen protestors, anti-radicalism became institutionalized in the United States, with Chicagoans at the forefront, shaping and molding the new definition of Americanism.

¹³² "Watch out for Foes at Home, Gregory Warns," *Chicago Tribune*, 22 November 1918. 5.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

On 29 November 1918, an article in the *Chicago Tribune* informed its readers of warnings by the United States government not to weaken the energetic campaign against German espionage that had carried on during the war. While some pro-Germans did exist in the United States, especially in Texas, where the author reported a “glorious, thoroughgoing, self-conscious Germanism ...centralized in the order of the Sons of Hermann,” the article specifically linked “Germanism,” Bolshevism, and socialism.¹ The author declared, “as sources of social poison they still remain, and it is for level headed Americans to see that they are made helpless.”² True Americans, the article continued, must create an atmosphere in which Bolshevism could not live. To this end, the author urged the continuation of the American Protective League, “that splendid organization of patriotic citizens.”³

For the defenders of “Americanism,” the end of World War I posed a new danger: would peace mean that Americans would relent in the fight to keep the country’s ideological enemies from claiming beach heads on the American homeland? When scholars think of the national security state in an American context, they look first to the Cold War, and then trace the roots of that conflict to the first Red Scare, but few have considered the historical

¹ “Within the Gates,” *Chicago Tribune*, 29 November 1918, 6.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

narrative beyond this point. The history of social and political conflict in Chicago, however, provides us with a more complicated narrative. Much like the “Red Scare” conjured legitimate “Americanism,” the creation of a national security state has far deeper ideological roots.

Sporadic violence against high government officials following the war kept the siege mentality alive. The concerns about radicalism raised by the *Chicago Tribune* continued into 1919, when on April 29, a packaged bomb exploded at the home of former Georgia Senator Thomas R. Hardwick, injuring his wife, and maiming one of his servants, whose hands were severed in the blast.⁴ The following day, thirty-six additional packages were discovered, addressed to several government officials including the new Attorney General, A. Mitchell Palmer, Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson, Postmaster General Albert Burleson, and Seattle’s Mayor Ole Hanson. Newspapers across the country immediately linked the bombs to anarchists, socialists and “reds.”⁵ Mayor Ole Hanson addressed fellow city mayors in Kansas City and urged them to close halls associated with the I.W.W., to suppress the “red flag” and deport those who taught dissension and violence, claiming, “If this brand of Americanism does not suit some people, let them go back to the country from

⁴ “Bomb Injures Ex-Senator’s Wife Maims a Servant,” *New York Times*, 30 April 1919, 1.

⁵ See “Bomb for Ole Hanson,” *New York Times*, 28 April 1919, 1; “Reds Betray Themselves,” *Washington Post*, 1 May 1919, 6; “War Obstructionists Released from Prison Believed Nation-Wide Bomb Plot Instigators,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1919, 12; “Extreme Care Used in Making Bombs of Reds,” *Chicago Tribune*, 1 May 1919, 2. Please also see: Beverly Gage, *The Day Wall Street Exploded: A Story of America in its First Age of Terror* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

which they came.”⁶ Also assuming radicals were responsible for the bombs, veterans of the American Protective League, and veterans of the United States military, raided socialist newspapers and disrupted socialist parades on May Day across the country, likely inciting a riot in Cleveland which left one person dead and forty injured. Chicago remained at the center of the concern and fear of radicalism. The writers for the *Youth’s Companion* worried about a new menace as 10,000 American citizens attended a socialist meeting in Chicago. Speakers at this gathering declared their sympathy with the Russian Bolsheviks, and criticized American troops for attempting to disarm the Soviets. Writers expressed their concern over the attendants at the meeting, who proclaimed their allegiance to the red flag of the International, rather than the American flag.⁷ As the anti-radical hysteria continued to spread, the public began making demands that Palmer reinstitute the American Protective League. One former APL member believed it would be a “splendid idea to revive the American Protective League to assist and help in running down these opponents of our government and institutions, and individuals who seem to prefer some kind of a rag, red or black, in place of ‘Old Glory.’”⁸ As they had done during the war, members of the American Protective League and Chicagoans helped lead the way during what would come to be known as the first “red scare.”

⁶ “Stamp Out all I.W.W. in U.S.,” *Chicago Tribune*, 2 May 1919, 1.

⁷ “The New Menace,” *The Youth’s Companion*, 12 December 1918, 662.

⁸ Joan M. Jenson, *The Price of Vigilance* ((Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), 270-271.

Beginning in the mid-19th century, citizens of Chicago had been at the forefront of an anti-radical movement that helped define American nationalism. Following the Civil War, with Americans no longer preoccupied with the politics of slavery and sectionalism, citizens of the newly reunited country renegotiated what it truly meant to be American. Though some of that focus turned toward immigrants, much of American nationalism centered around ideas. More specifically, those who adhered to ideas considered “radical” – including socialism, communism, anarchism, and even pacifism – no matter their country of origin, would be labeled specifically as “un-American.” Many of these so-called radical movements in the United States post-Civil War occurred among the working class as part of the labor movement, adding yet another layer to the ideas of American nationalism. From 1870 to 1919, many radical leaders were based in Chicago, with its large working class population; as such, Chicago became not only a hotbed of radicalism, but of anti-radicalism. Chicagoans would be at the forefront of this charge, helping to shape American nationalism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Chicago provided one of the first public stages on which “Americanism” debuted as a traditional value under threat from alien forces and people. It held this central and distinctive ideological role in the history of the United States for a variety of reasons. First, Chicago became perhaps the nation’s most important nerve center of economic activity over a very short period of intense growth. The unique amalgamations of boosters, immigrants, and the working class argued over what would become known as “Americanism.” Ballot boxes,

the streets, the court system, and even federal agencies, all served as points of conflict in the struggle between capital and labor. The advocates of “Americanism,” those so willing to destroy the “un-Americanism” in others were engaging in a political mission, as the economic leaders attempted to control the thoughts and political options of the working class, upon whose labor capital depended.

One of the most important forces that contributed to the growth of Chicago was the emerging railroad industry. Relying on private funding from boosters in the city, the railroads exerted an outsized influence on the city’s landscape and its economy. One consequence of this dominant influence was that Chicago became a vital national center, linking East and West in a multitude of ways. The combination of the railroads and the Illinois & Michigan canal transformed Chicago into a center for both transportation and distribution, primarily of agricultural products such as corn, wheat, lumber, and pork. In light of this potential for unprecedented growth, businessmen and boosters relocated to Chicago, such as Cyrus McCormick, William Butler Ogden, Jonathan Young Scammon, and William J. Newberry, and promoted the city to investors in the east. As industries grew, so did their need for workers.

This thriving center of industrial capitalism required the cheap labor that only immigrants could provide. Immigrants comprised 72% of the total population of 300,000 by 1870. The nations most strongly represented by that composite figure included Germany, Ireland, and the Scandinavian countries, respectively. Although Chicago during the mid-19th century was a thriving

center of commerce, immigrants rarely benefited from this prosperity. The demarcation between the poor and wealthy generally fell quite starkly along ethnic and racial lines. Just over 82% of the working class were foreign-born, unskilled laborers, finding employment in the slaughterhouses, stockyards, packinghouses, and docks. Among the immigrant groups, Chicago's Germans held a special status. First, they owned nearly 38% of Chicago's manufacturing businesses, and thus were far more likely to be considered "middle-class."⁹ In a community with an overwhelming immigrant majority, native born Americans, who were only 20% of the overall population, held 70% of the city's highest-paid white-collar jobs and controlled the city's most important businesses, amassed the largest fortunes, and supplied nearly all of Chicago's mayors.¹⁰

Judged by the efforts made by workers to organize themselves, they were aware of these disparities of power and sought to break them down. As early as the 1860s, members of the laboring class began to organize, protesting their working conditions, and expressing a shared sense of "class consciousness." Much of the general dissatisfaction among workers stemmed from the falling national economy, and workers in Chicago struggled to manage a higher cost of living with lower wages. Adding to the problems for the city's working class, politicians in eastern states often issued propaganda, highlighting the advantages of the West, causing many of their own

⁹ Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics*, 25.

¹⁰ Einhorn, *Property Rules*, 248; Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 13.

unemployed to view Chicago as a viable alternative.¹¹ Under these conditions, laborers united to form at least nineteen new unions during or immediately after the Civil War. These organizations were not cohesive, and were often divided by skill level, nationality, language, or neighborhood.

Chicago's first self-proclaimed socialists arose out of the skilled workers and trade unions. The first socialist newspaper, the German-language *Der Proletarier* was published by H. Rosch in 1854, and ten years later, a branch of the International Workingmen's Association (IWA) appeared in Chicago. Nevertheless, socialists did not gain much attention until the eight-hour movement and subsequent strikes in 1867. Politically, the state lawmakers agreed with the workers, and Illinois became the first state in the nation to enact eight-hour laws. Socially, however, many in Chicago, especially those in positions of influence such as the writers and editors of the *Chicago Tribune*, disagreed with both the movement and the new laws, often labeling the workers as selfish, setting the stage for future political and ideological conflict.

Beginning in the 1870s, members of the social elite in Chicago, whose voices and opinions were well represented in the mainstream media, reshaped the very definition of nationalism, demonstrating that the idea of "Americanism" could be consistently used as a weapon of a small group of political reactionaries. The increasing labor unrest of the 1870s caused this group of politicians and business leaders to return time and again to the idea

¹¹ Pierce, *A History of Chicago, Volume 2*, 156-157.

that those protesting against capital engaged in quintessentially “un-American” activity.

As I have demonstrated, the fears and concerns of these prominent city leaders can be traced back half a century before the Great War, to their reactions to the rise of the Paris Commune in 1871. Though the Commune held some American support, primarily from ex-Confederates who saw the events in Paris as a welcome uprising against an oppressive power, the majority of citizens opposed the Commune. Chicago was no exception, and saw many of these debates aired in local newspapers.

Just months later, a natural disaster, and the struggle to recover, contributed to the ideological conflict. It is a measure of the depth of antagonism, mistrust, and paranoia that rumors of a link between the Great Fire and the Commune were given credence. Some Chicagoans raised concerns over a supposed confession printed in the *Chicago Times* on October 23, in which an exiled Paris Communard claimed to have set the fire. In his letter, the mastermind boasted that he gathered a dozen likeminded conspirators to destroy the business district, an act of revolution meant to “humble the men who waxed rich at the expense of the poor.”¹² The newspaper, however, was notorious for printing sensationalized stories, and, realizing its readers expected dangerous tales from the fire, either printed a fabrication or was the victim of an elaborate hoax. While allegations against radicals may have been false regarding the fire, Chicagoans had been hyperaware of socialist

¹² Sawislak, *Smoldering City*, 46.

movements in the city since the communist takeover of Paris some five months prior.¹³ The violence of the Commune was still often discussed and feared among Chicago's elites, who were familiar with the stories of a great city being destroyed by revolutionary workers.

In the years following the fire, Chicago began to buckle under the strain of a waning economy, a rapidly growing city, and an increasingly displaced workforce. Even though the Paris Commune had long since collapsed, it continued to cast a shadow over Chicago politics, as economic, social, and political crises unfolded in the city in the early 1870s, summoning the memories and fear of radicalism in the city.

From 1870-1890, as Chicago became an even more important center of commerce and industry, the city's working class continued to grow exponentially. Prior to the panic of 1873, the working class was economically insecure, and especially concerned about wages lagging behind inflation. Food prices soared and the overall cost of living increased while wages remained relatively stagnant. Largely because of Chicago's booming economy following the Great Fire, laborers flocked to the city, with the promise of high wages. In reality, however, wages in Chicago, even for skilled workers, were far below that of other American cities, partly because of the increase of available laborers. For example, bricklayers were paid a maximum of \$4.00 or \$4.50 per

¹³ Ibid., 15.

day in Chicago, with carpenters only earning \$3.50 per day, in both cases far less than they would have received in either Philadelphia or St. Louis.¹⁴

Though political and social conditions in Chicago were similar to those of other large American cities, citizens of Chicago seemed to be in greater open conflict than Americans elsewhere, largely because of the wide gap between the rich and poor. To some outside observers, Chicago had risen from the ashes of the Great Fire, but they saw only the surface – the magnificent new stone buildings along State Street and Michigan Avenue, the palatial estates of wealthy families such as the Fields, Armour, Pullmans, and the Hibbards. These visions of the city ignored the direct contrast between these great monuments to wealth and the shacks in the Fourteenth ward that were a far more common part of the built environment in Chicago - unstable structures, without foundations or plumbing, housing entire families in one-room dwellings. Not all of Chicago's working class lived in such dire conditions, of course, but even skilled workers who lived in small cottages made ends meet only because their children also worked.

By 1873, the industrial growth of Chicago, much of which had been spurred on by the rebuilding of the city, came to an abrupt end. Trouble in the railroad industry spread quickly to the rest of the economy, stoking worker mobilization and also stimulating a strong reaction by the leaders of capital. In this context, "Americanism" was introduced into the body politic as a way for capital and management to stigmatize and marginalize labor.

¹⁴ Pierce. *A History of Chicago: Volume 3*, 240 n.

Over the next several years, the prospect of better times continued to appear further and further out of reach for many workers, especially for those employed by the nation's railroads. During the Great Strike of 1877, many Chicagoans feared the radicalization of the city's large working class, often comparing the violence of the strike to the excesses of the Paris Commune of 1871. The ideas of Americanism began to take shape, and would further solidify in the years to come. Citizens of Chicago in the 1880s especially witnessed the sharp contrast of elite business leaders and labor advocates played out in the city's political and social spheres. This conflict was particularly evident in the disputes between Cyrus McCormick, Jr., his employees at the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, and two Chicago transplants who identified themselves as both socialists and anarchists, August Spies and Albert Parsons. These debates strengthened "Americanism" as a sharp and effective weapon of ideological conflict.

In January 1885 when Cyrus McCormick, Jr., owner of the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company, cut pay for the factory workers by ten percent, for piece-workers by 15 percent, a new cycle of social and ideological conflict began. At first, the workers accepted the decrease, as they believed their wages would be restored beginning on March 1st.¹⁵ According to the local press, even with the decreased in pay, the employees still earned more than workers at similar factories in the city. Nevertheless, when the deadline came and went with no increase, the men demanded the restoration of their wages, which the

¹⁵ "Victory!" *The Alarm*, 18 April 1885, 1. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

company summarily refused. In response to McCormick's refusal, nearly one hundred workers walked off the job.¹⁶ Within just a few days, the strike took a violent turn, capturing the attention of the city. Chicago's mainstream media sided with McCormick, labeling the workers as a riotous, reckless crowd; nevertheless, despite the apparent sympathy for his cause, McCormick believed popular opinion was against him, and gave in to many of the workers' demands.

Following the end of the 1885 strike, the workers and their advocates celebrated their victory at a city-wide meeting. Albert R. Parsons, editor of the socialist monthly publication *The Alarm*, spoke at the gathering, praising the workers for the sudden and successful termination of their strike. Parsons, however, used the remainder of his time to speak to the crowd regarding the future of the working class, excitedly regaling the crowd with the merits of socialism, a system which, he claimed, would bring land for the landless, homes for the homeless, food, shelter, and clothing for the destitute, and peace and happiness for all. Foreshadowing the incidents to follow one year later, Parsons ended his speech by accepting the labels of communist, socialist, anarchist, and especially dynamiter, claiming dynamite to be the ultimate "peace-maker."¹⁷ Parsons assured the workers that if they had not been able to use force in their strike against the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company,

¹⁶ "Capital and Labor," *Chicago Tribune*, 28 March 1885, 7.

¹⁷ "Victory!" *The Alarm*, 18 April 1885, 1. Box 57, Series 2A, Cyrus H. McCormick, Sr. Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

they surely would have lost. "Where there is no force," Parsons declared, "there is no power."¹⁸

The incendiary speeches of Parsons and others at the gathering led to further conflict in the days following the strike. By the end of April 1885, Parsons and other socialist leaders protested the opening of the new Board of Trade building, carrying both red and black flags and singing the Marseillaise in French through the streets of Chicago. The very act of carrying the red and black flags set the demonstrators apart from other citizens of the city. These men and women knew Chicagoans would recognize the red flag in particular, and would associate it with the Paris Commune, though some fourteen years earlier, still fresh in their minds. These seemingly insignificant banners relayed to observers of the protest that the group rejected traditional "American" ideals, emphasizing the foreignness of their language and thought.

Debates over Americanism would once again take center stage one year later, as the labor disputes between McCormick and his workers recommenced in February 1886. These disputes surrounded the introduction of new machines in the factories, the company's refusal to rehire skilled workers that belonged to unions, and a decrease in wages. Employees went through proper channels to make their opposition to their current working conditions known, and when the company refused any of the workers' demands, it appeared another strike was imminent. McCormick, however, made certain that the men would not have the chance to strike, and ordered the factory to be shut down at

¹⁸ Ibid.,1.

9:30 am on 16 February. McCormick placed the blame entirely at the feet of the workers, believing he granted every reasonable concession they requested. The factory, McCormick announced, would remain closed indefinitely to all 1,400 employees, until the workmen were ready to accept the wages offered without questioning the right of the company supervisors to hire whom they wished.¹⁹ As news of the lockout reached other parts of the country, everyone seemed to be anticipating serious trouble, remembering the bloodshed of the previous year.²⁰

The Knights of Labor negotiated with McCormick on behalf of the workers, while other organizations across the city, such as the Trade and Labor Assembly, the Eight Hour League, the Central Labor Union, began to unite in order to once again demonstrate for eight-hours a day for workers. George Schilling, former McCormick employee and current member of the Eight-Hour League, asked for the support of local ministers, but their views were quickly denounced by speakers who were labeled rabid Socialists by the *Tribune*.²¹ At these meetings, the members of the various groups agreed to hold a mass demonstration on 1 May. What was supposed to be a one-day demonstration stretched into three, and by the third day became violent, once again surrounding the McCormick factory.

After an altercation at the factory between demonstrators and policemen resulted in the death of a young worker, self-proclaimed socialist

¹⁹ "Locked Out," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 February 1886, 1.

²⁰ "McCormick's Reaper Works," *New York Times*, 17 February 1886, 1.

²¹ "The Eight Hour Boom," *Chicago Tribune*, 10 April 1886, 1.

and anarchist August Spies wrote an editorial in the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* in which he declared that the blood of the workingmen shot down at McCormick's cried out for revenge, and called for a demonstration supporting the workers on May 4th. During the protest, held in the Old Haymarket, both Spies and Parsons gave fairly mild speeches to the crowd denouncing capitalism. However, when their colleague Sam Fielden spoke, his rhetoric turned violent, causing the policemen gathered at the square to order the crowd to disperse. At this point, a bomb exploded near the line of advancing policemen, and in the confusion exchanged gunfire with the mob.²² First reports about the casualties were contradictory, but in the end, the incident resulted in the death of seven officers, one member of the crowd, and an unknown number of injuries.

In the days and weeks that followed the bombing, newspapers nationwide not only denounced the Chicago anarchists, but discussed the ideology of true "Americanism." Many journalists labeled the men as murderers, communists, and "red-devils," who were opposed to every principle of American liberty. Likewise, a writer for the *Chicago Tribune* clearly called the perpetrators and their ideas "un-American." After the subsequent trial and death sentences for four of the eight men accused of the crime, some citizens across the country wrote to Governor John P. Altgeld asking for clemency; many more articles and letters addressed the governor, imploring him to continue with the executions, emphasizing the ideas of true American citizenship and Americanism.

²² "Rioting and Bloodshed in the Streets of Chicago," *New York Times*, 5 May 1886, 1.

The bombing at Haymarket Square and its aftermath provoked a concerted response from the political establishment and from those in positions of influence, especially the mainstream media, in the form that they called “Americanism.” In Chicago, between 1890 and 1919, further economic turmoil and a calamitous Great War provided the powerful advocates for this Americanism to institutionalize their ideas, allowing them to regulate political debate and conduct. The Haymarket riot would serve as a rehearsal for the labor disputes and strikes in the model town of Pullman from 1893-1894.

In the aftermath of the Pullman Strike, Chicagoans labeled all unions as disorderly, riotous, anarchical, unpatriotic, and “un-American,” hindering organizational efforts for many years. As we have seen, this ideology of Americanism affected attitudes toward the Chicago Teacher’s Union, led by Margaret Healy, and its attempt to join the Chicago Federation of Labor.

Between 1871 and 1919, key leaders of Chicago’s business community created a compelling narrative to marginalize their opponents in the emerging organized labor movement in the United States. The institutionalization of Americanism is demonstrated with a stark clarity in activities of the American Protective League, as manipulating public opinion became federal policy, and dissent in any form was punishable by law. During the nearly two years the United States fought to preserve democracy abroad, the war against radicals raged on at home, resulting in the arrest and incarceration of thousands of Americans for sedition or disloyalty. The Justice Department officially disbanded the APL shortly after the war, though Attorney General Thomas

Watt Gregory warned Americans to remain vigilant and to continue to monitor and report any suspicious activity.

These solidified ideas of Americanism led the public directly into the panic surrounding the first red scare of 1919-1920, with Chicagoans, especially former members of the American Protective League, leading the way in the fight against those considered to be un-American. Over the coming decades, this anti-radicalism would reach new heights. Within ten years following the red scare, Congress created the Special Committee to Investigate Communism in the United States, which purported upwards of 60,000 communists in the country, and members of the House of Representatives suggested deporting or arresting those belonging to such subversive organizations. By 1938, Congress established a subsequent investigating committee, the House Un-American Activities Committee, charged with seeking out both communists and fascists in the United States, and overwhelmingly supported by the American public. Within just a few years, the country would become embroiled once again in anti-radical and anti-communist hysteria during the Cold War, and the excesses of the McCarthy Era.

Reconsidering the Historiography

This dissertation contributes to an ongoing debate that began with John Higham's *Strangers in the Land*. Higham clearly states the anti-radical strain of Americanism had shrunk to insignificance and had, in fact, collapsed by the 1920s replaced by an anti-immigrant hysteria, though he does acknowledge its

multifaceted and changing nature.²³ The political history of the twentieth century should reinforce our sense that “Americanism,” though promoted by nativists, does not need immigration to have political power and consequences. As historian Richard M. Fried in *Nightmare in Red* claims, the anti-communist extremism existed in the United States long before the onset of the Cold War, before World War II, and even before 1938 and the establishment of the House Un-American Activities Committee.²⁴ This dissertation has proven that the roots of reaction can be traced back to the panic caused in Chicago over the Paris Commune of 1871. Severe blows to economic stability kept the sense of crisis alive. By the time the United States entered World War I, the champions of Americanism had been through many dress rehearsals and, like Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*, were “ready for their close up” when an actual war came their way.

²³ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 233, 266.

²⁴ Richard M. Fried, *Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), vii-viii.

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