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AMERICAN WORKERS, AMERICAN EMPIRE:
MORRISON I. SWIFT, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, AND THE MAKING OF
WORKING-CLASS IMPERIAL CITIZENSHIP, 1890-1920

A Thesis Presented

by

JUSTIN FREDERICK JACKSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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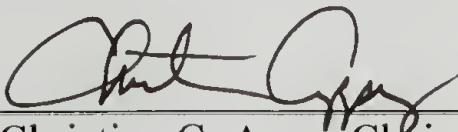
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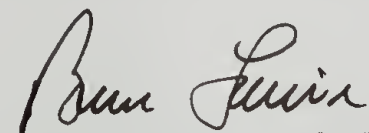
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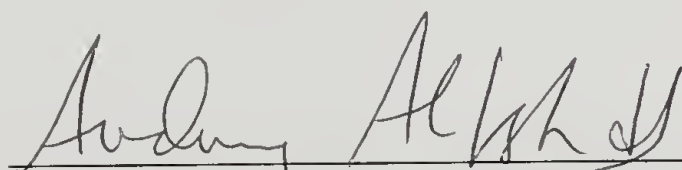
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DEDICATION

To Sarah G.—you know why.

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Somewhat like most modern republics, this thesis was quite small at the beginning but constantly expanded until, like an empire, it conquered, occupied, and pervaded all spheres of life. Numerous individuals provided crucial assistance and encouragement. The balance of my appreciation is due to my thesis committee chair, Chris Appy, who steered this project with words of wisdom, and committee members Bruce Laurie, who consistently provided me with sharp criticisms and smart suggestions, and Mary Renda, who cheerfully agreed to read the research of an old student. Many thanks also to Larry Owens and Audrey Altstadt for their patient support of my endeavors in the department.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: LABOR AND THE LOGIC OF EMPIRE

Frederick Jackson Turner, a pioneer among American historians and perhaps the first great historian of American pioneers, is today most well known for his so-called “frontier thesis.” The fact that Turner first presented “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” in 1893 at the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago should not be lost to historians of empire, for it was most fitting for Turner to theorize about the meaning of American expansion across the North American continent at an event celebrating Christopher Columbus, the founding father of Spain’s New World empire.¹ In arguing that westward expansion defined the fundamental contours of American history and enabled the peculiar democracy of the United States to thrive, Turner reminds us today that history is not merely the study of change in human societies over time; it is also necessarily the study of those societies and the spaces they occupy over time. Turner called upon historians to advance beyond political institutions and political systems to study the ways in which humans have constructed these institutions and systems in real space, and whether these political systems either expanded, contracted, disappeared, or maintained a sort of spatial stasis over time, and for what reasons.

It is therefore important to note Turner’s observations seventeen years later. In 1910, Turner observed that the exhaustion of the frontier in the 1890s had been followed by unprecedented immigration, extraordinary productivity and profits in the rail, iron, steel and coal industries, and tremendous concentrations of capital in gigantic

¹ John Mack Faragher, ed., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” and Other Essays* (New Haven, 1998), 1.

corporations. But Turner also suggested that America's recent acquisition of Hawaii and the Philippines, and the nation's entry into competition with the empires of Europe, was "in some respects the logical outcome of the nation's march to the Pacific...the sequence to the era in which it was engaged in occupying the free lands and exploiting the resources of the West."² Turner saw industrial capitalism and overseas expansion as important "social forces" in recent American history, but he did not explore what this meant for the multitudes of Americans with little immediate material interest in an American empire that no longer offered direct access to land or resources. In stressing the historical continuity of empire in the United States between the twentieth century and its preceding eras, and in largely leaving workers and labor out of the history of American empire, Turner established the frameworks for a historical interpretation of American expansion that persists in scholarship to this day.

Although "the labor question"—the question of who does (or does not do) the work of a society, for whom and under what conditions—has always been integral to the long history of empire, contemporary students of empire give it little attention. Highly influenced by the rise of post-structuralist philosophy, literary criticism, the ascendancy of cultural studies, and the transference of political legitimacy during the Cold War from the West to the so-called "Third World," recent historical narratives of Western empires represent a shift in historians' analyses of empire from issues of economics and politics to problems of cultural power.³ While this paradigmatic revolution has expanded our

² Frederick Jackson Turner, "Social Forces in American History," in Faragher, ed., *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, 123.

³ Indeed, one refreshing but rather lonely intervention in recent histories of empire that focuses on issues of work and labor does not even include "class" in its subtitle; see Gilbert G. Gonzalez, et. al., eds., *Labor Versus Empire: Race, Gender, and Migration* (New York, 2004).

understanding of the manifold operations and meanings of empire throughout history, it has also tended to obscure previous investigations of modern empire as a phenomenon inextricably related to the rise of the nation-state, new structures of international trade and finance, and the development of global capitalism and political economy in capitalist societies.

This is so partly because the influence of the new “cultural” historiography of empire waxed while the analytical appeal of orthodox Marxism waned. A growing disillusionment with Marxism and historical materialism within Western intellectual circles after the failures of metropolitan revolutionary movements in Europe and North America in the heady days of the 1960s and 1970s accelerated this transition.⁴ Marxism’s utility as a measure for understanding the past (including imperial pasts) declined, even while a beleaguered and dwindling set of historians and other scholars reformulated Marxism in new contexts and for new concerns.⁵

Post-structuralist theories formulated by Jean-Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida came to dominate the new intellectual mood. While some have construed these new theorists as inheritors of Western Marxism’s anti-authoritarian political project, the theoretical ascendancy of post-structuralism both reflected and helped to produce a disengagement from Marxism.⁶ On the one hand, the arrival of post-structuralism precipitated a rejection of “universalist” or “left” political causes, including various metropolitan anti-imperialist movements. On the other hand, the post-

⁴ See Peter Starr, *Logics of Failed Revolt: French Theory After May '68* (Stanford, 1995), and Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Decline of American Power: The U.S. in a Chaotic World* (New York, 2003).

⁵ See Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, 1999).

⁶ For a brief but excellent review of this shift in the American historical profession, see Herman Lebovics, *Imperialism and the Corruption of Democracies* (2006), 100-112.

structuralists and their followers substituted in Marxism's stead political theories that conceptualized power almost entirely in cultural terms.⁷ Analytical constructs that recognized the determinative potency of language and discourse, "difference," the body and identity soon pervaded academic history and the work of scholars throughout the humanities. Compared to a highly variegated Marxist political and theoretical project, however, post-structuralist endeavors seem somewhat impoverished. "The virtuosi of postmodernism," Philip Pomper reminds us, "have deconstructed networks of signifiers and tropes, but, unlike liberalism and Marxism, postmodernism has not gained a foothold in politics and has not directly removed any actual social, economic, or political chains."⁸

In this context, literary theorist and critic Edward Said demonstrated the scholarly and political rewards to be reaped from applying post-structuralist and critical theory to narratives of empire.⁹ Said illuminated the role of Western culture and knowledge in shaping Western empires, and he inspired a generation of students of comparative literature and history equally interested in the cultural dynamics and legacies of Western colonialism and imperialism. Said's influence is evident in the many cultural histories of empire written by European and American scholars beginning in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰

⁷ For a more critical review of this transformation in Western intellectual culture than that advanced by Lebovics, see Peter Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration: Post-structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London, 1987), and Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia, 1990).

⁸ Philip Pomper, "The History and Theory of Empires," in *History and Theory*, 44 (2005), 18.

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 2005), and *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1994).

¹⁰ For important cultural histories of European empire, see Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley, 1997); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, 2002). For some of the best work in the cultural history of American empire, see Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham, 1993); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, 1998); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and*

This impressive body of scholarship on culture and empire illuminated often disturbing ways in which imperial relationships crystallized in the West's distorted representations of the colonized "other." Monograph after monograph documented the ways in which empire had been finely contoured by western racism, sexism, "scientific" knowledge, literature, and popular culture.

Unfortunately, much of this post-Said scholarship has been written by academics trained not as historians but as analysts of literature and other cultural "texts." (This trend was only one of many signs of a blurring of already amorphous boundaries between history and literature). Yet, in the United States, the new cultural history of empire displaced an earlier revisionist history of American diplomacy and foreign relations that had incorporated culture as only one causal factor among many others. It also served to fill an interpretive vacuum left by the nation-centered narratives of American social and political historians of the 1960s and 1970s. In a globalizing, post-Cold War world, the cultural history of American empire functioned as an important and perhaps troubling reminder of the multiple ways in which imperial culture and violence contributed to the creation of a triumphant United States.¹¹

Nevertheless, these new interpretations of American empire suffered from an significant deficit. They tended to disregard the remarkable insights once offered by contemporary observers of a now seemingly-distant imperial past. Even though some

Abroad, 1876-1917 (New York, 2000); Gilbert M. Joseph, et. al., eds., *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Durham, 1998); Eileen J. Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, 1999); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill, 2001); and Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*. (Cambridge, 2002).

¹¹ Ellen Schrecker, ed., *Cold War Triumphalism: The Misuse of History After the Fall of Communism* (New York, 2004); Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley, 2002).

post-structuralists conflated early modern European thought and philosophy with Western imperialism, many key Enlightenment thinkers, beginning at least with French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, had ruminated on the injuries empire appeared to inflict on metropolitan values and culture.¹² Kindred Renaissance and Enlightenment-era theorists of republicanism struggled to resolve the ancient dilemma created by tensions between small-scale republics and territorial expansion.¹³ Of course, these sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth-century thinkers tended to regard empire as an essentially *political* phenomenon. Western theories of empire turned to the economic realm once the initial European conquests and mercantilist adventures of the seventeenth century gave way to the great “age of empire” of the next two centuries, in which European nation-states, and later the United States, competed for land and resources, markets, and prestige. Naturally, in this remarkably different context, thinkers like Adam Smith and Karl Marx easily discerned fundamental features of empire in complex inter-relationships between political economy, trade, finance and domestic political and social classes.

Smith and Marx did not, however, articulate the classic western theories of imperialism. Only in the first two decades of the twentieth century, centuries after the birth of modern European empires, did J.A. Hobson and Lenin develop the classical Western theories of empire. Hobson, a liberal British economist, located the origins of British imperialism in British foreign investment and domestic under-consumption, in which a high amount of saved capital was reinvested not in the metropole to foster higher

¹² Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton, 2003).

¹³ David Armitage, “Empire and Liberty,” in Quentin Skinner, et. al., eds, *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge, 2002).

domestic consumption, but overseas.¹⁴ Lenin was influenced by Hobson but gave Hobson's theories a Marxist edge that focused on imperialism as an inevitable result of competition between nation-states that were shifting to a new political economy rooted in capitalist monopolies of production and finance.¹⁵ Their seminal ideas structured the frames in which historians and other intellectuals discussed empire until the cultural turn at the end of the twentieth century.¹⁶ These thinkers placed capitalism and capitalist forms of production, distribution and consumption at the center of empire and the formation of empires.

After more than two decades of cultural histories of empire, it would behoove historians to reinvigorate older considerations of economy, politics, and class in narratives of U.S. empire. Scholars may do so without reducing the political positions or political culture of any one metropolitan class or group *vis-à-vis* empire to a problem of its class content. But it seems important for today's historians to realize that empire is never solely, or perhaps even primarily, caused by cultural factors. Nor is empire manifest historically only at a level of discourse or other forms of cultural expression; it is not important because it is a kind of specter that "haunts" the subjects of history by bearing a "threatening presence" which "invisibly" occupies or takes on a "changing form."¹⁷ As the astute British historian V.G. Kiernan notes,

¹⁴ J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (London, 1902).

¹⁵ V.I. Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (New York, 1939).

¹⁶ Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London, 2004).

¹⁷ Ana Laura Stoler, "Intimations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen," in Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham, 2006), 1.

“Modern imperialism has been an accretion of elements, not all of equal weight....Perhaps its ultimate causes, with those of war, are to be found less in tangible material wants than in the uneasy tensions of societies distorted by class division, with their reflection in distorted ideas in men’s minds. Capitalism is at bottom a relationship among human beings, and no human relationship, or its consequences, can have the logic of geometry.”¹⁸

Kiernan’s observation invites us to investigate the relationship between elites who promoted modern empires and everyday workers who have also been crucial to the production, reproduction and projection of modern empires. Historians have long known that many American elites in the late nineteenth century embraced overseas expansion as a way to ameliorate the intermittent social crises generated by rapid capitalist industrialization. Yet, historians have not addressed everyday workers’ relationship to the simultaneous construction of the modern American empire. Clearly, processes of class formation were imbricated in the structures of domestic and foreign policy in the Gilded Age and Progressive eras. In these years, American Federation of Labor officials shifted from opposing U.S. overseas expansion before 1900 to accepting U.S. intervention in an inter-imperial world war.¹⁹ Very few labor historians, however, have attempted to explain or explore this political shift in workers’ attitudes towards U.S. foreign policy.

The first generation of professional labor historians tended to focus on the pragmatic and institutional aspects of working-class history, and did not identify any necessary relationship between class and empire. The “Wisconsin school” of labor history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, best represented by the work of John R. Commons and his student Selig Perlman, interpreted modern American

¹⁸ V.G. Kiernan, *Marxism and Imperialism* (New York, 1974), 67.

¹⁹ David Montgomery, “Workers’ Movements in the U.S. Confront Imperialism: The Twentieth Century Experience,” University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, November 4, 2006. Paper in author’s possession.

unionism as an expression of workers' practical interest in "bread and butter" issues of wages and working conditions. Commons and Perlman eschewed notions that workers had seriously confronted larger problems of capitalism or empire.²⁰ While later so-called "consensus" historians in the early Cold War like Richard Hofstadter wrote little about labor *per se*, these scholars basically reiterated the claims of the Wisconsin School when they argued that a consensual embrace of liberal democracy, capitalism, and modernity defined American history and marginalized popular workers movements which, they believed, had been tainted by atavistic nativism and anti-intellectualism.²¹

Subsequent revisionist historians, inspired in part by the work of New Left scholars like William Appleman Williams, flipped this positive consensus on its head. While Williams and his colleagues acknowledged that the United States was generally a liberal capitalist society, they depicted America as a nation imprisoned by the political and economic structures of "corporate liberalism." In their minds, many Americans, including workers, enjoyed the tangible benefits of affluence and Progressive or New Deal reforms at the cost of becoming politically impotent in a society dominated and determined by invidious partnerships between labor, capital and the state.²² In these early twentieth-century narratives, workers appeared either as liberal but acquiescent or collaborationist and compromised. All in all, American workers seemed to have contributed little to the creation of U.S. foreign policy.

²⁰ David Brody, "The Old Labor History and the New: In Search of an American Working Class," in *Labor History*, 20 (1979), 111-126.

²¹ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955).

²² Williams, *Contours of American History* (New York, 1988); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York, 1963); James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* (Boston, 1968).

Influenced by the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s, however, the New Labor History challenged these conservative interpretations of labor's past. David Montgomery, David Brody, Herbert Gutman and a new generation of labor historians exposed heretofore ignored histories of working-class oppositional movements and cultures, all forged in the fires of war and reconstruction, shop floor and community struggles, resistant and residual pre-industrial immigrant culture, and socialist politics. Where others had detected accommodation, these historians exposed significant strains of radicalism in U.S. working-class political culture.²³ Yet, like their predecessors, this generation of labor historians did not deeply investigate workers' political attitudes regarding war, continental expansion, or overseas empire. A few New Left-era historians studied labor officials' seemingly sudden attachment to the Progressive state in the World War I period.²⁴ The gradual shift of AFL President Samuel Gompers and other moderate labor leaders from a traditional anti-statist voluntarism to an alliance with the Democratic Party and Woodrow Wilson's domestic and foreign policies was important, and it garnered a friendly (but preciously ephemeral) federal labor policy.²⁵ These studies, however, focused only on labor leaders; only a few rather narrow case studies of other

²³See David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Nonunion Era* (Cambridge, 1960); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality* (Urbana, 1967), *Worker's Control in Early America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (Cambridge, 1979); Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976). For an essay that links rather than contrasts the "Wisconsin" and "New Labor History" schools of U.S. labor history, see Leon Fink, "John R. Commons, Herbert Gutman, and the Burden of Labor History," reprinted in Fink, *In Search of the Working Class: Essays in American Labor History and Political Culture* (Chicago, 1994), 3-14.

²⁴ Frank L. Grubbs, Jr., *The Struggle for Labor Loyalty: Gompers, the A.F. of L., and the Pacifists, 1917-1920* (Durham, 1968); Ron Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969); and Simeon Larson, *Labor and Foreign Policy: Gompers, the AFL, and the First World War, 1914-1918* (Cranbury, 1975).

²⁵ Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (Cambridge, 1998).

labor statesmen and activists in the Progressive era followed.²⁶ These histories plowed new fields of research, but the value of their harvest remained ambiguous.

At the same time, however, Americans opposed to the welfare-warfare policies of the anti-communist Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations openly attacked the labor movement for its complicity in America's Cold War aggressions.²⁷ These critics documented labor's complicity with American imperialism and revealed AFL-CIO leaders' little-known careers as anti-communist labor diplomats. New Left writers pilloried historians like Philip Taft who dared defend labor's anti-communist statesmanship. However, this literature seldom looked farther back than World War II, an oversight that implicitly reinforced the consensus historians' belief in workers' essentially timeless conservatism concerning foreign policy. Only long after Vietnam did historians uncover a surprising amount of disquiet among rank-and-file American workers during this war, a development that somewhat undermined the rather harsh damnations New Left contemporaries hurled against "hardhat" hawks in the working class.²⁸

If New Left critics attacked labor's complicity with Cold War-era American empire, recent cultural histories have too often recapitulated the tenor of these charges in

²⁶ Gregg Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?: The American Federation of Labor, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1924* (Berkeley, 1991), and Elizabeth McKillen, *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy, 1914-1924* (Ithaca, 1995).

²⁷ Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy*. For a recent analysis of organized labor's political conservatism on foreign policy in the twentieth century that reiterates the spirit of New Left critics, see Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York, 1999).

²⁸ Jeffrey Coker, *Confronting American Labor: The New Left Dilemma* (Columbia, 2002); Peter Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Chicago, 1994); Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor, 2005). See also Marc Linder, *Wars of Attrition: Vietnam, the Business Roundtable, and the Decline of Construction Unions* (Iowa City, 1999) and Philip Foner's contemporary and heroic account of labor anti-war activity, *American Labor and the Indo-China War* (New York, 1971).

their indictments of working-class culture. Matthew Frye Jacobson's synthetic narrative of America's imperial political culture at the turn of the last century, *Barbarian Virtues*, is a case in point.²⁹ While Jacobson displays a refreshing respect for the emphasis revisionist diplomatic historians placed on the causal links between U.S. industrial capitalism and imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century, few American workers in his book escape the cross-class appeals of *herrenvolk* republicanism and nationalism. Yet, Jacobson hardly makes a compelling case for labor's complicity with empire. He bases his indictment of imperial American labor in passing remarks, offering only a few rather a-historical and de-contextualized references to statements made by Samuel Gompers and Eugene Debs.³⁰ We learn little about the views or cultural politics of the mass of organized and unorganized workers regarding questions of empire in the years between 1876 and World War I. *Barbarian Virtues* is an eye-opening and original work of synthesis that irrefutably illuminates the cultural bases of modern American empire. Yet, the cultures Jacobson describes are cultures that emerge only from the rarified expressions of America's cultural, political and economic elite. Jacobson overlooks the statements of American workers or the poor, rarely looking deeper than a few leaders claiming to represent rank-and-file workers. In effect, Jacobson basically extends Turner's emphasis on the new American empire as a continuation of earlier continental expansion, important for its relationship to politics, immigration, markets, and military intervention, but unrelated to social divisions within the metropole.

This study maintains that modernity has always retained a dynamic historical relationship between labor, citizenship and empire. In the years between 1890 and 1920,

²⁹ Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*.

³⁰ Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 82-83, 86-87, 229.

most workers in the United States were integrated into a political culture which they subjectively experienced as robust nationalism but what objectively and historically may be called a political culture of “imperial citizenship.” This peculiar and particularly *modern* political culture helped to resolve contradictions lingering between a declining nineteenth-century republicanism and an ascendant twentieth-century liberalism. Events at the end of the nineteenth century forced Americans simultaneously to confront the end of land-based westward continental expansion and social explosions caused by rapid, unregulated capitalist industrialization. As the 1890s progressed, American elites increasingly looked beyond America’s shores for solutions to the nation’s domestic crises. By the end of the 1920s, this political culture of imperial citizenship had come to structure the political discourse and activity of all social classes, including workers.

Some elites, and many prominent Republican, Populist and trade union leaders, feared that overseas expansion would prove detrimental to America’s republican political tradition of virtuous and manly independence and self-rule. Yet, between the Spanish-American War and the aftermath of World War I, many working-class leaders, and many workers themselves, came to embrace a foreign policy characterized by imperial intervention in other nations and societies. There was nothing inevitable about this deadly embrace. It coalesced in complicated interactions between patterns of race, gender, popular culture, military service, immigration, and radicalism and anti-radicalism. Imperial citizenship also was shaped by larger changes in consumer culture, political economy and workplace management. This thesis explores only a few of the various ways in which American workers and their leaders came to celebrate their individual and

collective identities as citizens of a republic which, in fact, quickly was becoming the most advanced empire in world history.

Working-class imperial citizenship in the United States was not a form of “false consciousness,” nor can it accurately be identified as merely one variant or manifestation of American nationalism. Undoubtedly, ever since the American Revolution, many artisans, laborers and workers have believed that they were part of an “imagined” American community.³¹ Nevertheless, it is of paramount importance for historians to acknowledge that these workers, in the larger context of modern world history, either contributed to—and perhaps were conscripted by—the imperial policies of America’s political and economic elite.³² Indeed, our historical perspective of American empire shifts dramatically if we analyze the construction of American empire not from the perspective of cultural, political and economic elites, but from a “bottom-up” perspective.

Indeed, such a perspective brings to the surface certain liabilities inherent in recent cultural approaches to the history of empire. Cultural historians may correctly claim that Americans of all classes *culturally* embraced empire, from the colonial period well into the modern era. Certainly, many if not most ordinary Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shared with elites an interest in continental expansion as a means to secure precious land and resources, often at the expense of indigenous peoples and other imperial powers. Yet, our engagement with this question is altered when we recognize that few workers accrued direct, material benefit from the very

³¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1996).

³² The concept of cultural conscription employed here is found in Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 17-29.

different kind of *overseas* U.S. commercial and political expansion that began in earnest at the conclusion of the nineteenth century.

Therefore, for elites to interest American workers in forming an empire, these workers first had to be culturally and figuratively (and sometimes literally) conscripted by the nation's political, economic and cultural elite. Between 1890 and 1920, many workers came to embrace United States foreign policies which their working class predecessors in the nineteenth century would have regarded as dangerously antithetical to republican principles and practice. Yet, a working-class political culture of imperial citizenship was forged not only in the fires of violent U.S. military and commercial expansion at the edge of America's turbulent frontiers.

The American empire, like all empires, was an internal and external project. In the years between 1890 and 1920, the sites of American workers' consumption, work, collective organizations, politics, and immigrant and ethnic culture and identity, all became battlegrounds of empire. It was no accident that workers confronted agents of the state, capital and urban reformers attempting to colonize them and their culture at the very same moment that the United States searched abroad for cheap labor, raw materials, and consumer markets. In the years prior to World War I, many Americans feared (and some hoped) that contests for political, social and cultural power and authority inside and outside the United States might culminate in worldwide social revolution. After the reaction of the war years, however, few doubted that American society had been successfully mobilized to repress internal forms of dissent against a new kind of America and a new kind of American presence in the world. With this understanding, the story of

the rather conservative culture that came to characterize American workers and organized labor in the Cold War begins not in 1945, or even 1917, but in the 1890s.

As will be obvious to the reader, Charles S. Maier's recent comparative essay on American empire has been enormously influential.³³ On the other hand, theories of empire have not actually advanced far beyond the conceptual frameworks established by classical theorists like Hobson, Lenin and Joseph Schumpeter.³⁴ These older theorists inform a study of labor and empire by clarifying our main problematic: the historical relationship between states and the formation of state structures (or, more properly, the formation of empire-states and empire-state structures) and classes and class formation. Here I tend to agree with Etienne Balibar and others who observe that classes and states do not develop autonomously. "What history shows is that social relations are not established between hermetically closed classes, but that they are formed across classes—including the working class," Balibar argues. "The state, by means of its institutions, its mediating or administrative functions, its ideals and discourse, is always already present in the constitution of class."³⁵ Modern states, whether nation-states or empire-states, have always mediated and influenced class identity and class relationships through categories of citizenship.

³³ Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge, 2000). I disagree with Maier's overly judicious assertion that the United States is not currently an "empire."

³⁴ Hobson, *Imperialism*; Lenin, *Imperialism*; Joseph Schumpeter, "The Sociology of Imperialisms," (1919), reprinted in Paul Sweezy, ed., *Imperialism and Social Classes* (New York, 1951); Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, 2000).

³⁵ Etienne Balibar, "From Class Struggle or Classless Struggle?" reprinted in Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London, 1988), 171.

Eugen Weber's work on the colonization and cultural modernization of the French peasantry is also highly relevant for studies of the relationship between culture and empire- and nation-formation in western societies.³⁶ Some have criticized Weber for failing to recognize that the formation of national identities in France during the Third Republic took place in a larger context of the French empire.³⁷ However, the virtues of Weber's study lies in his observation that the formation of national identities—an important phase in the history of empire-states and the building of empire-states—is essentially a phenomenon driven by political and economic elites. They implement strategies for such a project from above, within but also beyond the borders of their self-defined nation-state, for a variety of reasons and from a multiplicity of motivations not always reducible to political or material concerns. I also share Weber's conclusion that the formation of modern political culture and political identity is a process that occurs both inside and outside the established borders of states.

Ultimately, in the words of one observer of labor and empire, “empire building is essentially a form of class warfare from above.”³⁸ Unlike much recent scholarship that emphasizes the power of the subject in shaping the forces and outcomes of history, this study affirms that empire all too often concedes little space for individual subjects to influence the course of history. This does not imply that non-elites have not affected the contours of history. They have, and they will continue to do so. Yet, it must be

³⁶ Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford, 1976).

³⁷ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 175-176.

³⁸ James Petras, “Empire and Labor: U.S. and Latin America,” in Gonzalez, *Labor Versus Empire*, 58.

recognized that spaces for oppositional action and ideas tend to be severely limited under conditions of empire and empire-formation.

Although this study is intended as an intervention in American labor, foreign policy, immigration, and political and social history, its central purpose is to reaffirm the signal importance of class and labor in shaping modern societies and subjective experiences of modernity. Despite many recent and rather scholastic claims that “class is dead,” it is perhaps more accurate to describe the body as badly bruised but not yet expired.³⁹ Nor is the utility of “class” as an analytical category of historical study likely to decline in the near or distant future. Specifically, this study is primarily a history of the class dimensions of a great transformation in American political culture.

Given an indeterminacy to definitions of “political culture” in recent scholarship, it is important to define exactly what I mean by the term. By political culture I mean the complex field of human activity and discourse concerning the power and identity of different social groups in any given society. Political culture is both constructed by human subjects and imposed on them by the past. The concept of political culture employed here includes but extends beyond individual participation in (or discourses regarding) traditional political practices or institutions, such as elections, parties, policy-making, and statecraft.

Political culture, however, does not itself maintain any essential power to determine history, nor is political culture a structure whose referent consists only of discourse or language. Political cultures are constructed historically from social and political interaction and struggles between different groups in societies over time; each

³⁹ Jan Pakulski and Malcolm Waters, *The Death of Class* (London, 1996).

social group develops its own specific political cultural contents.⁴⁰ Political culture is never merely discursive in origin or form. As Ronald Aminzade, a historical sociologist of nineteenth-century French labor has argued, identities and political culture are constituted politically, and often through organizations, institutions and ideologies, but never fully separate from social and historical realities:

“The translation of class interests into political objectives occurs in a structured process of conflict and alliances, through organizational and ideological mechanisms linking social structure to political behavior. Translating interests based on one’s position as a landowner, shopkeeper, worker, or capitalist into subjective political dispositions and collective political action depends on a process that is not a simple reflection of class structure. Institutions, such as political parties, and ideologies, like republicanism, play a key role in this process. Contrary to what proponents of abandoning class analysis suggest, however, these institutions and ideologies are not independent of material conditions and class forces; nor are they capable of simply creating interests out of discourses, unconstrained by material realities.”⁴¹

Furthermore, if we accept that historical events are almost always rooted in multiple causes, then it is also reasonable for historians to identify and interpret those causes and sift through them to determine the relative significance of each. The study of political culture is therefore also inherently comparative.⁴²

⁴⁰ Klaus Eder, “Politics and Culture: On the Sociocultural Analysis of Political Participation,” in Alex Honneth, et al., eds, *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1992), 95-120.

⁴¹ Ronald Aminzade, “Class Analysis, Politics and French History,” in Lenard R. Bernstein, ed., *Rethinking Labor History: Essays on Discourse and Class Analysis* (Urbana, 1993), 94.

⁴² See Ron Formisano, “The Concept of Political Culture,” in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31 (2001), 393-426.

This study is also informed by what is not present in the historical record, for one of the essential features of American empire is a remarkable absence of introspection, debate and deliberation regarding empire and its costs and benefits to Americans and others.

This study has geographical, chronological and methodological limitations. I have focused the questions I outline above primarily through the history of workers in Boston, Massachusetts, because the Bay State's capital has always been a seat of empire of one form or another. Furthermore, while it may seem that I excessively analyze the ideas and activity of only a few working people, intellectuals and organizers, I do not claim that these subjects at any time between 1890 and 1920 represented more than a militant minority within a highly variegated U.S. working class. Furthermore, the militant working-class minority that challenged American empire in this period was hardly composed of perfect individuals; in many ways they were decidedly not heroic or infallible, and should not be portrayed as such. The narrative is therefore loosely structured around one rather fallible and enigmatic American whose life in many ways represents and recapitulates the complicated trajectories of working-class citizenship in the United States at the turn of the last century.

Morrison I. Swift is certainly one of the more unknown, misunderstood and unappreciated personas in the history of American radicalism. A promising young philosopher who abandoned a life in the academy for a revolutionary vocation among the poor and unemployed of the urban northeast (and Boston especially), Swift sheds light on a particular kind of working-class movement agitator against empire which has received

very little attention in recent histories of U.S. empire. In Chapter One, “The Wages of Expansion,” I set the context for Swift’s ideas and activities by providing a necessarily broad sketch of Boston’s working-class republican political culture, from colonial times to the Gilded Age. In Chapter Two, “The Social Origins of the New Empire,” I discuss the political and social context in which socialists like Swift came to understand American political economy and articulated an alternative to it. In Chapter Three, “The Modern Moment,” I trace the alternative discourse against empire charted by working-class radicals like Swift which both hearkened back to a fading republican past and looked forward to a future society based on social harmony, not imperial expansion. My epilogue concludes this largely biographical narrative and offers some speculation about workers and empire in the twentieth century.

Lastly, in the course of research and writing I have wondered if there is not a kindred historical connection between Swift and his contemporary Jack London. London’s literary talents completely dwarf Swift’s marginal effusions. But London, like Swift, identified with the American working class. London, also like Swift, was a socialist with his fair share of cultural blemishes by today’s standards (notably, his racism towards Asian immigrant workers). *The People of the Abyss* remains his finest statement on the deprivations of industrial capitalism, but he situated his observations in London’s East End, not Hell’s Kitchen or Skid Row. Written only because the author was unable to travel to South Africa to report on the Boer War, *The People of the Abyss* operates as an evocative metaphor for the culture that Swift, a man with middle-class origins, entered and adopted in his own kind of “slumming” with the urban American poor and unemployed. In the preface to his account of English slum life, London described, in

prose of simple elegance, his approach to observing the urban working-class “under-world” of Western empire in terms that inform my reading of the history he witnessed:

I went down into the under-world of London with an attitude of mind which I may best liken to that of the explorer. I was open to be convinced by the evidence of my eyes, rather than by the teachings of those who had not seen, or by the words of those who had seen and gone before. Further, I took with me certain simple criteria with which to measure the life of the under-world. That which made for more life, for physical and spiritual health, was good; that which made for less life, which hurt, and dwarfed, and distorted life, was bad.⁴³

⁴³ Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London, 1992), 9.

CHAPTER 2

THE WAGES OF EXPANSION: LABOR, CITIZENSHIP, AND EMPIRE IN EARLY ANGLO-AMERICA

“Nations...are, in my view, dual phenomena essentially constructed from above, but which cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist.”¹

In 1890, when Morrison Isaac Swift arrived in Boston, this cultural and financial capital of New England still enjoyed its well-earned reputation as the Eden of the American nation. Only a few miles from Boston's busy city streets, battlefields in Concord and Lexington still marked where shots heard around the world had once announced the birth of a brave new nation. These hallowed grounds also hosted new statues of proud minutemen-farmers, monuments that signified a distinctly Yankee celebration of American national identity. Nevertheless, by the 1890s, an earlier historical memory and consciousness that might have viewed the revolution as not merely national, but also anti-imperial in nature, seemed to have passed into oblivion.

The rebellious colonists of 1775 were far more cognizant of the imperial and global context of the Revolution than the everyday Gilded Age American. If nothing else, the verse adorning a plaque at Concord, affixed upon a stonewall over the graves of British soldiers, indicates that the new citizens of Massachusetts—only recently the subjects of an English king—were conscious of the costs and benefits of empire. They also

¹ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990), 10.

seemed sensitive to the common sufferings that empire imposed on all peoples. The plaque celebrated America's victory, but also acknowledged the suffering of British opponents:

“They came three thousand miles and died,
To keep the past upon its throne;
Unheard, beyond the ocean tide,
Their English mother made her moan.”²

Such verse reflects a fervent affirmation of a particularly *national* identity that pervaded the early American republic, from the constitutional period to the end of the nineteenth century. White Protestant male workers of British ancestry in Massachusetts especially identified with the republican political culture forged in the revolution. Even by the early 1890s, the Yankee citizenry of Massachusetts, including workers, members of the middle class and Boston Brahmins, still identified with the republican legacy established by their revolutionary predecessors.

Yet, for some Gilded Age Americans, the American republic seemed to have lost its moorings. At the end of the nineteenth century, American military interventions in Latin America and the Pacific Rim forced many Yankees and other Americans to confront apparently new and dissonant tensions between a specifically American form of republicanism and the emergence of a uniquely American sort of empire. A few Bostonians, including newcomer Morrison Swift, soon recognized the organic connections between social and political developments within the United States and the extension of U.S. power beyond continental borders.

² From James Russell Lowell, “Lines,” in *The Complete Poems of James Russell Lowell* (New York, 1898).

The common, cross-class bonds of republican citizenship celebrated by many of Boston's white male artisans and laborers after the consolidation of the Revolution exerted a powerful centrifugal pull on working-class identity and political culture in the early Republic.³ Nevertheless, the social transformation of the United States, in which an economy based on small-scale artisanal and agricultural production gradually gave way to one dominated by large-scale capitalist corporations and powerful investors, threatened popular notions of republican citizenship. At the same time, many white male workers expressed political allegiance to an expanding New World republic of economic opportunity, political liberty, and basic social equality. The nation of which these artisans and workers imagined they were a part, however, had always been much more and much less than the representative republic their artisan forebears had intended to establish.

Recent histories of the United States that focus on the culture of American empire largely ignore these workers, even while the authors of these histories have sought to affirm the continuity of empire in the *longue durée* of American history.⁴ But the American empire prior to the 1890s was markedly different from the American empire after the 1890s. In social terms, popular support for American empire was disrupted by extra-continental expansion. Before the annexation of Hawaii and the conquest of Cuba and the Philippines, American workers and American elites reaped considerable material

³ James R. Green and Hugh Carter Donoghue, *Boston's Workers: A Labor History* (Boston, 1979), 1-22.

⁴ Andy Doolen, *Fugitive Empire: Locating Early American Imperialism* (Minneapolis, 2005); Gretchen Murphy, *Hemispheric Imaginings* (Durham, 2005); and David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America* (Minneapolis, 2003). Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley, 2002) is a welcome exception, as Streeby analyzes the class contents of popular working class literature and culture in relation to issues of expansion, primarily during the Mexican-American War. But in seeking to emphasize the continuity of American empire, Streeby also does not discern that the social basis of empire changed from expansion for land and resources in the continent to markets and raw materials abroad, a difference which separates pre-1898 U.S. expansion from the expansions that followed.

and psychological rewards, both direct and indirect, from American expansion. Most workers believed that they benefited or could benefit from the availability of lands secured in multiple wars and treaties. While farming was not always a realistic option for many men and women of the landless urban artisanry or the poor and unemployed, the possibility of land ownership in the West signified for many Americans the resiliency of a republican Jeffersonian political economy, a faith bolstered by the fact that some individual white males could still preserve their manly virtue and secure a livelihood, and delay the decline of an agrarian republic threatened by the luxurious vices of commerce, through agricultural pursuits. These western lands also contained precious minerals that, beginning with the 1849 gold rush, commanded the attention of Yankees seeking quick riches. When violent expansionism seemed to be motivated not by the search for land and minerals but by an interest in commerce and fulfilling an American mission in the world, the social basis of American empire changed.

EMPIRE-STATES, LABOR, AND ANGLO-AMERICAN EMPIRES OF THE EARLY ATLANTIC WORLD

European political theorists of the sixteenth century, including Machiavelli, were aware of the centrality of political economy in explaining the rise and fall of empires. By reading the history of ancient empires, political thinkers of the Renaissance period struggled to reconcile classical political theory with the rapid political and social developments transforming feudal Europe. In particular, they turned to Sallust, especially his *Bellum Catilinae*. Sallust identified a positive and original relationship between great republican states and liberty. For Sallust, Rome demonstrated that republics which based

their greatness on expansion faced inevitable decline and corruption.⁵ Machiavelli extended Sallust by arguing rather pessimistically that all republics faced these fatal tensions between greatness and liberty. He did not identify any necessary relationship between class, labor and empire. But Machiavelli worried that popular reforms like those instituted by Gaius Marius, who allowed foreigners and the propertyless to join the Roman legions, would cause internal unrest and, like Sulla's dictatorship, finally destroy republican liberty.

While Machiavelli feared that expansionist republics without popular armies risked becoming vulnerable to states that had militaries, he also concluded that greatness was ultimately more important than republican liberty and well worth the risks. This position had its critics. The Venetian Paolo Paruta suggested in 1599 that "the perfection of Government lies in making a City virtuous, not in making her Mistress of many countries. Nay the increasing of Territories, as it is commonly coupled with some injustice, so it is remote from the true end of good Laws, which never part from what is honest. Governments which aim at Empire are usually short lived; which denotes their imperfection."⁶

British republican political thought of the same period inherited this same tension between empire and liberty. In 1594, Richard Beacon, a former British official in Ireland, published *Solon His Follie*, a treatise on the problem of Ireland. Like Machiavelli, Beacon also distinguished between expansionist and non-expansionist republics, both of which seemed condemned to decline. After the civil war, however, as British commerce

⁵ David Armitage, "Empire and Liberty: A Republican Dilemma," in Quentin Skinner, et. al., eds., *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage* (Cambridge, 2002).

⁶ Paolo Paruta (1657), quoted in Armitage, "Empire and Liberty," 33-34.

and trade increased, political economists like Charles Davenant and philosophers like David Hume reasoned that commerce might rescue modern republics from the terrible fate of previous expansionist republics. To Davenant and Hume, the naval power necessary for protecting ocean-going commerce seemed to obviate any traditional dangers posed by authoritarian land-based armies. The British Empire therefore could safely achieve international repute by conquering the high seas, not new territory. In France, Montesquieu endorsed the relatively peaceful commerce of Britain's new kind of empire, even while he condemned the expansionist "universal monarchies" of the Continent.⁷

British mercantilist theory and policy tried to reconcile emerging conceptions of political liberty with imperial expansion. By advancing mercantilist political economy, British elites worked for a new commercial empire that would increase private wealth and also relieve domestic social tensions by generating wealth for the common welfare. Advocates of overseas colonization tended to share the sentiments of Francis Bacon who, in 1628, fearing that "The rebellions of the belly are the worst," suggested that "The first remedy or prevention, is to remove by all means possible that material cause of sedition, which is want and poverty in the estate."⁸ The liberal political philosophy and political economy of mercantilist England and Scotland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries deepened an emphasis on commercial empire as a moral means to preserve

⁷ Armitage, "Empire and Liberty," 36-44. See also David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000); and Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before Its Triumph* (Princeton, 1977), 60.

⁸ Francis Bacon, *Of Seditious and Troubles* (1628), quoted in Williams, *The Contours of American History* (New York, 1988), 27.

social stability and pursue the common good. Commercial empire would be rooted in the accumulation of private property at the expense of other empire-states.

John Locke explored the social import of this historical departure in the history of empires. Herman Lebovics suggests that Locke's *Second Treatise* actually provided the first grand theory of social empire.⁹ In arguing that government functioned primarily to preserve individual property, Locke necessarily had to argue that individuals required private property to participate in the state. But England in Locke's time afforded fewer and fewer opportunities for most English subjects to amass individual wealth, so naturally Locke suggested North America as a solution. The land there could rightfully be given to Europeans who, unlike the natives, would maximize its productivity. Primitive accumulation in America would secure the political loyalties of a population facing land enclosures in a restored England. Locke, Lebovics contends, "made the colonial empire a vital bond between Britain's new elite and those they governed," thereby strengthening "the nascent liberalism of British society by building into it the promise of growth, of more for all, of social peace through empire."¹⁰

Scottish political economist Adam Smith soon thereafter argued that the British empire needed markets for its expanding domestic manufacturing surplus. Smith believed that such an endeavor could be accomplished only by military forces composed of citizen-soldiers, not corrupt mercenary armies. Smith's ideal English subject would both accept the new industrial division of labor engendered by commercial capitalism and serve in the British imperial navy and army. As one student of Smith has noted, "It was

⁹ Lebovics, *Imperialism and the Corruption of Democracies*, 87-99.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

the existence of the empire which made it possible to rely rather upon the division of labor than upon mercantilist policy to sustain and increase the wealth of the rich country.”¹¹ Imperial expansion was therefore intimately linked to a new socialization of labor in the British isles. Even Smith, however, worried that the metropolitan division of labor which fostered the wealth and glory of empire would necessarily degrade the English laborer. But he refrained from supporting the enfranchisement of the laboring masses, lest “dependent” laborers be forced to follow the political will of employers as slaves followed masters.¹²

Therefore, while some British republican, mercantilist and liberal thinkers attempted to theorize empire as a social palliative for non-elites within the long transition from feudalism to capitalist modernity, they also expressed fear about commercial empire’s relationship to metropolitan artisans and workers. Commercial empire seemed to enrich individuals of all social classes, but the new economic forms wrought by Europe’s nascent commercial capitalism also threatened social stability and challenged the republican political order. At the social bottom of an ascendant English empire-state, however, English commoners in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries often seemed reluctant to accept the costs of empire.

Though most commoners who supported the English constitutionalist and Protestant forces in the English Civil War genuinely embraced citizenship in a new republican state, many protested a new political order which based an exclusive franchise on property ownership. A growing number of radical republicans also actively opposed

¹¹ Armitage, “Empire and Liberty,” 44-45; Williams, *The Contours of American History*, 70-74.

¹² Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (New York, 1980), 35-40.

the domestic and foreign costs of the new state's imperial policies. In 1649, rank and file soldiers of the New Model Army resisted conscription into forces meant to assist Oliver Cromwell's Ireland campaign. In 1657 and 1661, English commoners distressed by land enclosures, various forms of unfree labor, and press gangs recruiting for colonial adventures in Ireland and the Caribbean organized dramatic but unsuccessful armed rebellions against the Protectorate. The rebels included men only recently returned from the American colonies, where they had been radical antinomian followers of Anne Hutchinson and exiled from the Bay Colony for heresy (a few also had actively opposed colonial slavery and depredations against indigenous peoples, including the massacre at Mystic, Connecticut). These men returned to the mother country to fight for a Protestant republic, only to suffer the indignities of conscription and enclosures in the postwar period.¹³ Individual and collective resistance to the extreme violence of empire and commercial expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not limited to New England; it was manifested in countless acts of protest throughout the Anglo-American Atlantic world.¹⁴ Not all Englishmen readily accepted the older but maturing political economy of Atlantic empire and the limitations it placed on their rights as citizens of an expanding commonwealth.

The crises of the North American colonies exposed domestic class tensions inherent in the political economy of Anglo-American Atlantic empire, even as they generated powerful new national identities and claims to republican citizenship among men and women of all classes. Nowhere was this more apparent than in Boston. While

¹³ John Donoghue, "Unfree Labor, Imperialism, and Radical Republicanism in the Atlantic World, 1630-1661," in *Labor: Working-Class History of the Americas*, 4(2004), 47-68.

¹⁴ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, 2000).

revolutionary Bostonians in the 1760s and 1770s may have found a common political cause in their opposition to British policies and their desire for independence, the meanings of that collective struggle varied across class lines. Colonial Boston, and the larger colonial society of which it was a part, was not a class society.¹⁵ But Boston was part of a colonial society whose members responded to empire in different ways, often according to race, gender and religion, but also individual class experience and interest.

The imperial subjects of New England were hardly averse to expansion. Indeed, in 1748, adventurous and enterprising men of all pedigrees joined the successful campaign to capture Louisburg and North Atlantic trade routes and fishing grounds. Following the French and Indian War, however, New England's commercial elites increasingly resented British intervention in a somewhat separate but integrated North American and Caribbean commercial economy. While these interventions caused elites to eventually rally around complete independence, Massachusetts' commercial elite hardly envisioned a new republic based upon an alternative political economy. On the contrary, onerous British regulations had to be removed precisely because Boston's merchants hoped to establish what Boston patriot James Bowdoin and other revolutionary notables called an "empire of liberty."¹⁶

Happily, elite colonists' resentments toward Parliament, and eventually toward the King, were congruent with the frustrations of everyday Bostonians who daily chafed against the privations of British imperial policy. Everyday Bostonians joined the revolution to free themselves of these policies and in the process struggled for equal

¹⁵ Ronald Schultz, "A Class Society? The Nature of Inequality in Early America," in Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger, eds., *Inequality in Early America* (Hanover, 1999), 203-221.

¹⁶ Quoted in Frank E. Manuel and Pritzie P. Manuel, *James Bowdoin and the Patriot Philosophers* (Philadelphia, 2004), 98.

political participation in a virtuous New World republic.¹⁷ But it should be noted that Boston's artisans, like the "mechanics" of other colonial cities, did not intend to establish a separate American "empire." This word appears primarily in the discourse of the patriot leadership in Massachusetts and other colonies, whose ranks were largely constituted by upper-class white men who favored American greatness, but for whom "empire" did not necessarily imply territorial expansion.¹⁸ Artisans, on the other hand, hoped merely to establish a republic based on manly economic and political independence.

The story of George Robert Twelves Hewes, a revolutionary war veteran and shoemaker, reflects the experiences that motivated many everyday Bostonians to risk life and livelihood for the patriot cause. No evidence suggests that Hewes joined the Revolution in order to build a lasting American empire. But Hewes did refer his biographers to the multiple humiliations he suffered and witnessed as a young Boston resident in the years preceding the war. Once British troops occupied Boston, a city of sixteen thousand residents, in the summer of 1768, Hewes was constantly stopped by sentries. When a British soldier cheated Hewes in a transaction, he complained to the man's commander; he was horrified to learn that the soldier received three hundred and fifty lashes for the transgression. He watched one British regular harass and rob a woman on the street. Most important, Hewes was one of many Boston artisans and laborers threatened by moonlighting British soldiers competing with colonials for scarce employment. On March 5, 1770, Hewes watched British troops kill five of his fellow workingmen—four of whom he knew personally—in the Boston massacre.¹⁹

¹⁷ Alfred Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York, 2006), 27-99.

¹⁸ Marc Egnal, *A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, 1988).

Hewes suffered the violence of empire personally as well. Four years after the massacre, Hewes tried to prevent Malcolm Hawkes, an unpopular customs official and loyalist, from beating a small boy. Hawkes in turn knocked Hewes unconscious (soon thereafter Hawkes was tarred and feathered by a group of Hewes' friends). In explaining his decision to join the revolutionary navy in 1776, Hewes told one biographer that he "was continually reflecting upon the unwarrantable sufferings inflicted on the citizens of Boston by the usurpation and tyranny of Great Britain"; his "mind was excited with an unextinguishable desire to aid in chastising them."²⁰ Immediate and earthly causes motivated Hewes and his fellow artisans to engage in revolutionary politics.

As revolutionary rhetoric and activity escalated, Boston's artisans grew determined to wrest the benefits and rights of republican citizenship for themselves. To mount an effective opposition, radical Whig leaders like Samuel Adams and John Hancock were compelled to curry support from Boston's plebian majority. In doing so, however, the leadership had to accommodate artisans' desire for political equality, or at least some influence in public affairs. Boston's workers did not organize separate revolutionary committees as did their compatriots in Philadelphia or New York.²¹ But Whig leaders several times reduced the property bar to the franchise in order to incorporate Boston's workers in public protest meetings against the British.²² By participating in the revolutionary conflict, Boston workers like Hewes hoped to found a

¹⁹ Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party: Memory and the American Revolution* (Boston, 1999), 33-41, 46-51.

²⁰ Quoted in Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, 55.

²¹ Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1986).

²² Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, 39.

virtuous republic in which Americans of all classes could enjoy the equality and benefits of political citizenship—a truly radical departure in the long history of the British empire. These workers and artisans, however, fought for political independence because they hoped to establish an independent republican state. In the end, their trials and tribulations furthered the formation of what revolutionary elites conceived as a New World empire.

The formation of the American state is necessarily a history of the formation of a type of empire-state entirely new in the annals of world history. Indeed, as one historian argues, “The Atlantic World was defined by states but colonized by empires,” and this applies to the United States as much as any other Euro-American power.²³ Indeed, the Constitution ensured that the former American colonies would become more than a mere confederation of individual states. As legal scholars and legal historians have recently noted, the founders’ national charter laid a firm but also flexible and somewhat ambiguous foundation for the territorial expansion of the American state.²⁴ By ensuring central taxation through tariffs, by enabling the creation of a central army, by freeing interstate commerce and regulating trade through common tariffs, and by developing a process by which territories could gain statehood, the Constitution enabled American citizens of all classes to eventually partake in the benefits of empire.

Indeed, the majority of Boston’s artisans and tradesmen supported the Federalists in the creation and ratification of the Constitution. They saw no contradiction between the imperial nature of the document and their republican principles. They seemed keenly

²³ Elizabeth Mancke, “Empire and State” in David Armitage and Michael J. Bradick, eds., *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (New York, 2002), 175.

²⁴ Gary Lawson and Guy Seidman, *The Constitution of Empire: Territorial Expansion and American Legal History* (New Haven, 2004); James G. Wilson, *The Imperial Republic: A Structural History of American Constitutionalism from the Colonial Era to the Beginning of the Twentieth Century* (Burlington, 2002).

interested in protecting domestic manufacturers against the flood of cheap British imports then causing economic havoc and agrarian unrest in western Massachusetts. But Boston artisans did not support anti-federalists or rebels led by revolutionary veteran Daniel Shays.²⁵ These “mechanics” in fact were a sizeable element in America’s first celebration of the ratification of the constitution by the convention. On February 8, 1788, this parade, arguably the first labor-organized parade in American history, included nearly 90 percent of Boston’s 1,250 master artisans.²⁶ The new nation was more than the sum of its parts precisely for the reason that the national constitution allowed for *more*—more prosperity and more land—to be enjoyed by white male citizens of all occupations and social classes.

As urban and rural America experienced a slow but steady transition to modern capitalism, the political culture of artisanal republicanism that infused working-class political culture in Boston in the late eighteenth century came under increasing stress.²⁷ Many aging veterans, Hewes among them, began to actively press the federal and state governments for financial support. Beginning in 1818 with the passage of the Pension Act, American veterans for the first time applied to the state for financial support they believed they had earned through military service—no small matter for men who prized manly and virtuous independence.²⁸ Although many states gave soldiers small land grants, sometimes in lieu of pay or bounties, most poor veterans did not receive even a

²⁵ Various social factors, including class status but also kinship and locality, influenced individual support or opposition to Shay’s Rebellion; see David Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, 1980), and Leonard Richards, *Shays’s Rebellion: The American Revolution’s Last Battle* (Philadelphia, 2002).

²⁶ Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, 128; Waldstreicher, 90.

²⁷ Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York, 1991).

²⁸ John Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (Amherst, 1999).

pittance for their service. In Maine, part of the new American empire's New England frontier, thousands of revolutionary war veterans were forced to squat on small pieces of enormous land-grant properties, owned by the great proprietors of Boston.²⁹

Perhaps most important, the political economy of the Jeffersonian period fostered increasing tensions in urban centers between both master artisans and journeymen, and between those who identified as "producers" and local commercial and financial elites.³⁰ As conflict revealed subterranean tensions lurking just beneath the social surface, citizens of all classes laid claim to a common revolutionary heritage. Amidst strikes and the formation of the first citywide trade unions in the United States, political discourse in Boston started to bifurcate along divisions inevitably engendered by a maturing and expansionist capitalist society.

THE WAGES OF WESTWARD EXPANSION: LABOR AND CITIZENSHIP IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC AND ANTEBELLUM BOSTON

In the years immediately before and after the Civil War, most Boston workers seemed to benefit from the expansionist capitalist political economy then altering the United States. While some artisans, tradesmen and laborers joined the nation's earliest trade unions in order to defend themselves against the most deleterious effects of the capitalist market and capitalist production, opposition to a highly expansionist capitalist political economy did not materialize. A vocal and growing minority of white male

²⁹ Alan Taylor, *The Liberty Men and the Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1990).

³⁰ Howard Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 1979); and Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (Oxford, 2004).

Yankee workers actively opposed slavery in the antebellum period, in part because of slavery's westward expansion across the continent. But these workers hoped only to contain southern forms of American expansion. Anti-slavery agitators opposed slavery because it degraded free labor and forced virtuous free labor to compete with slaveholding southern whites for western lands.

By and large, however, Boston's Yankee workers seemed more interested in promoting federal and state policies that fostered and protected American commerce and manufacturing than in supporting and subsidizing territorial acquisition in the West and South. Boston's working class never mounted serious opposition to the expansion and reproduction of a northern polity and economy riven with class, racial and gender divisions in western lands that had already been claimed by other populations, cultures and states. And they often believed themselves to be stakeholders and beneficiaries of the westward expansion of a northern free labor society. "An empire," historian Charles S. Maier notes, "is not just a state that subjugates other peoples or states...."

It is a system of rule that transforms society at home even as it stabilizes inequality transnationally by replicating it geographically, in the core and on the periphery. In return it promises to make even the materially disadvantaged in the core stakeholders, often enthusiastic ones, in the imperial project. It enlarges territory or decisive influence to ensure its own new political order, and then it must defend the contested boundaries it has extended to avoid discrediting the expansion previously attained."³¹

Boston's white male workers exhibited an acute consciousness of their stakeholder status in the American empire, but they did so primarily in political terms. As citizens of an expanding New World republic, Yankee workers celebrated the

³¹ Charles S. Maier, *Among Empires*, 20-21.

workingman's franchise and availed themselves of precious opportunities for participating in local, state and federal elections—precious if only because they understood that workers in England, France and other European societies lacked the ballot. But the Yankee ballot box was not the coffin of class consciousness, as some historians have maintained.³² Workers' support for the Democratic-Republicans, Whigs, Democrats and later the Liberty, Free Soil, American and Republican parties was always accented with considerable consciousness of class identity and class difference. The antebellum period also witnessed a plethora of third parties, through which dissatisfied workers created cross-class alliances with members of a growing and increasingly self-conscious middle class, and sought (and sometimes won) meaningful social and political reforms.³³

Undeniably, differences based on race and ethnicity, gender, and religious affiliation often blunted or inflated the significance of class in local politics. But Boston's workers believed that their ability to produce wealth through free labor in an expansionist New World republic endowed them with a special kind of virtue absent in the non-producing classes. As the liberal values and institutions of the market revolution gradually eroded the vestiges of republicanism, working-class political culture was challenged by an expansionist political economy that often displayed anti-republican attributes and outcomes.

In the 1790s and the following two decades of Jeffersonian rule, Boston's workers exhibited an increasingly class-conscious national and internationalist republicanism. Boston's workers celebrated the benefits and sometimes opposed the costs of citizenship in an expansionist American republic in a variety of ways. As citizens of a virtuous

³² Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, 2000).

³³ Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (Cambridge, 2005).

republican nation, artisans and tradesmen of the Bay State capital participated in a number of public rituals of nationhood. Although important to the reproduction of a national political culture, the parades, festivals and other ritual collective forms of activity are meaningful because of their political cultural content.³⁴

At times, working-class republicanism in Boston in the early Republic was more than nationalist: it was internationalist and inclusive. Artisans and laborers dominated the demonstrations of January 24, 1793, the largest public political event in Boston of the decade, in which the entire city celebrated the French revolutionary republic's victory over the Prussian army at Valmy. Yet, this event reflected the development of partisanship partially based in the differing emergent class cultures. Organized by local Democratic-Republican leaders who invited men from "all classes and persons without discrimination" and promised that social rank would be "abolished by the title of Citizens," seven hundred of Boston's citizens paraded behind French and American flags. The event marked the first parade route through both the northern and southern working-class neighborhoods of Boston.³⁵

The manifestation displayed other unmistakably anti-Federalist features, including a disruption of the racialized and gendered norms of white male republican citizenship, when women and black spectators spontaneously joined the pro-French procession at the rear. Federalists recoiled at these cultural transgressions, in which black seamen joined white seamen to foist a liberty pole and the "cit" joined the "citess," all without

³⁴ David Waldstreicher emphasizes on the contrary nationalist rituals as practices that situated the content of nationalism in the early republic; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 3-14.

³⁵ Quoted in Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997), 122-130.

demonstrating proper deference for local elites and their social norms.³⁶ The divisions within Boston between Federalist elites and growing numbers of pro-Democratic-Republican artisans only increased during the Jay Treaty crisis. Boston artisans, dependent on commerce and now forced to compete on unfavorable terms with British imports, protested the treaty's consequences for trade and its failure to stop the British navy's marauding press gangs.³⁷

But the Jeffersonian period marked not only the rejection of social deference by artisans antipathetic to Old World and New World aristocracy. These years also witnessed a degree of artisan participation in politics that made citizenship in a republican empire meaningful. Although property requirements for voting existed well into the nineteenth century and clearly excluded some white men in Massachusetts towns, the vast majority were included in the franchise.³⁸ In 1784 and 1792, Boston's artisans and laborers rallied to defend the town meetings in which they had participated against proposals to establish a municipal city government.³⁹ During the Jefferson and Madison administrations, many Bay State workers swung solidly behind Federalists in their opposition to the Embargo and War of 1812 as policies injurious to domestic manufactures, and many Boston workers supported the anti-southern, anti-expansionist pronouncements of their local Federalist senator and tribune, Josiah Quincy. No matter their political loyalties, Boston's white male workers took advantage of the franchise for

³⁶ Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 122-130.

³⁷ Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst, 2006), esp. 73-75.

³⁸ Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Parties, 1790s-1840s* (New York, 1983), 140-143.

³⁹ Newman, 126.

brief periods before the rise of the mass parties in the 1830s and 1840s. During the embargo crisis and the war of 1812, many Boston artisans, soon thereafter named “the middling interest,” participated in local, state and federal elections.⁴⁰

Declining voter participation in the late 1810s and throughout the 1820s, however, did not represent a lack of political activity. Rather, non-elite political activity took the form of social movements. Republican artisans and other non-elite Federalists of the middling interest pressured the city and state to move representational elections from Faneuil Hall to the ward level, and repealed a law banning construction of easily combustible and cheap “ten-footer” housing typical of artisans’ homes.⁴¹ The debtors’ crises that followed the 1819 panic, a rather difficult issue for local Federalist elites, also caused considerable agitation among Boston’s poor, laborers and artisans.

Boston workers also launched petition campaigns for an end to mandatory militia duty. Although the militias had been cross-class institutions through which local elites had recruited political supporters, the popularity of mandatory militia service waned during the highly unpopular embargo and war. Massachusetts males were forced to pay for their arms and equipment, obey commands from elite officers, and spend time away from precious work. On the other hand, clergy, doctors, schoolmasters, students, and public servants enjoyed exemption from militia duty and the high fees others were required to secure exemption.⁴² “[T]he laborer, whose daily tasks suppl[y] but a pitiful morsel for the support of his family, is called upon for the same sum as the nabob who is

⁴⁰ Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture*.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 181-187.

⁴² Matthew H. Crocker, *The Magic of the Many: Josiah Quincy and the Rise of Mass Politics, 1800-1830* (Amherst, 1999), 24-28.

worth million[s],” cried Joseph Buckingham, printer and publisher of Boston’s *Galaxy*. “He is driven from his employment, and trained to the use of arms [and] for the defence of what? Of nothing that he can call his own—of the palace and treasures of his rich neighbor.”⁴³

Josiah Quincy, by now somewhat independent from his Federalist allies, also appealed to the anti-militia clamors of Boston’s laboring base. In an 1820 speech to the Massachusetts Peace Society, Quincy worried that poverty and the militarism engendered by the militia laws would compel unending war. Why should the poor not go to war, Quincy asked, when they “go...to war beggars, [and] return from it nabobs.” The entrenched militia system made war “no longer...a matter of blood, but a matter of business.”⁴⁴ In 1823, Quincy rode a cresting wave of insurgent populism into the mayor’s office. For the next five and a half years he served as tribune of Boston’s burgeoning middling interest, and nag to Boston’s old Federalist elite. According to one historian, Quincy’s term marked three decades, beginning in 1800, in which “ordinary Bostonians shook off the established political culture, forced further democratization, weathered a populist Caesarist, and in the end established an advanced and more inclusive democracy.”⁴⁵

Nevertheless, as the market revolution penetrated and revolutionized the old social system and political economy, Boston’s political culture became increasingly bifurcated along lines of class and culture. Emerging from the anti-elitist currents of the anti-masonry ferment and Jacksonian National Republican party, the Workingmen’s

⁴³ Quoted in Crocker, *The Magic of the Many*, 28.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Crocker, 84.

⁴⁵ Crocker, 163.

movement and Workingmen's party in 1830's Boston signified the end of a Yankee society based on social and political deference. In August, 1830, following an unsuccessful strike by carpenters and masons, local mechanics met in Julien Hall and declared support for various reforms that included an end to debt imprisonment and monopolies, liberal and more diffuse education, the elimination of religion from politics, and militia reforms.

The political factions that supported Workingmen's candidates (who themselves were often not artisans or mechanics but local men from the growing middle class) were only partially related to the much larger labor reform movements in Boston and throughout the Bay State's industrial centers. These men and women agitated tirelessly for a ten-hour working day, a call that continued to reverberate well into the 1840s, especially in cities like Lowell and Lynn. In 1834, workers formed the Boston Trades Union, central body of sixteen different craft unions, to coordinate strike activity and reform efforts. On July 4, the BTU organized an autonomous Independence Day parade of two thousand union members. In July, 1835, Boston's journeymen carpenters attempted a strike against local masters and merchants for a ten-hour workday, the third such strike in eight years.⁴⁶ Seth Luther, an early labor organizer and radical, expressed the working-class republicanism of the movement when he wrote that the carpenters believed that "no man or body of men who require such excessive labor can be friends to the country or the Rights of Man. We also say, that we have rights, and we have duties to perform as American Citizens...which forbid us to dispose of more than Ten Hours for a day's work."⁴⁷ Republican citizenship could further social reforms but did not alone

⁴⁶ Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture*, 222-236.

guarantee these workers victory. The strike was crushed by employer opposition, and Boston labor protest dissolved in the wake of the 1837 depression.

If the market revolution challenged the economic foundations of Boston workers' sense of republican citizenship, immigration also challenged its racial and ethnic dimensions. Although the city's small population of German and other central Europeans in the antebellum period seemed to cause little havoc, the presence of thousands of Irish Catholics who migrated to escape the ravages of British colonialism visited considerable strain on Boston's social and cultural order. The destruction of Charlestown's Ursuline Convent in 1834 is perhaps only the most extreme event indicating the resentment encountered by the Irish. These resentments, furthered by the massive immigration provoked by the potato famine, politically crystallized in the nativism of the American Party (the "Know-Nothings") and in elements of the new Massachusetts Republican Party after its founding in 1854. But Irish community leaders managed to win a modicum of power through the Democratic Party and through their own educational and religious institutions.⁴⁸ But the interrelated questions of slavery and westward expansion struck at the very heart of Boston's working-class political culture of republican citizenship.

There is some evidence to suggest that Boston's workers joined middle-class reformers and Yankee elites in opposing the United States' invasion of Mexico in 1846. It should be remembered that Massachusetts Senator John Davis cast one of two negative votes against the war, Governor George Briggs granted commissions only to those officers who agreed not to serve outside of the commonwealth, and the state legislature

⁴⁷ Quoted in Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture*, 236-237.

⁴⁸ Thomas O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston, 1995).

urged the Christian and patriotic citizens of Massachusetts to actively oppose the war.⁴⁹ Middle-class anti-slavery activists like Theodore Parker also agitated against the invasion as an anti-republican scheme of the slave power, often at great bodily risk (Parker was nearly bayoneted in Faneuil Hall by nearby soldiers), even though he and other anti-war figures considered the Mexicans to be a race unworthy of joining the northern republic.⁵⁰ Even those assembled at a New England Working People's Association meeting in Lynn in January, 1846, denounced the Mexican war for extending slavery, the first recorded instance of an anti-slavery position in any labor organization in the United States.⁵¹

Yet, the NEWA's anti-war position statement did not represent the views of all Massachusetts workers. Working-class popular culture of the period was inundated with images and representations easily reconcilable with elite notions of manifest destiny.⁵² Irish working-class immigrants in particular seized enlistment as an opportunity to prove their loyalty to their adopted nation, and hoped to prove their capacities for citizenship in an expansionist republic through military service. Significantly, workers and farmers throughout the state supported the National Reform movement of George Henry Evans and other land reformers who sought to prevent slaveholders and non-producing speculators from securing western lands at the expense of free-labor homesteaders and producers.⁵³

⁴⁹ Thomas O'Connor, *Fitzpatrick's Boston, 1846-1866: John Bernard Fitzpatrick, Third Bishop of Boston* (Boston, 1984), 64-65.

⁵⁰ Streeby, *American Sensations*, 169.

⁵¹ Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 145-146.

⁵² Streeby, *American Sensations*.

⁵³ Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800-1862* (Stanford, 1999), 173-185.

Indeed, the ideology of the Republican Party, whose leadership would lead the North into a civil war, found root in a social base of white free-laborers committed to containing slavery's westward advance. In Massachusetts, working-class nativist support for the Republicans waxed and waned quickly with the infamous dispute over the two-year naturalization law controversy in the late 1850s, and the question of slavery quickly returned to the center of state politics. Although the largely middle-class organizers of the Liberty and Free Soil parties were instrumental in winning local and state civil rights for Bay State African-Americans, it should be noted that workers and trades unionists were also part of the political wing of the anti-slavery movement that formed the factions and third-party coalitions that preceded the Republican Party. Massachusetts whites of all classes within the anti-slavery camp ranged in their racial views from a soft paternalism to a rigid, exclusionist racism.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the history of Massachusetts and Boston do not seem to vindicate the conclusions of historians who have recently contended that northern working-class "whiteness" functioned as the primary obstacle to working class solidarity.⁵⁵

The experience of the Civil War reinforced a cross-class regional and national identity. Even while wartime policies and hardships exposed the widening class divide between a growing class of wage-earners and industrial and financial elites, the war served as a crucible of working-class nationalism crucial to the military and political

⁵⁴ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (London, 1970), 250-253; Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*.

⁵⁵ See David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the Working Class* (London, 1991), and Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London, 1995).

strength of an expansionist federal government.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, as the conditions for rapid capitalist industrialization created by the Civil War triggered explosive social strife in the Gilded Age, it became increasingly clear to both workers and elites that the United States had become something other than the nation of small-scale and independent republican producers which so many artisan revolutionaries had hoped to establish a century ago.

⁵⁶ David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (Chicago, 1981); Richard F. Bensel, *Yankee Leviathan: The Origins of Central State Authority in America, 1859-1877* (Cambridge, 1990); Thomas H. O'Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston, 1997).

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL ORIGINS OF THE NEW EMPIRE: CONTENDING CLASSES AND POLITICAL ECONOMY IN GILDED AGE BOSTON

“The masters of industry, who control interests which represent billions of dollars, do not admit that they have broken with pioneer ideals. They regard themselves as pioneers under changed conditions, carrying on the old work of developing the natural resources of the nation....

Two ideals were fundamental in traditional American thought, ideals that developed in the pioneer era. One was that of individual freedom to compete unrestrictedly for the resources of a continent—the squatter ideal. To the pioneer government was an evil. The other was the ideal of democracy—“government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” The operation of these ideals took place contemporaneously with the passing into private possession of the free public domain and the natural resources of the United States. But American democracy was based on abundance of free lands; these were the very conditions that shaped its growth and its fundamental traits. Thus time has revealed that these two ideals of pioneer democracy had elements of mutual hostility and contained the seeds of its dissolution.”¹

The great and often violent social transformation of America in the thirty-five years after the Civil War also contributed to the transformation of working-class political culture. Many workers, especially northern white and Protestant Anglo-Saxon workers, had long maintained a virile identification with the republicanism of the Revolution and its traditional values of manly virtue and independence. Yet, the liberal restructuring of the American economy and political economy eroded the republican roots of nineteenth century northern working-class political culture.

Industrial workers responded to the expansionist, monopoly capitalist economy and political economy of the age with their own popular conceptions of political economy. Sometimes joined by farmers and middle-class allies, industrial workers

¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, “Social Forces in American History,” (1910), reprinted in Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*, 127.

pressured the Republican and Democratic parties, formed their own independent local, state, and national parties, and organized trade unions and radical associations in order to assert and implement their alternative vision. Their response to the chronic recessions and depressions of the 1880's and 1890's spread panic within the exclusive circles of elite political and economic decision-makers. Elite reaction to social and political crisis in turn inexorably contributed to the United States' intervention in an inter-imperial conflict to its south in the Caribbean, and to the west, in the Pacific, and the creation of a qualitatively new kind of American empire.

Cultural historians of America have recently stressed the continuity of empire throughout the history of the United States, from its colonial beginnings as an assortment of British trading and religious settlements to more recent interventions in the Middle East. Although claims for continuity focuses our attention upon trends of imperial expansion and a pervasive culture of empire too often neglected by dominant narratives, the historical record substantiates claims for continuity almost entirely in terms of culture and cultural representations. Because cultural histories of empire often ignore questions of class and social structure, such considerations hardly enter calculations of continuity or discontinuity in American empire. Nevertheless, the lived experience of individuals in a society divided not only by culture, race, and gender, but also class, shaped the ways in which individuals and groups viewed questions of empire and expansion, nation and citizenship, and their relation to the political economy as a whole.

If one analyzes the history of American empire not merely as a cultural phenomenon but also as a relationship between class, foreign policy, and politics and political economy, the history of American empire seems quite different. From a

“bottom-up” social perspective, U.S. acquisition of Hawaii and domination of Cuba and the Philippines constitutes a significant departure in American history. This departure is not merely a matter of the creation of a modern military and administrative state, nor is it defined only by greater U.S. integration in world labor and export markets.² No longer able to rely on ample western lands to preserve their republican independence, manliness, and virtue, workers faced an expansionist foreign policy and political economy which, it was alleged, no longer provided homestead acres for free labor and free farmers, but open markets for American exports and the exploitation of precious raw materials overseas. While some industrialists, financiers, and farmers supported overseas economic and political expansion as a means to settling the simmering social, economic and political crises gripping the country in the 1890s, many workers and trade unionists detected private-minded motives lurking behind a new kind of overseas, militarized American expansion, and worried that it threatened their traditional republican notions of citizenship. Many in the labor movement also feared that the new empire would unleash waves of immigration, thereby introducing fatally competitive cheap labor that lowered living standards unfit for white republican workers and their families.

However, a few individuals within the working-class movement, including Morrison I. Swift, began to express a critique of American society that posited a qualitatively new and different form of citizenship and political economy. The alternative economy, society and polity they envisioned for America de-linked production, consumption and prosperity from expansion and empire. Before workers and working-class organizers and intellectuals criticized American empire at the end of the century,

² Jacoboson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 6-7.

however, they first offered an alternative vision of American economic and political life that, at its very center, emphasized an egalitarian redistribution of wealth and political power—a way of life requiring not the further acquisition of territories and their precious resources, but the reorganization of production, consumption and distribution, and the polity.

MORRISON I. SWIFT AND THE PROBLEMS OF A NEW LIFE

If Morrison Isaac Swift became one of the first American radicals to identify and critique an American political economy of empire, his origins seemed to prepare him for a less unorthodox legacy. Born in the Midwest, Swift was raised in the traditional culture of New England, and his migration to Boston in 1890 virtually represents the return of a prodigal son of Yankeeedom.³

His parents had named Swift after a paternal grandfather, Isaac, born in 1790 in Connecticut and fathered by a revolutionary war veteran and doctor. Thrust into the world by his parents' early death, Isaac Swift studied medicine in New York before he emigrated westward. Finally settling in Ravenna, Ohio, he married, started a successful practice, opened the town's first drug store, and quickly became a prominent member of the community. He organized the First Congregational Church, became county treasurer, and was appointed to an associate judgeship. His son Charles, father to Morrison, also became a doctor. Isaac Swift's other son, Henry, adopted his father's political interests, but died tragically a few months after being elected governor of Minnesota in the late 1850's.⁴

³ On antebellum "Yankee" political identity and culture, see Laurie, *Beyond Garrison*, 102-105.

While Morrison did not initially seem to share his family's vocation in business, politics or religion, he certainly thrived in school. His parents, Charles and Emily Folger, married in 1851. After living for a time on Nantucket Island in Massachusetts, they moved to Ravenna, where Morrison was born in 1856, and later to Ashtabula, Ohio. High school prepared young Morrison for college and, in 1875, he enrolled at Western Reserve College (now Case Western). In 1877, for reasons unknown, Swift transferred to Williams College, a small liberal arts institution in western Massachusetts. There he launched an academic career of considerable promise. Swift consistently maintained a high rank, and the college president at the time remembered him as an earnest, diligent and faithful student. His peers recalled his talents as an eloquent and persuasive speaker and leader in clubs and fraternities. In his final year at Williams, Swift edited the student newspaper and delivered a commencement address. Although his Williams colleagues remembered him as an ardent Congregationalist, idealist, and Republican supporter of free-trade economics, his later education, both on and off campus, moved young Morrison in another direction.⁵

By all indications, Swift might have secured a professorial position in one of America's elite universities. In 1879, he began studies for a Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins University; in his first year he studied Greek poetry and philosophy. In 1880, Swift completed an essay on the ethics of Herbert Spenser and Immanuel Kant which earned him a fellowship. Now tutored by scholars including philosopher Charles Santiago Pierce and historian Herbert Baxter Adams, Swift soon took interest in philosophy's relevance

⁴ Lawrence Stone, "The Anatomy of an American Radical: Morrison Isaac Swift—A Biography," Undergraduate Thesis, 1980, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections Department, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, 1-2.

⁵ Stone, "Anatomy of an American Radical," 1-4.

to contemporary society. Adams' social-biological "Teutonic germ theory" of American political development, in which he argued that American liberalism and democracy had sprouted from an English (and earlier German) seed planted in New England, must have influenced Swift greatly, as we will later see. Although he briefly taught philosophy at Hobart College, Swift returned to Johns Hopkins, which in 1885 awarded a Ph.D. for a dissertation on "The Ethics of Idealism, as Represented by Hegel and Aristotle." For the next year Swift continued his studies at the University of Berlin, but returned to America in 1886.⁶

Swift now began a journey that ultimately led him to spurn life in the academy for the privations of the American urban poor and the working-class. As a young middle-class intellectual and social worker in various cities in the urban industrial northeast, Swift plunged into the ferment of radical Gilded Age social reform. Yet, Swift's experience with urban middle-class reform clearly troubled his expanding radical sensibilities.

In his first four years of settlement work, Swift committed himself to uniting middle-class and working-class reformers through educational programs in poor and working-class neighborhoods. In the winter of 1887 and 1888, he worked for a settlement house in Philadelphia and collaborated with Adams in efforts to introduce into American settlements the university extension practices of English working-class educational reformers. In 1889, he moved to New York's Lower East Side to live and work in the first settlement house in the United States, the Neighborhood Guild, founded by Stanton Coit, an Amherst College graduate who learned the English model while in residence at

⁶ Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988), 87-88; Stone., 4-6.

Toynbee Hall.⁷ In 1890, Swift returned to Philadelphia and founded a Neighborhood Guild. Later that year, he moved to Boston for the first time to found the Equity Union, another progressive settlement house.⁸ Swift hoped to improve on older settlement models by adopting English practices including weekly lectures by professors, students, and political organizers. Although he conceded that light entertainments and social occasions were more likely to attract workers exhausted at the end of the day, Swift seemed most interested in offering a social education to urban workers.

Swift consistently organized an ecumenical lecture series in each of the settlements where he worked. In New York, his “Social Science Club” hosted an impressive roster of speakers, although some clearly reflected the middle-class orientation of his politics. Lawrence Gronlund, author of *The Cooperative Commonwealth*, a primer on Marx and socialism published in 1884, reassured his audience that socialism would not abolish human individuality. Professor Felix Adler of the Society for Ethical Culture advocated an ethical solution to America’s social problems, and another Professor, Richmond M. Smith of Columbia College, addressed immigration. Other speakers, including a union printer, lawyers, college students, editors, and Swift himself, discussed strikes, trusts, settlements, taxation, and anarchism.⁹ Like many middle-class reformers of his time, Swift hoped that his urban “social university”

⁷ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, 1998), 64.

⁸ Stone, 7-8.

⁹ Morrison I. Swift, *The Working Population of Cities, and What the Universities Owe Them* (Philadelphia: 1890), 12-13 (originally published in the *Andover Review*, June, 1890). For more on Gronlund, see Howard H. Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism: Origins of the Modern Movement* (New York, 1953), 28-30.

would provide a “middle-ground” for “social fusion” that would dissipate class distinctions and class consciousness.¹⁰

Yet Swift’s frustrations with the settlement approach seethed through the pages of his writings on these projects. Clearly, his *noblesse oblige* and cultural elitism remained an obstacle, despite his obvious sympathy for the oppressed and his disdain for charity. “The wage class, the masses, may somewhat shock our taste,” warned Swift,

“but had they not for generations and centuries devoted themselves to severe and uncouth lives the higher taste that they shock in us would never have been developed in us. We owe them something. We owe them an immense, an unspeakable debt. . . . Since the masses have made taste and comfort possible to us, our debt is to turn and make taste and comfort possible to the masses. . . . In making culture and taste and comfort possible for us they may have sacrificed not only culture but the power to desire culture. . . . In the way least harsh and offensive we must extend to the masses the comeliness and the desire for comeliness which in the world’s evolution they have been temporarily deprived of for our sakes.”¹¹

Despite this condescension, Swift carefully distinguished the “philanthropy” of social settlements from religious charities or relief, struggling to define ways in which middle-class reformers could act in solidarity with workers and the poor. Swift decried temperance, means-testing, and proselytizing, urging instead conversation, common labor and friendship between staff and workers. But Swift admitted that this progressive approach did not always successfully elicit participation and approval or urban workers.

Reflecting on his time in New York, Swift acknowledged that local working-class leaders regarded experiments like his Social Science Club as programs of the “well-to-do,” “palliatives” which did not address the root cause of inequality. Skilled workers, he

¹⁰ Morrison I. Swift, *The Plan of a Social University* (Ashtabula, 1891), 8.

¹¹ Swift, *The Plan of a Social University*, 27.

complained, told him “they could accomplish more for the cause at the hearts by intensifying class feeling.”¹² His efforts in Philadelphia seemed quickly reversed when he established his university extension project in a building owned by the Baldwin Locomotive Works. Baldwin employees disapproved of such welfarist schemes; Swift noted they were “prejudiced against it because they regarded it as a charity,” and worried it would force them “to pay in more work or less wages.” Nevertheless, Swift affirmed the value of university extension and praised Baldwin and other firms for their support.¹³ Swift later alleged that this project faltered only when wealthy members of the board of directors interfered with the Guild workers’ educational programs, causing them to quit.¹⁴

Swift almost certainly acquired his socialist politics through these middle-class values and pretensions. Although he hailed his “social university” as a means to “mass emancipation,” Swift first seemed more interested in educational reform as a way to extend the good life than as a strategy to spread socialist ideas and practice. Indeed, Swift appeared absolutely naïve about possible obstacles to building cross-class alliances. In 1889, in a lecture to the Nationalist club of Oakland, California, Swift appealed to the middle-class socialists in the audience to reach out to the struggling workers below.

The Nationalists, whose ranks were filled mostly by professionals, the educated, and, in Boston, military retirees attracted to Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward*, could unite with the upper echelons of labor. “I have noticed how certain thrifty workingmen itch for the condescending approval and friendship of their social superiors,” Swift assured the Oakland Nationalists. “They will not join labor organizations for fear of the

¹² Swift, *The Working Population of Cities*, 11-12

¹³ Swift, *The Plan of a Social University*, 14.

¹⁴ *Boston Herald*, February 21, 1894.

cold shoulder from this quarter and make themselves great impediments to the industrial emancipation.” But Nationalists, he argued, could recruit these workers into the Knights of Labor and other trade unions. In addition, he urged the Nationalists to investigate stores and factories with poor working conditions and call boycotts and use other forms of public pressure to force improvements, anticipating the strategy of organizations like the National Consumers League.¹⁵ Swift hardly realized that the middle-class and bureaucratic sort of socialism advocated by the Nationalists and their Fabian cousins in England had marginal appeal for working men and women whom the Nationalists, he suggested, should “rescue.”¹⁶

Swift carried his reform message beyond the urban middle-class, however. In 1890, he returned to Ashtabula, Ohio, and continued to write and speak to a variety of audiences. In January, 1891, in the midst of the agrarian crisis then sparking populist agitation, Swift addressed local Ashtabula farmers. He began by making a startling observation that struck at the very core of American republican ideals. “It is a mistake of the American people to think they have departed far from European traditions,” Swift said. “Our revolution freed our purses from English taxation, but it did not free our minds from English ideas.” Aristocracy had planted itself in American soil, Swift maintained. Plentiful lands that once seemed to assure a rough social equality were exhausted, and farmers everywhere had become impoverished.

¹⁵ Morrison I. Swift, *Problems of the New Life* (Ashtabula, 1891), 86-87; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven, 1995), 309-311.

¹⁶ Arthur Lipow, *Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement* (Berkeley, 1982); Swift, *Problems of the New Life*, 87.

But now Swift seemed to root his socialist beliefs not in fears of class antagonism or an attempt to bring culture to the working class, but in a labor theory of value that defined capitalism as a system of organized robbery. The railroads, the trusts, retailers and banks had all combined to rob the farmer of the wealth produced by his arduous labors. Swift suggested utilization of the ballot to secure nationalization of transportation, manufacturing, cooperative stores land and state ownership of banking and credit. These were the only remedies for the dire situation facing farmers and industrial workers. “It is a conflict between capitalists and citizens,” Swift thundered. “If the capitalists survive the citizens will not survive, for citizenship is not possible without independence, and combined capital leaves no chance for that.”¹⁷

The once-promising son of society’s middle ranks now happily reconciled himself to the possibility of social revolution and prepared to abandon his class for that of the workers and poor. Swift the social reformer, who only recently had advocated a gentle “social fusion” of the classes, now endorsed a violent social war, such as the French Revolution, as a necessary last resort to enact fundamental social transformation. “There will be no peace on earth until inequality is abolished, and there should be no peace,” warned Swift. “If equality must be bought by bloodshed, let us have bloodshed; let us have riots and rebellions and violent revolutions, *if necessary*.”¹⁸ Yet Swift had not entirely lost hope in independent politics as a means for reform, as his activities in Boston during the coming depression indicated. Nor did he lose his optimism that the social question might be settled without wholesale class warfare.

¹⁷ Swift, *Problems of the New Life*, 103-110.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

His first attempt at fiction, *The League of Justice; Or, Is it Right to Rob Robbers?* (1893), signaled a residual faith in a peaceful resolution to America's growing social divide. Although a convoluted plot and awkward prose marred the story, Swift centered it around a secret society of clerks who chisel dividends from their employers and distribute the stolen surplus value to the needy. Although his League protagonists gradually organize newspapers, cooperatives, schools, and clubs, their detection brings a trial and a final armed confrontation between the League, worker and farmer supporters, and the president and his capitalist and banker cohorts. Magically, the vastly outnumbered elite realize the hopelessness of their cause, capitulate to the masses, and recognize the error of their ways.¹⁹ Although such a cheeky ending must have invited dismissal from skeptical readers, *The League of Justice* marked Swift's abandonment of middle-class social reform for a politics of social citizenship and redistributive political economy.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE UNEMPLOYED

Between 1891 and 1893, Swift spent fourteen months in England, Switzerland and Berlin (doing what is unclear), but in 1893, upon returning to Boston and the Equity Union, he found fertile soil in which to reap the seeds of social discontent.²⁰ The massive depression that ensued in the summer of 1893 wreaked havoc on the urban working class and poor in states across the country, including Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics did not collect unemployment data for 1893, but the data for the census for the year ending May 1, 1895, indicated severe levels of unemployment that rivaled those of the Great Depression forty years later. Although only 8 to 10 percent of

¹⁹ Morrison I. Swift, *The League of Justice; Or, Is it Right to Rob the Robbers?* (Boston, 1893).

²⁰ *Boston Herald*, February 21, 1894.

Massachusetts' labor force was unemployed at any one time that year, nearly 30 percent were unemployed, for an average of more than three months, during that census year. The frequency of unemployment was undoubtedly even higher in late 1893 and early 1894. In 1895, Boston's building trades workers still reported extraordinary levels of unemployment. That year in the city, 36 percent of carpenters, 55 percent of brick masons and 44 percent of stone masons, and 45 percent of house painters experienced joblessness for an average of four months.²¹ These workers, many of whom were already members of AFL craft unions, probably fared better than most unorganized workers.

Witnessing the specter of deprivation and misery daily on the streets outside the Oak Street offices of the Equity Union, Swift sought to instruct Boston's unemployed workers on the cause of their condition. A pamphlet published on New Year's Day, 1894, suggested that a grossly unequal distribution of wealth was the cause of the unemployment. Swift assured his readers that even Edward Atkinson, an eccentric advocate of free trade and dietary reform, inventor and innovator in industrial insurance, and Boston's most well-known political economist, claimed that America had never been wealthier. Swift, however, held individual capitalists responsible for the plight of the jobless. The wealthy and manufacturers had squandered an opportunity to provide work. They therefore lost any original social rights to their wealth and the means of production. "Ownership," Swift declared, "is abrogated."²²

Such a dire situation demanded an alternative political economy, in which American citizens assumed social rights to own and operate the nation's farms and

²¹ See Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics data in Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1986), 50-56, 314.

²² Morrison I. Swift, *Capitalists are the Cause of the Unemployed* (Boston, 1894), 4-5.

factories. Every American citizen, Swift asserted, had a right to employment.²³ “Who are you,” he asked the factory owner, “to decree like the Shah, or Czar, or Almighty Turk, that the children of millions of solid respectable American citizens shall go shivering though this winter planting consumption in their chests?” Fundamental rights to employment had been denied twice, only to be gained and regained in the American Revolution and the Civil War. But the late depression forever vitiated any claims the free labor doctrine made on defining economic and social realities. “*If a man is not free to labor when he wants to,*” Swift suggested emphatically, “*there is no freedom of labor!*”²⁴ Swift also condemned the Associated Charities and other relief organizations for failing to provide food, clothing and shelter to the majority of Boston’s unemployed workers and their families. He instead advocated road construction and repair, the construction of public housing and parks, and state farms. Indeed, the intense deprivation of the first “great depression” had caused Swift to root his social ideals in a concrete interest in political economy. Swift’s capacious social notion of citizenship and his proposals for public relief policies vividly illustrated the alternative social system he envisioned for Boston and America.

Whether or not all of Boston’s unemployed agreed with every aspect of his political program, Swift consistently attracted a significant number of the city’s jobless to a series of political demonstrations throughout the spring of 1894. In word and deed, Swift developed a symbolically potent repertoire of collective action in order to illustrate

²³ Swift’s interest in employment as a social right of citizenship cut against the grain of American notions of worker’s rights in the nineteenth-century; see David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market During the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. 13-51.

²⁴ Swift, *Capitalists are the Cause of the Unemployed*, 4, 8.

the plight of the unemployed and to make social demands of citizenship upon the state and federal governments.²⁵ The protests of Boston's unemployed focused workers' attention and activity towards a political economy based not an expanding polity or commercial system but on a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power.

The first demonstration, evidently sponsored by Swift and his colleagues at the Equity Union, and held on Boston Common in the early afternoon of February 6, closely followed the themes of Swift's pamphlet. Between 1,000 and 2,000 unemployed men (and a few women) including native-born workers but also numerous Italians, Jewish garment workers, and Irish immigrants, first listened to Swift. He endorsed government relief policies recently instituted in Belgium, and urged the audience to form a delegation to wait upon the state legislature and force them to enact similar measures. "It is time that citizens should lay down their absurd respectability, so called," said Swift, "and demand their rights if they are starving." Patrick F. O'Neil, a prominent member of the Boston local of the Socialist Labor Party, condemned the Republican and Democratic parties, to great applause. The Methodist Reverend Herbert N. Casson, also of the Equity Union, condemned charities for spying into workers' privacy before distributing relief. "I should advise that the workers put spies on the rich and find out how they obtained their wealth and how they live," Casson remarked. "Mrs. Merrifield" urged "obliteration of race prejudice in the common fight against capital," and James F. Carey, a shoe worker from Haverhill, former Populist and state SLP leader, also spoke. Swift, who apparently had sent a letter to Massachusetts Governor Frederick T. Greenhalge urging relief, read his reply, in which Greenhalge remonstrated that all municipal relief employment "should be

²⁵ See Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge, 1998).

so administered as to disturb as slightly as possible the conditions of the labor market in general, with the hope that more work may be forthcoming in the natural and regular way.” Then, led by three high school boys with fife and drum, the assembled marched past City Hall, the State House, and down Beacon Street and Commonwealth Avenue through Boston’s best neighborhoods, before returning to the Commons and disbanding.²⁶

Swift and his SLP colleagues continued to organize more protests at the Commons, despite the vicissitudes of winter weather. On February 13, the 250 unemployed in attendance approved a resolution urging the legislature to adopt a constitutional amendment recognizing a right to employment and mandating its provision by the state. The gathering marched to the State House to see the governor, whose absence prompted them to briefly visit the House and Senate galleries. After talking to two state legislators, Swift led the delegation back to the Commons, denounced the legislature as “the representatives of the capitalists and the monopolists,” and dissolved the meeting.²⁷

The agitation seemed to climax on February 20, when 2,500 assembled on the Commons for another march on the State House. Only Swift and Casson entered, but this time they returned with Governor Greenhalge, who nervously urged the crowd first to follow the law. He informed them that the state would provide work only if necessary, beneficial, and fundable, but promised to do whatever legally possible to create jobs. After the governor returned to his chambers, Swift, now armed with a petition with the

²⁶ *Boston Daily Globe*, February 7, 1894; *Boston Herald*, February 7, 1894; Henry F. Bedford, *Socialism and the Workers in Massachusetts, 1886-1912* (Amherst, 1966), 25, 44-45.

²⁷ *BDG*, February 14, 1894; *BH*, February 14, 1894.

usual demands for the House of Representatives, led the throng into Doric Hall. “We are going to present our petition to the House, and if the suggestions contained in the Governor’s speech are not carried out,” Swift threatened, “we’ll clean out every man in the Legislature.” This statement caused considerable consternation, and the Governor, now quite irate, demanded that Swift clarify that he meant “by the ballot.” At this, 50 police forced the crowd out of the building. Swift attempted to speak from the Grand Army of the Republic monument on the Commons, but forced off by the police, he addressed the jobless from the crotch of an elm. One reporter thought the crowd consisted mostly of Armenians, Polish, and Russian Jews, although he also spotted a few African-Americans, Irish and Germans. “We found out one thing this afternoon,” declared Swift. “It is that an employed workman is a part of the state, but that an unemployed man is not. When you lose a situation and don’t know where you can get something to eat, then you lose your citizenship in the United States.” But this time the protests seemed to have succeeded; a few friendly representatives persuaded the House to refer their petition to a special committee of seven legislators.²⁸

For Swift, the event obviously was a high point in his long career as a political organizer and agitator. He fictionalized the confrontation in a novel transparently modeled after Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. *The Horroboos* is narrated by a retired American adventurer, Colonel Fessenden Brady, who, aboard a European ocean-liner, recounts his long-ago journey into Africa as a missionary. In the course of his story, Colonel Brady is captured by a savage tribe, but manages to win the favor of his captors and begins to introduce Western civilization, namely capitalism and Christianity, to the African “Rinyo” culture. Brady soon finds himself the puppeteer behind the Rinyo king.

²⁸ *BG*, March 21, 1894.

When the King one day suddenly informs him that a gigantic leviathan is approaching the palace, Brady realizes that the beast is actually “a compact body of emaciated men,

“who sustained themselves on their feet by leaning together in a mass, the tottering weight of one side of the group propping up the other side, as two men tipping with drink support themselves by embracing each other when either alone would fall. Not much but bones and facial expressions remained of these wasted beings, while as to strength they retained none, or barely enough to stagger slowly forward. In number they were about four hundred and fifty altogether.

‘Have they smallpox, cholera, or what, that they frighten everybody so?’ I demanded, hoping the King might have recovered the power of a few syllables from his general paralysis.

‘Far worse,’ twitched he, his sublime teeth masticating themselves with the force of a mill, “it is Hunger! They are the superfluous population you cast out, returning for vengeance.”

The King, obviously representing Governor Greenhalge, begs Brady to meet the mob, but Brady reassures his subordinate:

‘Calm your fears, dry your tears, receive these dying emaciants with the mien of a sovereign, and try your best to hide from them and the populace that you are in mortal fear for your life. Quake as it were haughtily to deceive them.’

‘Oh! Oh!’ wailed His Sublimity, ‘go down and meet them for me, you have the armor of a thousand theories in your breast and I am naked.’

‘No my dear boy,’ I answered, ‘we must use finesse. The time has come for stratagem, and I will stand behind you with all the theories named. Listen to my instructions. Receive them with deep sympathy, assure them that you feel for them, promise all the help in your power, declare with blinks of sorrow that you will carefully examine the laws on the subject of allowing surplus men to eat surplus food, point out with gulps of woe that the Rinyo Constitution stands in the way of your doing anything for them that you do not want to do, and that our Congress of Ancient Quacks prohibits everything else; be solemn, majestic and slippery: then come away and we will kill them off one by one by delays. The imbecile multitude will think we mean what we say’....”²⁹

²⁹ Morrison I. Swift, *The Horroboos* (Boston, 1911), 97-99.

Swift clearly felt that his efforts had been deflected by clever politicians. But the protests, defended by Swift as “town meetings,” continued through April, and encouraged state legislators to immediately generate limited employment by funding more public works projects.³⁰ The House committee which received the petition formed a three-member Board to Investigate the Subject of the Unemployed, but their report, released the next year, recommended little other than expanded public works programs—even though it was unprecedented in its acknowledgement of unemployment as a permanent policy concern for state government.³¹ The House committee and the Board also held hearings. In Boston, AFL representatives advocated direct, non-contract state employment at union rates through state ownership of railroads and increased public works. But the AFL men refused to endorse the state farms, labor colonies or factories of Swift’s petitions. At several Boston Central Labor Union meetings Swift and Casson successfully garnered support from many local unions with unemployed members, and a majority of delegates at a March CLU meeting even seemed to favor Swift’s proposed socialist policies. But union leaders were reluctant to embrace measures that could be construed as socialist in nature.³²

Furthermore, while unions that probably contained large numbers of immigrant workers, including the Street Laborers union, felt that citizens should be allowed public employment on relief work, the majority of delegates to Boston’s Building Trades union council approved a resolution to the mayor to restrict city employment to citizens. A

³⁰ *BDG*, February 24, 1894; *BDG*, February 26, 1894;

³¹ Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 256-257.

³² On the tensions between Boston AFL unionists and the Boston SLP, see Green and Donoghue, *Boston’s Workers*, 75-77.

similar resolution in the Boston CLU met considerable opposition from the United Garment Workers, the Furniture Workers, and the Cigar Makers.³³ Even the relatively conservative Frank K. Foster, editor of the Massachusetts AFL's official weekly, *The Labor Leader*, argued that the proposed citizenship requirement improperly elevated "the political duties of union members above their economic duties," a reversal which would "belittle and emasculate the organization."³⁴ Nevertheless, Foster opposed Swift's proposal for state farms, lest they overwhelm the state treasury by attracting an inordinate amount of immigrant workers from poorer nations.³⁵ Though elite Bostonians afraid of the foreign dilution of Anglo-Saxon culture were busily organizing the Immigration Restriction League, many Boston workers viewed immigrants primarily as an economic threat in moments of extreme economic distress.³⁶ This was not so different from many Massachusetts workers in previous decades who had denounced the drastic competition introduced by immigrant workers' wages, but who had also denounced both the employers and contractors who determined these wages and the un-American values of legislative exclusionism in the 1880s.³⁷

Nevertheless, Swift's spirited demonstrations caught the eye of AFL President Samuel Gompers, who appeared at a March 20 mass meeting in Faneuil Hall alongside Swift and exclaimed to great applause, "If you are true to Mr. Swift, you will be true to

³³ *BDG*, February 19, 1894; *BDG*, February 26, 1894; *BDG*, March 5, 1894; *BDG*, March 6, 1894.

³⁴ *The Labor Leader*, February 17, 1894.

³⁵ *The Labor Leader*, March 10, 1894.

³⁶ Barbara Miller Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (Cambridge, 1965).

³⁷ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, 1992), 102-103; Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

the labor movement.”³⁸ In the meantime, Boston unionists generally displayed considerable support for independent local, state and national political efforts. In early April, city unionists of both the AFL and the residue of the Knights of Labor adopted an independent political platform for upcoming city elections based on abolition of contract labor, municipal ownership of the railroad and gas and electric works, and female suffrage.³⁹ In June of 1894, Boston-area unionists also convened a political convention for Massachusetts trade unionists to organize an independent party. These movements echoed the popular agitation behind the socialist-led “Political Program,” a program that notably included state ownership of the means of production and had been approved by the 1893 AFL convention. (Eventually opposed by Gompers and his supporters, the program was finally voted down in late 1894).⁴⁰ Yet, for a time, it seemed that organized labor, the political left, and the unemployed had found a common ground which competition for scarce jobs had in the past prevented.

Public interest in the cause of the unemployed grew when Swift and the Equity Union decided to organize an independent delegation to join Coxey’s Army at Washington, D.C. On April 22, nearly 25,000 people assembled on the Commons to observe the departure of the “New England Industrial Delegation.” Though Swift clearly found the military character of the march distasteful—the several dozen unemployed men in the delegation marched from Boston to New Haven in columns of four abreast, with captains leading them—he joined the marchers to make speeches and organize supplies at several points along the way. While the marchers met some opposition from frightened

³⁸ *BDG*, March 21, 1894.

³⁹ *BDG*, April 3, 1894.

⁴⁰ *BDG*, April 14, 1894; *BDG*, April 26, 1894; Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*, 61-64.

local authorities, they, much like the movement led by Jacob Coxey, invoked popular notions of citizenship and Americanism and strained to appear patriotic, carrying an American flag from the Civil War. Sons of Union Veterans militiamen in Wakefield, Rhode Island, refused to eject the delegation from their town when asked to do so by town selectmen.⁴¹ Despite their constant disavowal of violent intentions, Swift and the unemployed of the movement he helped to organize clearly caused great consternation among a middle and upper class frightened by infectious social and political unrest.

This fear extended to those in Washington, D.C., in control of decision-making in foreign policy. Many viewed overproduction as the primary culprit behind the current economic calamity, and urged as a remedy an increase in trade and the opening of foreign markets. The same month Coxey's Army arrived in the nation's capital, Secretary of State Walter Q. Gresham informed acquaintances that "the assembling of bands of men all over the country" might "portend revolution." Although he opposed the annexation of Hawaii, Gresham advocated increased and competitive commerce abroad as the surest path to renewing prosperity at home.⁴² Gresham was not alone in his concerns. Boston's Brooks Adams, whose finances suffered considerably in the 1893 depression, also expressed anxieties about a possible social revolution, leading him later to advocate similar expansionist policies.⁴³

⁴¹ Lucy G. Barber, *Marching on Washington: The Forging of an American Political Tradition* (Berkeley, 2002), 11-43; Michael Kazin and Joseph A. McCartin, *Americanism: New Perspectives on the History of an Ideal* (Chapel Hill, 2006); BDG, April 20, 1894; The *Boston Daily Globe* assigned a reporter to the delegation who filed reports each day from April 23 to May 4, 1894.

⁴² Quoted in Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Empire, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, 1963), 200.

⁴³ La Feber, *The New Empire*, 80-85.

Although Swift did not share their conclusions, his observations in the next few years only verified the trepidation expressed by elites. In 1895, he traveled to California and surveyed the opinions of bankrupted farmers, agricultural wage workers, and tramps.⁴⁴ Although Swift selectively reported the opinions of his informants, his report echoed anticipations of social revolt in the agricultural populations of the West. Not even the verdant fields of California had been spared the intense dissatisfaction sweeping the Midwest and East. One “observant citizen” of Monterey speculated: “If the rich did in other countries as they do here there would be a revolution. Our whole social system is a humbug. You look at the whole nation and you would think it was crazy.” A businessman in San Rafael affirmed, in Swift’s words, “the terrible condition of society, and declared that American people would never submit to be slaves, that they would fight and overthrow the capitalists.” Discussing the presidential race in 1896, a Guernsville man warned, “If the next election does not win for the people, the social question will be settled by muscle and bullets. I would have Rothschild put on his bank and blown up. He is the worst enemy of man.” Threats of violence pervaded Swift’s interrogations. “I despise the rich man,” raged a teamster near Forestville. “The only way to help them is to bore a hole in their heads and let the sap run out, and put some new sap of a better kind in . . . We could manage things a good deal better. If things get desperate enough people will rise up.”⁴⁵

The great social crisis of the 1890s had politicized Swift and moved this young middle-class reformer from sympathy and settlements to socialism and protest. By the late 1890s, Swift had lost much of the bourgeois condescension he had formerly

⁴⁴ Morrison I. Swift, *What a Tramp Learns in California: Social Danger Line* (San Francisco, 1896), 8.

⁴⁵ Swift, *What a Tramp Learns in California*, 9-10, 17-18, 19.

displayed as a young academic-turned urban reformer. A master of sarcasm if nothing else, Swift now ridiculed the settlements' attempts to introduce refinement and "culture" to the working class and poor. The creation of a "Pitying Society," Swift urged, might help society to discover that "the trouble with the poor is not that they are poor, but that they are without art...Their real wretchedness lies in their lamentable enjoyment of miserable pictures." If only these workers could realize the "ghastly falseness of their standards of art," Swift suggested, no matter their poverty, they would "soar to a new high and satisfied plane of being by going to look in the windows of an art store." Then Pitying Society staff might organize a free school for poor girls to teach them to be better domestic servants.⁴⁶ Swift's rejections of his past as a settlement worker and academic marked a cultural turn in his politics from charity and elite knowledge to an expansive culture of social citizenship, even if he maintained a certain middle-class sensibility in his politics, as we will see in the next chapter.

No less than a pioneer in crafting a specifically American political culture of social citizenship far more suited to the New Deal period than the 1890s, Swift was one of the first political radicals to build a mass movement to demand a public right to employment. In Boston and New England, Swift created a powerful repertoire of collective action through which to organize the mostly immigrant unemployed and make claims on local, state and federal government. Swift's belief that even immigrant workers from southern and eastern Europe had social rights to employment suggests that not all Americans, including native-born workers themselves, believed in a racialized kind of citizenship, but instead primarily rooted their notions of citizenship in political and social

⁴⁶ *Public Ownership Review*, December, 1898.

rights.⁴⁷ In the West, Swift had sought experiences and individuals to confirm his growing belief in the necessity for a radical redistribution of the nation's wealth and political power. He was not disappointed. But he could not have anticipated that American elites would soon attempt to resolve America's social question, though not by transforming domestic politics, but by crafting and implementing expansionist foreign policies and an expansionist, capitalist political economy—elite policies that would eventually help undermine the bases and boundaries of republican working-class political culture.

⁴⁷ Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 191. Jacobson correctly observes that legally and politically the United States has always maintained a racialized citizenship, and yet Jacobson makes little allowance for those like Swift who, while they may have used racist discourses, rooted their concepts of social and political rights and obligations in a universal and inclusive citizenship, irrespective of ethnic or racial identification or national origin.

CHAPTER 4

THE MODERN MOMENT: POLITICS, WORKERS, AND THE NEW AMERICAN EMPIRE

“The working men have no country...

National differences, and antagonisms between peoples, are daily more and more vanishing, owing to the development of the bourgeoisie, to freedom of commerce, to the world market, to uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life corresponding thereto . . . In proportion as the exploitation of one individual by another is put an end to, the exploitation of one nation by another will also be put an end to. In proportion as the antagonism between classes within the nation vanishes, the hostility of one nation to another will come to an end.”¹

When George E. McNeill chaired a mass meeting in Boston’s Faneuil Hall jointly organized by the New England Anti-Imperialist League and the city’s Central Labor Union on the evening of January 22, 1902, this experienced labor organizer and working-class reformer knew how to appeal to his audience. An imposing, bearded man now in his sixty-sixth year of life, the venerable McNeill was a living embodiment of the producerist, republican political culture that had long infused Boston’s working and middling classes.

A textile worker and shoemaker, McNeill had led labor protests since the age of 14, when he was fired from a woolen factory for leading a six-month strike to defend a twenty-minute lunch break. A former abolitionist crusader, McNeill after the Civil War became a pioneering leader in the movement for eight-hour legislation. In 1869, he was appointed the Deputy Secretary of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor, the

¹ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto: A Modern Edition* (London, 1998), 58.

first of its kind in the United States. He also led the International Labor Union, the precursor national organization to the American Federation of Labor, and the local Knights of Labor district assembly in Boston in the mid-1880s. In the 1890's, McNeill joined the Social Gospelers and openly supported Irish nationalist and Russian radical movements.² McNeill's personality and politics was woven whole cloth from Yankee working-class culture, and *The Labor Movement: The Problem of To-day*, published in 1886 and edited by McNeill, captured the views of the most militant Yankee workers. "We declare," announced McNeill in its pages, "that there is an inevitable and irresistible conflict between the wage-system of labor and the republican system of government."³

Now, in 1902, McNeill joined Samuel Gompers and others who had assailed the cheap labor a new U.S. empire threatened to introduce to the New World republic. But McNeill also reminded his audience of the costs of American empire in Asia. "Wealth is not as rapidly increased by killing Filipinos as by making shoes," McNeill suggested. If American expansion in the Pacific Rim was intended to find markets for the goods produced by America's industrial workers, as its boosters argued, McNeill replied that "Every Filipino killed means one consumer less." And he appropriated the economic discourse of the day in order to spear his opponents. "We favor a high protective tariff on human blood, and free trade in liberty."

Most importantly, McNeill invoked the heritage of the Revolution in constructing his republican, working-class version of Americanism. "Self-government produces men fit for self-government, but a government over a people will end in the overthrow of the

² Robert R. Montgomery, "To Fight This Thing 'Till I Die": The Career of George Edwin McNeill," in Ronald C. Kent, et al, eds., *Culture, Gender, Race and U.S. Labor History* (Westport, 1993), 3-23.

³ George E. McNeill, ed., *The Labor Movement: The Problem of To-day* (Boston, 1886), 439.

government by the people, or reduce the people to a condition of vassalage,” McNeill warned. “If we withhold the right of self-government from any people we invite the withholding of self-government from ourselves.” He appealed to the sympathies of Irish workers in the audience by suggesting that Filipino workers, irrespective of skin color, enjoyed the same political rights as they. “The old song, ‘They are hanging men and women there for the wearing of the Green,’ can be changed to ‘They are hanging Filipinos for wearing their own colors.’” McNeill sharply castigated those who equated dissent with disloyalty, intoning, “It is not yet treason to give three cheers for Samuel Adams in Faneuil Hall.”⁴

As the United States’ bloody occupation of the Philippines extended into the first decade of the twentieth century, and as the patriotic fervor inspired by the Cuban war subsided, many labor leaders, trade unionists and workers in the United States joined McNeill in opposition to militarized overseas U.S. expansion. This abomination of a new and *modern* American empire is an important marker in the long history of U.S. working-class political culture. For the first time in American history, a significant number of working people came out against the violent expansion of the Anglo-American polity and political economy, a phenomenon already 300 years old but rarely opposed by workers or artisans. At the same time, workers around the world also grappled with new forms of empire, both informal and formal empire, and how to interpret it and accommodate or oppose it.⁵ Yet, in the next twenty years, many American labor leaders and workers

⁴ George S. Boutwell, *The Enslavement of American Labor* (Boston, 1902), 4. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁵ David Montgomery, “Workers Face Imperialisms, Old and New,” Lecture, Trent University, Canada, October, 2006. Paper in possession of author.

would come to embrace U.S. military intervention in a world war which many argued was a war for global power between competing European empires.⁶ Why is this?

While a number of scholars have sought to explain this change in labor leaders' positions on U.S. foreign policy between 1898 and 1917, they have not yet investigated the attitudes and politics of the mass of American workers (within and outside organized labor's ranks) on questions of foreign policy in this period.⁷ Their opinions and activities seem as important, if not more important, than those of labor leaders, and historians should not simply infer that the statements of certain labor leaders reflected the views of their rank-and-file union members or other workers.⁸ If we accept that empires historically have required active participation and support—or at least passive or active consent—from not only elites and the middle-class but also a significant portion of the workers and poor who directly or indirectly contributed their daily labors to imperial conquest and commerce, then we need to explore the forces that may have influenced American workers' relationship to the new American empire. Workers were not merely “complicit” in empire; workers resisted, accommodated themselves or consented to, or participated and actively supported the construction of the modern American empire.

Cultural historians of U.S. empire have recently tended to interpret labor leaders' opposition to the war in Philippines as an expression of economic fear and racism. Labor

⁶ David Montgomery, “Workers’ Movements in the U.S. Confront Imperialism: The Twentieth Century Experience,” Lecture, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Amherst, Massachusetts, November 4, 2006. Paper in possession of author.

⁷ Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy*; McKillen, *Chicago Labor and the Quest for a Democratic Diplomacy*; Andrews, *Shoulder to Shoulder?*; Larson, *Labor and Foreign Policy*; Grubbs, *The Struggle for Labor Loyalty*.

⁸ Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 73-88. Jacobson utilizes the statements of John R. Commons, Samuel Gompers, and Eugene Debs (in 1891, before Debs adopted socialist politics) to explore working-class attitudes towards empire and immigrant labor, but does not investigate the political statements or activity of other working-class movement leaders or workers.

leaders' attitudes, they contend, flowed from their hostility towards cheap labor that might take employment from native-born workers, depress wages and living standards, and from their belief that immigrant workers were unfit for citizenship in a self-governing republic.⁹ Undoubtedly, there is some merit to these conclusions, and certainly evidence for these claims exists in the historical record of American trade union leaders' discourse.

However, the sources of working-class opposition to the construction of the new American empire was both at once far more complex and simple than those suggested by cultural historians of U.S. empire. American working-class politics spanned a spectrum of opinions shaped not only by race and republicanism but by gender, religion, and ethnicity. Furthermore, radical politics and political movements intersected with workers' concerns about the transformations of American society in this period, and also affected how they related to the nation and conceived of themselves as citizens. More simply, American workers who had gained dignity, income and even protective legislation through unions and labor politics wanted to preserve the precious gains that they made from real and exaggerated or inflated threats.

In retrospect, the violent expansion of the United States into the Caribbean and the Pacific Rim at the turn of the last century provoked attempts by a militant minority of working-class organizers, agitators and intellectuals to build a movement against empire within the labor and larger reform movements. Some individuals, including those like George McNeill and middle-class reformers in the Anti-Imperialist League, hoped to appeal to American workers by addressing them as citizens of an endangered republic. By looking backward to the *political* ideals of the revolutionary generation, such activists

⁹ Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues*, 73-88.

contended that the new U.S. empire contradicted traditional republican values.¹⁰ Others, including Morrison Swift, also appealed to workers' republican political culture and sense of Americanism, but infused the plastic discourses of American citizenship and national identity with a new, forward-looking *social* politics based on human and international solidarity.

These radicals suggested that American society and the economy had developed structures which necessarily and inevitably forced military expansion to protect and extend American commerce and investments abroad. Even though Swift and fellow radicals were unable, much like the middle-class Anti-Imperialists, to build and sustain an effective movement, Swift and other radicals proposed the only viable means to halting the violent, overseas expansion of the United States' monopoly capitalist economy and political economy. In making their proposals, these radicals appealed to American workers as the only force capable of bringing an end to empire and creating conditions for a new kind of citizenship in a post-imperial society.

THE PERILS OF SOCIALISM AND THE POSSIBILITY OF PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

Like many future Progressives, Morrison Swift was disgusted by the corruption of American politics, parties, and government. Swift joined many middle-class and working-class radicals and socialists in believing that the Democratic Party presidential candidacy of populist leader William Jennings Bryan in 1896 was imperfect, at best. Ever the idealist, Swift was sickened by the spoils and self-interest rampant in both the Democratic and Republican machines. He sought a meaningful alternative.

¹⁰ Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (New York, 1968).

Swift at first seemed to support experiments in building exemplary utopian alternative communities as a strategy for reaching his new society. In September, 1896, after Swift had worked briefly in a San Francisco rubber factory and made a short-lived attempt to organize a "Society of American Socialists" in the Bay area, he was elected national organizer for the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth. Founded in the fall of 1895 by an obscure Yankee socialist reformer, Norman Wallace Lermond, of Thomaston, Maine, the Brotherhood hoped to educate Americans about socialism by settling socialist enclaves in a western state and eventually taking control of its state government, a necessary precursor, they believed, to building a nationwide fraternal organization of cooperationists. Bryan's defeat in the 1896 election caused many dejected socialists to enlist in the Brotherhood's cause. By June of 1897, blacklisted union members seeking a livelihood had also joined, and the Brotherhood had expanded to 125 branches and contained 107 members willing to commit \$45,000 to the construction of a model colony in Washington state.¹¹

But Swift clearly became disenchanted with colonization schemes (in 1897 Eugene Debs succeeded him as national organizer for the BCC) and returned to political action. An incisive critic, Swift now rejected utopian socialist communities. Colonizationists mistakenly assumed that "socialism in one colony" could successfully compete with capitalist firms in a capitalist economy. He quickly learned that these projects attracted individuals with plenty of ideals but little practical knowledge or experience. Such endeavors seemed doomed to failure. Swift pleaded that model colonies only weakened the reform movement by diverting socialists and radicals from political action. "Take them away, set them to splitting rails on the prairie and building cabins in

¹¹ Quint, *The Forging of American Socialism*, 282-285.

the air, and you have diverted them from the work they were doing of leavening the American continent with social intelligence,” he wrote after leaving the Brotherhood. Swift accurately observed that colonies resulted only in “great smoke of advertisement and preparation and little fire of achievement.”¹² It was a form of retreat.

But Swift also refused to work within the longest-living socialist party in the United States. As we noted in the last chapter, Swift, in the midst of the great depression of 1893 and 1894, had collaborated with the Socialist Labor Party in Boston. At the time the SLP had few members locally or nationally. Despite its support for his efforts to organize the unemployed, the party’s politics and internal practice quickly alienated Swift from the party. He soon analyzed the reasons for the SLP’s failure to gain support from American workers and urged fellow socialists and radicals to stay away from SLP leaders like Daniel DeLeon and their party.¹³

Swift faulted the Socialist Labor Party primarily for failing to adapt to the peculiarities of U.S. working-class political culture. The SLP’s internationalist doctrine erected a crude Marxist screen of cultural reductionism which blinded party members to uniquely American conditions. Although Swift hardly considered himself a nationalist, he believed that the SLP’s largely German constituency had made it “foreign and exotic” and isolated it from American workers. On the other hand, suggested Swift, Bellamyite Nationalists had converted to socialism not just members of the middle class but also many workers who considered themselves middle class. Although the Nationalists failed by limiting themselves to education and abstaining from electoral politics, the SLP had

¹² Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, December, 1897.

¹³ For a historian’s analysis similar to that offered by Swift, see Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London, 1987), 49-56.

failed because it entered the political field without the support of the middle class or the working class—the latter whom the SLP mistakenly approached as proletarians.

The SLP had imposed the class consciousness of European politics on American soil. The American worker, explained Swift in the social biological discourse of his day,

“hasn’t the groundwork for a healthy class consciousness of the European breed. His consciousness is essentially a middle class consciousness, and when you tell him to hate the middle class you tell him to hate himself. Possibly he deserves to, but he isn’t going to do it. The European peasant and workingman has centuries of proletarianism in his blood. Put in a drop of class consciousness and the whole liquid turns instantly black with it. But you can hypodermically inject a stream of class consciousness from a class conscious hydrant into the American workingman, and he throws it off serenely because his blood and history are different from European workingman blood and history. This is true, however bad his actual condition as a workingman may be.”

Swift suggested that the vulgar Marxism of these “scientific socialists” had made them “pathological”; their “metaphysical bosh” rendered them incapable of practical participation in American politics. If ever successful, their bitter “class struggle” theories would result only in bloodletting and tyranny reminiscent of the Jacobins. “Today in the cauldron of the official socialist labor minds, it is the capitalists who are pulling the wires and every move on the American checker-board is prompted by a mortal conspiracy against their step-children, the working class. Such minds,” Swift maintained, “are capable of anything.”¹⁴

The only option left for Swift was to form his own political party. In January, 1897, not long after departing from the Brotherhood, Swift launched a monthly publication, the *Public Ownership Review*, through which he hoped to organize a cross-class socialist third party. Swift hoped that local “Public Ownership” clubs would form

¹⁴ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, October-November, 1898.

the long-term educational base on which a party could eventually form, uniting disaffected and reformist Democrats, Progressives, Populists, and socialists. Swift hoped to avoid the SLP's alienating approach by building a movement and party that was implicitly socialist but explicitly reformist, thereby respecting the United States' indigenous political culture. Swift's five-point program called for "Public Ownership of all Monopolies, including the Trusts and the Land," the popular initiative and referendum, civil-service reforms, proportional representation and "the Imperative Mandate," and immediate employment on public works for the jobless. Swift imagined that he could avoid a self-interested party bureaucracy by refraining from elections until a mass membership could be recruited. In Swift's original and unique party strategy, the public ownership movement would coalesce into a structure only immediately before elections; immediately afterward, the provisional party organization would dissolve and return power to members in clubs at the base.¹⁵

Swift's recrudescient middle-class sensibilities infused his calls for reform in the journal, and clearly most Public Ownership party supporters were middle-class. But Swift's publication and program clearly appealed to some workers, including laborers in Oregon and Arkansas, trolley operators in New York City, and even one New Hampshire factory worker afraid to distribute party literature for fear of being fired.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Swift was always more accomplished as an agitator and grassroots organizer, and while his third party strategy seemed theoretically sound, the Public Ownership Party never gained enough members or support to get off the ground. Swift's achievement with the public ownership movement instead resided in his ability to propose a forward-looking

¹⁵ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, September, 1897.

¹⁶ *Public Ownership Review*, December, 1898.

socialist politics that accepted “the Trusts” of modern monopoly capitalism. His American form of socialism sought not a return to an imagined, nineteenth-century republic of equality and simplicity, but instead adopted politics and the search for political power as a way to capture concentrated capital and turn it to social ends.

AN EMPIRE FOR MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

Morrison Swift stood out among American socialists for accepting the ascendance of modern monopoly capitalism as inevitable and even desirable, even while he continued to invoke the precious traditions of American republicanism. Fully seventeen years before Lenin wrote the famous pamphlet in which he suggested that imperialism was both necessary and inevitable as the highest stage of capitalism—a stage in the evolution of capitalism wrought by centralized, monopoly industrial and finance capital—Swift suggested the same. Swift was hardly a theorist, and he certainly contributed little to contemporary theories of empire, an enterprise most developed by British economist J.A. Hobson in *Imperialism* (1902), a book which greatly influenced Lenin.¹⁷ But Swift may have been the first socialist to propose what is widely regarded as a traditional Marxist understanding of imperialism: an organic relationship between an advanced form of capitalism (monopoly capitalism) and a political economy of expansion which provided opportunities for the investment of surplus capital—a process that necessarily caused wars of colonization and occupation.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lenin, *Imperialism*.

¹⁸ See below. Norman Etherington, in *Theories of Imperialism: War, Conquest, and Capital* (Totowa, 1984), 25-39, claims that J. Gaylord Wilshire, the socialist millionaire and editor of *Challenge* and *Wilshire's Magazine*, had been led by his readings in the U.S. business press to publish the first socialist theory of imperialism in April, 1901. Swift, however, while not a talented student of political economy or socialist theory like Wilshire, seems to have posited a necessary and organic relationship between the

At the end of 1897, Swift believed that the American republic was in an advanced state of decline. An accomplished student of history and philosophy, Swift believed that the ancient Roman republic had collapsed because it had conquered new territories that it could not govern. But the problem facing the modern United States, Swift pointed out in contrast to Rome, was not extensive but intensive. "Its extending territory is industrial machinery," he wrote, "as difficult a thing to learn to govern as provinces." The greatest challenge to industrial life was the recent monopolization of capital, land, and finance—or, as Swift was wont to write, "The Trusts."¹⁹ Swift was convinced that the American experiment and its citizenry needed to master industrial production and distribution.

A sort of syndicalist, Swift believed that capital would become so centralized that it would eventually form a "Trust of Trusts," which, once subjected to popular political rule, would become a "Universal Trust." Swift called that the horizontal integration of giant capitalist corporations then raging across the nation a "higher organization of business" that was "the necessary product of business evolution." The dissolution of the trusts, a policy advocated by many liberal reformers, could only result in "industrial retrogression." Yet, the private control of monopoly capitalist firms allowed capital to subjugate and dominate "all branches of government" and reduced the population to a

monopoly (or "Trust") phase of capitalist development and wars of occupation and conquest as early as 1899. See Morrison I. Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty* (Los Angeles, 1899), 218: "Real military expansion did not fairly set in till thirty years ago. There is a reason for its setting in then, a law of its increase, and certain assurance of continued increase according to that law. It began then with full vigor because at that period civilized nations became fully stocked with capital and the era of surplusage [sic] opened. Investments ceased to pay as before, since there was much more capital accumulated to invest than profitable places for investment. This was an epoch and turning point in the economic history of the world. . . Three movements of paramount meaning arose through this industrial event: (1) A desire for stable forms of investment, (2) The impulse for new markets by appropriation or conquest, (3) The tendency to develop armed force for the protection of monopolized capital. All of these processes are organic elements of the grand transformation which the surplus of saved capital is causing. They combine to show that military armaments will continue to expand according to a definite law, because they combine to enforce that increase."

¹⁹ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, December, 1897.

state of “servility.”²⁰ Like many traditional Marxists, Swift decried private control of the means of production even while he welcomed the evolution of capitalism as a necessary stage in social development that had to precede public ownership and government administration of the national economy.

Like many Marxists and socialists, Swift also subscribed to a labor theory of value and an economic crisis theory of under-consumption. Whereas many capitalists emphasized that industrial over-production had precipitated the recent depression and required new markets abroad, Swift suggested that domestic wages were too low to sustain consumption. Monopoly capitalism had formed two social classes, first, the capitalists and investors, professionals and middle-class retailers, and second, farmers and “mechanics and other laborers” who engaged in “the real production of wealth or tend to the moral or intellectual advancement of the race.” Swift argued that elites who believed in an over-production theory of crisis failed to recognize that depressions and recessions were not attributable to the fact that “every worker has all he needs, but to the fact that his wages are insufficient to buy back what he produced.” Only the “public ownership of all the means and sources of wealth and culture,” suggested Swift, could prevent economic crisis and restore a balance between labor, wealth, and consumption.²¹

Swift urged his readers to fight for municipal and state control of industries in order to prove the possibility of government ownership and administration of the economy. In the pages of the *Public Ownership Review*, he maintained a kind of running tally of municipal or state takeovers of industries in the United States and Europe to prove the efficacy of his program and inspire supporters. He disdained as diversionary

²⁰ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, November, 1897.

²¹ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, January, 1898.

not only the dogmatism of the Socialist Labor Party, but populists who continued to advocate for monetary policies like the free coinage of silver, and single-taxers after Henry George, all of whom ignored the central question of centralized production and distribution. He also had little sympathy for the voluntarism of AFL trade unions. In early 1898, Swift noticed that AFL Vice-President P.J. McGuire had endorsed working-class political action, even though McGuire warned it would invite reactionary repression from the nation's rulers. Swift scoffed at McGuire and the tepid conservatism of the AFL. "Never in all its history has it made one intelligent political attempt," Swift barked. By not supporting third-parties, Swift complained, working-class voters reinforced the anti-labor forces in the Democratic and Republican parties; working-class participation in elections would bear fruit only when an alternative party had gained workers' support and entered the political field.²²

Despite his tireless advocacy on behalf of the nascent "Public Ownership Party" (which organized clubs only in California and a handful of other states), Swift began to turn his attention to a different concern. Beginning in January, 1898, Swift invoked traditional republican fears of standing armies to marshal opposition to an imminent U.S. war with Spain. Swift warned his readership that the imminent annexation of Hawaii and Cuba indicated that the army and navy were uniting with capital in order to protect "the universal monopoly that is near." Swift worried that American territorial expansion overseas would form the pretense for a "despotism" which, fearing popular agitation, would require a large standing army that elites would use to organize "violence on a large scale to hold the people in awe and silence." Swift eagerly desired freedom for the Cubans, and believed that Cuban independence would greatly benefit the world. "Spain

²² Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, March, 1898

adds to modern capitalist tyranny the worst elements of feudal tyranny,” Swift argued; Spain’s imminent loss of its colonies could only weaken a military which allowed Spanish rulers to oppress their own population. However, Swift also warned pro-independence Cubans to beware of indigenous and American elites who would seek to monopolize Cuban wealth after winning the war. The oppressions and miseries imposed on citizens and workers by monopoly capitalism tended to render national self-determination meaningless. “The original question of national freedom and supremacy is now complicated with the question of the supremacy of capital, which forms an upper layer running through all nations,” Swift contended.²³

But Swift warned that overseas military intervention would also cost Americans dearly. Mobilization would certainly improve the economy in the short-term, but the maintenance of a permanent military after the war would burden taxpayers with enormous expense. Even though the size of the continental mainland would probably cause this standing army to remain mostly in North America, Swift suggested, it would be increasingly used to suppress the labor and unemployed movements. It would empower a “vulgar element” of militarists jealous of the armed might of European nation-states, and would cause them “to go everywhere interfering.” Perhaps looking askance at the veterans of the Civil War whom he had encountered, war would cause “a certain senility” in the average veteran, who would be “always afterward dwelling on the marvelous things he has done,” having endured “so much excitement that he is, to use the phrase, a back number.” Even worse, foreign war would divert reformers and radicals

²³ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, January, 1898.

from the paramount social question facing the domestic United States and the world.²⁴ Future events certainly justified a great deal of Swift's apprehension. Swift should have been more concerned with himself than other reformers, for in the next four years he abandoned his struggle to form a third party and instead thrust himself into fevered agitation against a new American empire.

EMPIRE AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF ANGLO-AMERICAN POLITICS AND CULTURE

Between 1898 and 1902, Morrison Swift adopted a principled, indigenous and forward-looking critique of the new U.S. empire and its expansionist, militarist political economy. While the largely middle-class members of the New England and national Anti-Imperialist League looked to a simple and allegedly non-expansionist republican past in order to critique America's domination of Cuba and its military occupation of the Philippines, Swift and other working-class agitators and organizers denounced the McKinley administration for its violent extension of monopoly capitalism and its insatiable hunger for markets and resources. These anti-empire radicals suggested that U.S. empire could only be defeated if the workers joined the middle class and organized to abolish the private economic imperatives behind expansion by reordering America's political economy.

Nonetheless, Swift developed his own indigenous, Yankee discourse of Americanism against empire. While he joined the middle-class anti-imperialists in invoking the republican political traditions of American and English history, he also spurned the liberalism and paternalism of the respectable anti-imperialists by developing

²⁴ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, January, 1898; Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, April-May 1898.

both an anti-capitalist and an anti-racist internationalism. Swift incessantly resorted to American and European cultural constructions which, according to recent cultural historians of empire, tainted even the Anti-Imperialist movement. But Swift appropriated the flexible discourses of race, particularly Anglo-Saxonism, religion, republicanism, and culture in order to express his antipathy to racism, cultural colonialism, and America's political, social and economic domination of others that characterized the new U.S. empire.

It also suggests that culture, ideology and discourse are best analyzed by historians in relationship to politics. Through a history that includes politics, historians may best discern human motivation and intent by attempting to weigh the variable meanings and intentions of discourse, expression and language against human activity. As Eric Foner has carefully written about the recent scholarship on "whiteness," discourses and ideologies which are concerned with culture are inherently ambivalent and plastic. Culturalist concepts such as the racial category of "whiteness," Foner reminds us, "are never the only characteristic that shapes individual identity. As a category of analysis, whiteness runs the risk of homogenizing a vast population that differs within itself in terms of class, religion, gender, politics, and in many other way . . . The historian's task is to examine the specific historical circumstances under which one or another element of identity comes to the fore as a motivation for political and social action."²⁵

²⁵ Eric Foner, "Response to Eric Arnesen," in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 60 (2001), 58.

Swift was hardly alone in the earliest stages of this working-class movement against empire. Even though many workers and members of the middle class in 1898 hastened to support William McKinley and the Congress in retaliating for the explosion of the *Maine*, not all supported the initial foray against the Spanish to the south. Three years earlier, AFL President Samuel Gompers, himself an English immigrant, had denounced U.S. saber-rattling at Great Britain regarding its dispute over the boundary between Venezuela and British Guiana. "Labor is never for war," Gompers suggested:

It is always for peace. It is on the side of liberty, justice and humanity. These three are always for peace . . . Who would be compelled to bear the burden of war? The working people. They would pay the taxes, and their blood would flow like water. The interests of the working people of England and the United States are common. They are fighting the same enemy. They are battling to emancipate themselves from conditions common to both countries. The working people know no country. They are citizens of the world, and their religion is do what is right, what is just, what is grand and glorious and valorous and chivalrous. The battle for the cause of labor, from times of remotest antiquity, has been for peace and good-will among men.²⁶

In 1895, however, Cuban insurgents led by Jose Marti mounted one final armed rebellion against Spanish rule. Trade unionists across the United States, in both the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor, hailed the Cuban independence movement and pressured the administration and Congress to recognize the Cubans as belligerents. At its 1897 convention, the AFL passed a resolution condemning imminent U.S. annexation of Hawaii, largely because the Senate refused to repeal Hawaii's contract labor laws (Congress had made contract labor illegal in the continental United States in 1885). In a highly contentious debate, a majority of delegates, supported by Gompers,

²⁶ Quoted in Philip Foner, *U.S. Labor Movement and Latin America: A History of Workers' Response to Intervention, Volume 1, 1846-1919* (South Hadley, 1988), 13.

reaffirmed their sympathy with the Cubans, but shouted down “jingoists” on the convention floor who hoped to endorse an invasion.

The destruction of the *Maine* in Havana harbor on February 15, 1898, clearly caused many workers to initially rally behind U.S. military intervention in the Spanish-Cuban conflict. The Hearst press and other newspapers popular among working-class readers probably played no small part. But a few working-class leaders still suspicious of elite motives strained to maintain worker and union opposition to intervention. In April, the International Association of Machinists’ journal expressed sympathy for the loss of life in the *Maine* disaster, but also pointed to a daily “carnival of carnage” within American industry. In a widely circulated document titled “A peace Appeal to Labor,” Bolton Hall, treasurer of the American Longshoreman’s Union, pointed to the war’s dampening effect on reform. “A war will put all social improvements among us back ten years,” warned Hall. “If there is a war, you will furnish the corpses and the taxes, and others will get the glory. Speculators will make money out of it—that is, out of you. Men will get high prices for inferior supplies, leaky boats, for shoddy clothes and pasteboard shoes, and you will have to pay the bill, and the only satisfaction you will get is the privilege of hating your Spanish fellow-workmen, who are really your brothers and who have had as little to do with the wrongs of Cuba as you have.”²⁷

And yet, after April 25, when war was finally declared by President McKinley with the support of a majority of the Congress, many workers wholeheartedly supported the war effort. Joseph R. Buchanan, a longtime labor organizer for the AFL and anarchist, correctly noted that many American workers accepted traditional republican principles of self-rule that easily translated into an anti-colonial sentiment against Spanish tyranny in

²⁷ Quoted in Foner, *U.S. Labor Movement and Latin America*, 17-19.

Cuba. Furthermore, the Teller amendment to the Congressional endorsement of the war promised the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the island upon the war's conclusion. In this political environment, Gompers and the leaders of several previously anti-war unions like the Sailor's Union and Railroad Brotherhoods rushed to secure political protection against employers and government by declaring their loyalty to the war effort. But in July, with the annexation of Hawaii, union newspapers again signaled that organized labor had great trepidation regarding overseas U.S. expansion. As the U.S. occupation of the Philippines transformed into a counter-insurgency in late 1898 and 1899, working-class opposition to American empire temporarily increased.²⁸ The fervor over Cuba having subsided, Gompers returned to his anti-imperialist statements and in November, 1898, he joined the Anti-Imperialist League as one of its vice-presidents. The AFL annual convention in December, 1898 won the support of many trade unionists when it endorsed a statement calling upon "workingmen to awake to a full realization of the dangers that confront them, and call upon their representatives with no uncertain voice to save them from the dangers . . . of imperialism."²⁹ But, as other scholars have pointed out, official opposition to U.S. occupation of the Philippines within the labor movement decreased as it became clear that the Congress would continue to protect the continental United States from the threat of cheap Filipino immigrant labor and imports from Asia.³⁰

For their part, the majority of American socialists, including the SLP and the Social Democracy of America, consistently opposed the war and simply denounced it as a war by, for and of individual capitalists. But Swift stood out among socialists and other

²⁸ Foner, *ibid.*, 20-23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 31-37.

opponents of the new U.S. empire for his analysis of empire and his attempts to reach workers by developing an oppositional discourse in an American idiom, in his anti-racism, and in his zealous defense of Filipino's right to violently resist American designs on their land and sovereignty. Indeed, the import of Swift's writings and activity has been almost entirely neglected, if not distorted, by most historians of this period. Swift's extensive political journalism and poetry also suggests that the discourses of Americanism, Anglo-Saxonism and republicanism were not entirely the province of those in favor of building a new empire, nor did they necessarily connote cultural approval for imperial conquest.

Swift differed from middle- and working-class anti-imperialists in his economic analysis of empire. Swift certainly shared their belief that individual capitalists benefited from U.S. dominance of markets and resources in Latin America and Asia, and had used their political influence to promote imperial policies and wars of conquest. Yet, Swift also believed that empire was the natural and necessary result of monopoly capitalism, a stage of capitalism which produced immense surplus profits, a desire for secure investment for this surplus capital, and eventually a standing army to protect monopoly profits, trade, and overseas investments, and monopoly capitalists from social unrest at home. "All of these processes are organic elements of the grand transformation which the surplus of saved capital is causing," he noted. If the war had not occurred, Swift maintained, "something similar to serve the guiding tendency would have happened. Industrial monopoly is total and universal, and must be protected; its protection calls for armies, and that is national militarism. Industrialism militarizes in order to terrorize."³¹

³¹ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 187, 218-219.

Like the members of the Anti-Imperialist League, Swift also lamented the social and economic costs that empire posed on the metropolitan citizenry. Even his old adversary Edward Atkinson shared these sentiments.³² In 1903, Atkinson, a thrifty Yankee who loved numbers, estimated that the war with Spain since 1898 had cost Americans more than \$900 million. Atkinson suggested that the war in the Philippines had also brought comparatively little commercial profit given promises of improved commerce; up to June 30, 1902, noted Atkinson, “we had been paying for five years on dollar and five cents (41.05) per head of our population to secure an export which had amounted to six and one-half (6½) cents per head, on which there might have been a profit to some one at the rate of one cent per head of the whole population.”³³ Swift concurred that the war drained public coffers which might otherwise be dedicated to public uses, but he also believed it would be highly profitable to manufacturers who secured markets and investors in government bonds.³⁴ More important to Swift than per capita expense, however, was the cost of empire to American ideals and American values; that loss deeply troubled him.

Whether or not he sincerely believed it or used it as rhetoric for his political purposes, Swift soaked his sermons in effusive celebrations of republicanism and Americanism, infusing his sometimes tortured prose with fiery denunciations of empire for its violations of sacred Anglo-American political traditions. At times, he merely seemed to echo the backward-looking lamentations of the Anti-Imperialist League. This

³² Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire*, 84-106.

³³ Edward Atkinson, *The Cost of War and Warfare to June 30, 1903, Extended by Estimate to Dec. 31, 1903* (Boston: New England Anti-Imperialist League, 1903), 7, MHS.

³⁴ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 219-224.

former student of Herbert Baxter Adams clearly believed that the English republican traditions of virtue, self-government and limited representative democracy instilled by the experience of the Civil War and the Commonwealth represented social and political progress. But American nationhood and the principle of self-determination signaled a departure from English and European societies, in that Americans hoped to escape the feudal legacies of rule by monarchs, aristocrats and armies. But Swift knew that the American republic had only recently evolved from a monarchical English political system and empire, and he sensed in the era of monopoly capitalism a kind of industrial feudalism that formed a continuity with the residue of tyranny constantly lurking in the English origins of American political culture.

Furthermore, he understood that republican freedoms and virtue required a rough equality in the distribution of wealth. Plentiful land had allowed the American republic to flourish, but by the 1890s these lands had been exhausted or monopolized. Swift lamented the loss of the frontier even while he acknowledged that the rapacious primitive accumulation of westward expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth century had provided great abundance but exacted enormous costs to Americans' virtue. "O Americans, you have sad, hard lessons to learn," wrote Swift in the summer of 1898. "You have thought that you could reap all the blessings of virtue without being virtuous, that you could gather all the richness of a new continent and a new world without paying for it in character. You will have to pay."³⁵

Now expansion overseas, and especially the need for an army to occupy the Philippines after the Cuban "expedition," empowered an interventionist and self-interested standing army and threatened what remained of American virtue. Swift

³⁵ Swift, *Public Ownership Review*, June-July 1898; Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 44-45, 187-189, 196.

displayed an ecumenical knowledge of republican theorists, including Machiavelli, who had warned republican citizens in his *Discourses on Books of Livy* to avoid military adventurism. Congress, now controlled by capital, would inevitably defer to the needs of monopolists, and short of socialism, the only immediate remedy to this situation for Swift lay in placing grave decisions about war within the purview of the citizenry, through popular referendums or by requiring mass conscription of men from all classes. Otherwise overseas adventures would fatally corrupt America's admittedly imperfect but potentially democratic political institutions. "Imperialism cancels the Constitution and takes the life of popular government," declared Swift.³⁶

And yet, even though Swift condemned British imperialism in South Africa, India, and elsewhere, and sought to link McKinley's empire-building policies with the already mature empire established by Great Britain, he also consistently praised the libertarian and republican traditions of what he often called "the Anglo-Saxon race." As one scholar has noted, the term "race" in this period was "highly unstable" and could imply any number of social differences based on "biological, historical, political, psychological, physiological, linguistic, or some combination" of these categories.³⁷ Swift certainly used, and quite probably accepted, social biological concepts popularized in a period when Darwin's ideas of human evolution had been appropriated by social biologists eager to construct and reify cultural differences as racially distinct.

But the multiple discourses of race, it must be admitted, were not always employed in order to endorse the imposition of imperial power on other cultures. Swift,

³⁶ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 1, 186, 200, 234.

³⁷ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows: The Diasporic Imagination of Irish, Polish, and Jewish Immigrants in the United States* (Cambridge, 1995), 186.

for one, utilized the multivalent language of race and social biology by deploying it to strike against the new American empire. The political traditions Swift and so many others of his day associated with different “races” really served as an identification of historical continuities and discontinuities in different political cultures within and between various cultures and societies, and Swift in effect turned the discourses of empire against empire itself.

Swift sincerely asserted that McKinley and other promoters of the new American empire had departed from the finest traditions of the Anglo-Saxon race. President McKinley and his administration, and his supporters in the Congress and business circles, Swift felt, had betrayed the political principles not only of America but centuries of political development in England. By imposing imperialism on “liberty-loving” Americans, Swift declared, McKinley had practiced a “breed” of “statesmanship of the most consummate and royal brand, and we humbly remark that it is not democratic and not Anglo-Saxon.”³⁸ Their corruption of ancient Anglo-Saxon political traditions and protections against the abuse of state power had introduced a virulent authoritarianism and tyranny into the American body politic:

“America then, the pure and beloved, the unsullied divine child of Destiny, is at death’s door with vile diseases, caught by the poor child when it was going about nights seeing the world as fag of its envied instructors, the European Powers. It has drunk of the exudations of British scrofula, and who can live after that? In this place it caught the Dreyfus chancre, in that noisome alley the English Boer complaint, in a third the Russian tubercle of autocracy. The lovely offspring of liberty and manly revolution is ulcered from head to foot, and each ulcer is one of those mean malignant ones taken where honor and purity would not have been. Will America survive this? There seems to be just one hope—that the excess of foulness of the eating sores may arouse a reaction.”³⁹

³⁸ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 341.

Although Swift used “fag” here to describe America as a drudge or servile inferior to the mature Europeans, he clearly implied that American imperialism represented a kind of prostitution that had infected American political culture with the ailments of European militarism and authoritarianism.

He reserved special ire for the instruction of the British in preparing Americans to sully themselves with empire. Swift noted that in an 1899 address to San Francisco merchants Lord Charles Beresford, an admiral in the British Navy, praised America’s entry into the race for empire and the recently announced “Open Door” policy in China. But, when prompted, Beresford cheerfully denied having any Saxon blood; Beresford traced his lineage to William the Conqueror. Sarcasm dripped from Swift’s poison pen as he invoked the long-standing thesis of radical Anglo-American republicans who argued that the “Norman Yoke” had rudely ripped the ancient English from a state of nature.⁴⁰

“Every true American ought to revere Beresford after that,” he wrote. “He is a lord, and he came over with William, the pious William who stripped their lands from the liberty-seeking Saxons, destroyed their free institutions, and retarded the growth of popular freedom and upright human independence in England for centuries, infusing a foul strain of domineering robber poison which still runs in the Anglo-Saxon vein and prevents the realization of justice, the evolution of character, and the consummation of democracy.”⁴¹ Clearly, Swift keenly felt the painful contradictions of Anglo-American

³⁹ Ibid., 466.

⁴⁰ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1966), 86-89.

⁴¹ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 80-86.

political culture. His often utterly unpalatable poetry illustrated the commonalities and continuities he detected between English and American political institutions, culture and history that both inspired and repelled him:

“But if you would have union of the Anglo-Saxon race,
If you would wipe dishonor from the Anglo-Saxon face,
Abhor the king and wealthy man, and sweep them from the fold,
Restore the common people to the sceptre and the gold.”⁴²

Swift was not alone in questioning the positive relationships between racial and ethnic identity that Roosevelt and other imperialists had tried to tie to U.S. expansion. Although many immigrant workers certainly welcomed the war in Cuba as an opportunity to prove loyalty to their new nation and their manliness, not all, including certain radical Irish nationalists in Boston, consistently supported U.S. intervention in the Caribbean and the Pacific.⁴³

Swift also invoked the masculine discourse of empire and the “strenuous life” that Teddy Roosevelt had so successfully cultivated and popularized.⁴⁴ Swift undoubtedly feared that the experience of imperialism might degenerate the morals of male American soldiers.⁴⁵ But Swift used it in his agitation against empire by associating it with a supposedly masculine desire for political freedom, political rights, and resistance to tyranny. He asked American men to resist emasculation by turning away from empire to

⁴² Morrison I. Swift, from “Anglo-Saxon Union,” in *Advent of Empire* (Los Angeles, 1900), 31.

⁴³ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Special Sorrows*, 141-176.

⁴⁴ Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, 1995), 170-215; Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*.

⁴⁵ Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, 188-189.

socialism. Americans, Swift declared, are “manly,” and intervened in world affairs only “to help and civilize the world without militarism and murder, and tyranny made legal by our fiat, and industrial pillage.”⁴⁶ President McKinley, who had capitulated to monopoly capital and its representatives in Congress, Swift alleged, had submitted to those who desired war in order to consolidate his political support for the upcoming presidential race. “He did not want to make enemies in his party for fear of losing a second presidential term,” Swift charged, “so he truckled and gave up his manhood and became a traitor to his trust.”⁴⁷

Swift appealed to the republicanism of the American citizen-soldiers of the revolutionary generation in order to inspire political resistance to empire, summoning “the men of Bunker Hill” to “rise from the earth for whose liberty you bled, to rebuke this blasphemy and restore your weakened descendants to manhood.”⁴⁸ By contrast, and again turning to the powerful metaphor of sexual enslavement, professional soldiers in a standing army could only ever be “an anachronism in civilization, the male prostitute, being among men what the abandoned woman is among her sex.”⁴⁹ A standing army of

⁴⁶ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 91.

⁴⁷ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 116.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁴⁹ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 208. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*, cites this passage in *Imperialism and Liberty* and implies that Swift here expressed a fear that professional soldiering would lead to homosexuality. It is far more likely that Swift (as Hoganson cautiously concedes in her own words) was implying that “soldiering was an immoral profession”—especially in an army for empire.

Hoganson also contends (189) that Swift worried that the U.S. military presence in Asia would lead to racial mixing, and she associates him with the likes of anti-imperialist and racist Senator James F. Pettigrew. Hoganson quotes only part of the passage (I have underlined the text quoted and included by Hoganson) in Swift’s *Imperialism and Liberty* and does not provide its context, misinterpreting Swift’s typical sarcastic style. Those familiar with Swift’s poorly executed style will quickly discern that he intended to expose and condemn atrocities in the Philippines while mocking American racists’ fears of “miscegenation.” Swift titled the passage on U.S. soldiers’ behavior in the Philippines, “Rapers Also,” and began by quoting verbatim from reports sent from the Philippines to Assistant Secretary of War Meiklejohn that Swift had found reprinted in the *San Francisco Call*, October 13, 1899:

professional soldiers could only ever lead to “a life of strenuous idleness on the part of the soldiering half of mankind and of strenuous toil of the other half to support them.”⁵⁰

Furthermore, and unlike many supporters of the Anti-Imperialist League who partially based their dislike for empire on their fear of assimilating “races” unable to govern themselves, Swift spurned the racialist and paternalist arguments for American empire as a beneficent exercise in uplifting peoples of allegedly inferior cultures.⁵¹ In the first article in the *Public Ownership Review* in which he declared his opposition to the Cuban war, Swift pointed to the reconstructed South and the West as examples of the horrible “blessings” of a capital-fueled white paternalism, in which southern Blacks faced “denials of the ballot” and “ballot-box massacres” and Native Americans had suffered “robbery and progressive extermination.”⁵²

Swift countered the enlightened imperialists by placing freedom and self-determination at the very center of his definition of civilization and its blessings. Those subjected to empire, Swift objected, lacked “independent development, self-development, the power of standing alone and going forward without leading or being led. Order,

“An American chaplain in Malabon, whose name I withhold, told me that in his first parish work he had been told by the natives of Malabon that their wives and daughters had been raped by our soldiers. He could authenticate only five cases. The papers of that date (September 15) say that two men in Manila have been condemned to death for maltreating native women. I saw again and again the brothels of Manila crowded to the doors by our soldiers, and the saloons also. All these things may be unavoidable at times.’—Beneficent assimilation war-times, that is. And this the form assimilation will take. The wives and daughters of the Filipino ‘niggers’ will be assimilated by the males of the higher race, as the wives and daughters of the colored race were by the planters during slavery. It will be in brothels and elsewhere, and this mixing of the blood will be called civilization. Every brothel should contain an American clergyman, paid by the government, to pray over the ceremony and thank God for human progress.” Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 475, 479-480.

⁵⁰ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 205.

⁵¹ For a recent definition of the paternalism characteristic of American empire at the turn of the last century, see Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 15.

⁵² Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 1-3.

justice, and humanity are developed in chattel slaves, but they lack a prime requisite of civilization, without which civilization is not. They are not free.”⁵³ Claims by policymakers and elites for a progressive nature of American empire would always be secondary and subject to empire’s original commercial purposes. “The law of imperialistic colonizing is this,” noted Swift. “No outlay shall be made for ‘civilizing’ purposes which does not promise to return, sooner or later, the usual rate of returns on invested capital. The corollary of this law is that civilization is not an end in itself but a means to an end—a means for increasing and firmly establishing commerce. This simple principle is the key to the entire mighty network of imperialist dogmas concerning duty, religion, humanity, unselfishness and civilization.”⁵⁴ American military intervention and occupation could never benefit nor improve either Americans or their colonial subjects.

Most importantly, Swift differed from the Anti-Imperialists in his increasingly militant international solidarity with the Filipino resistance. As early as January, 1899, Swift had started to express his opposition in a Los Angeles lecture series.⁵⁵ Only a few years later, Swift not only called for American withdrawal from the Philippines; he endorsed insurgent attacks on American soldiers. “I declare that the Tagals are the real American army today,” opined Swift rather provocatively. “We ought to furnish them comfort and succor” for upholding American principles in their own country.⁵⁶ Swift passionately denounced the “millionaire savages” who sought to subdue “our superb

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁴ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 21.

⁵⁵ *Public Ownership Review*, January-February, 1899. Lecture titles included “Imperialism for the Sake of Mankind,” “Economic Reasons Against Expansion,” “American Character, and the Part It Should Play in the World,” and “The Effects of a Standing Army Upon the United States.”

⁵⁶ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 348.

Filipino saviors . . . Fight on, brave Tagals, never cease your guerrilla war . . . Keep heart and fight on, hand to hand with the people[,] your brothers here, to destroy the common foe of humanity.”⁵⁷

Such solidarity was far too radical for the Anti-Imperialist League, especially once that organization had retreated after Gamiliel Bradford’s endorsement in August, 1899, of a “peace conference” and “moral alliance with the Filipinos.”⁵⁸ In fact, the AIL quickly distanced itself from Swift once he formed a “Filipino Liberation Society” in Los Angeles and forwarded copies of a pro-independence petition to the Philippines, a copy of which landed in the hands of Brigadier General Joe Wheeler, a former Confederate commander.⁵⁹ Such internationalism seemed to win Swift more critics than converts.

Yet, Swift also went beyond liberal sympathy with the plight of the beleaguered American volunteer soldier. The Massachusetts Reform Club had held some of the first hearings on the poor medical treatment, sanitation, and deficient supplies and food received by Americans in the Cuban and Philippine excursions. Swift shared these sympathies, and often reprinted letters from soldiers and family members who now felt betrayed by a military poorly prepared for rapid deployment and long-term occupation overseas. But Swift also risked charges of treason by urging soldiers to resist the war in any way possible. “Refuse to enlist, refuse to fight,” called Swift:

⁵⁷ Swift, *ibid.*, 369.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Richard E. Welch, *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 54.

⁵⁹ Welch, *Response to Imperialism*, 54-55.

You who are in the Philippines, demand immediate passage home. You who have not yet gone, refuse to go. There is a law high above the word of an officer, the law of duty, the law of country. Your officers are commanding you to destroy your country: will you obey them? . . . You swore allegiance to your nation, not a popinjay president . . . Be men and bravely think. An American soldier owes allegiance to his conscience and reason first, last and forever.”⁶⁰

Real traitors, Swift suggested, were not soldiers who resisted a war for commerce but those like President McKinley who had traduced the sacred principles of his own nation. Like manufacturers who, in the recent depression, refused to find employment for the jobless and had lost their rights to property, elected officials like McKinley and their government could no longer command obedience. In fact, it was the duty of every citizen to disobey. “Whoever yields to the president now comforts and promotes a traitor to his country, and connives at treason, subversion, and revolution,” Swift trumpeted in defiance. “He makes himself an accomplice of villains to destroy the institutions of liberty.”⁶¹ While difficult to measure how any American soldiers might have responded to such an appeal for resistance, certainly a few Irish volunteers displayed disgust with suppressing a national rebellion and publicly stated their opposition. Re-enlistment rates, furthermore, rapidly declined to a mere seven percent as the insurgency continued.⁶²

In the end, Swift seemed unable to rally many to his radical stance against the new American empire. He incessantly appealed to workers as the only domestic social force capable of dissolving an empire constructed for monopoly capitalism. His poem, “A Workingman’s Opportunity,” called on American workers to organize themselves to act against empire:

⁶⁰ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 350-351.

⁶¹ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 347.

⁶² Jacobson, *Special Sorrows*, 205.

“He can throw down the buttressed robber clan
That has assailed the righteous Philippines,
Crush under that rapacious type of man
On which the coward president falsely leans.
United Labor rushing to the van
Can save itself and this vile nation cleanse.”⁶³

But his effusive prose and poetry often betrayed a wrenching despair regarding workers' apparent acquiescence, a pessimism about the future so severe that at times it bordered on misanthropy.⁶⁴ Swift's appeals to working-class “Anglo-Saxon” manhood undoubtedly would have only ever appealed to the thin stratum of American workers around 1900 who were white, Protestant and class conscious. Certainly, Swift's incipient anti-Semitism must have offended even left-leaning Jewish workers.⁶⁵ His choppy and awkward prose, in books he almost always self-published, must have even further limited his readership.

But the real fault behind the failure of disparate Americans to create a mass movement against empire at the turn of the last century resides not with minor figures like Swift but in the inability of organized labor, radical and socialists, and liberal reformers and disaffected Democrats and Republicans to reconcile considerable socioeconomic, cultural and political differences in order to rally a broad base of popular opposition.⁶⁶ As for Gompers and organized labor, his fraternal union with fellow Anti-Imperialist League vice-president and donor Andrew Carnegie only prefigured a further

⁶³ Swift, *Advent of Empire*, 62.

⁶⁴ See Swift, “The Free American Workingman,” in *Advent of Empire*, 41.

⁶⁵ Swift, *Imperialism and Liberty*, 130.

⁶⁶ For a more sanguine interpretation of the Anti-Imperialist League, see Jim Zwick, “The Anti-Imperialist Movement, 1898-1921,” in Virginia M. Bouvier, ed., *Whose America?: The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define America* (Westport, 2001), 171-192.

shift away from his earlier socialist politics.⁶⁷ But two months into the U.S. counter-insurgency in the Philippines, Gompers addressed a Boston audience assembled at an AIL meeting in Tremont Temple in terms that Swift probably would have applauded: “I look forward to the time when the workers will settle this question [of how to abolish war] by the dock laborers refusing to handle materials that are to be used to destroy their fellow men, and the seamen of the world. . .while willing to risk their lives in conducting the commerce of nations, refusing to strike down their fellow men, even though they may be employed by a foreign power.”⁶⁸

Certainly, the New England Anti-Imperialist League recruited only a few working-class leaders to help them organize in the Boston area, George E. McNeill and Henry Lloyd among them.⁶⁹ Indeed, even labor leaders were split on the question of the new empire. Although the venerable McNeill denounced the coup in Panama that President Roosevelt had provoked to open the gates for the Panama Canal, Gompers endorsed Roosevelt’s policy at the AFL annual convention that met in Boston that year.⁷⁰ But it seems unlikely that an organization like the New England Anti-Imperialist League, led largely by aged and wealthy Mugwumps, would ever have been able to reach beyond the labor officialdom to include the mass of rank-and-file union members.

Morrison Swift went beyond the guarded and inconsistent criticisms of labor officials like Gompers and instead offered a radical critique of American empire. He

⁶⁷ For an account that traces Gompers’ gradual shift towards labor conservatism, see Stuart Bruce Kaufman, *Samuel Gompers and the Origins of the American Federation of Labor, 1848-1896* (Westport, 1973).

⁶⁸ Quoted in Welch, *Response to Imperialism*, 85.

⁶⁹ Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, 1972), 139-140.

⁷⁰ Schirmer, *Republic or Empire*, 248-249.

articulated an indigenous discourse of resistance to U.S. economic, cultural and social domination overseas, and amidst a disjointed movement dominated by trade union leaders and middle-class anti-imperialists, Swift seemed alone in comprehending the enormity of the shift in American political culture, and in suggesting the only viable resolution to the violence, terror and misery that empire inflicted on peoples abroad. At home, many Americans of all classes continued to believe that they were still citizens in a New World republic. But Swift understood that elites, and the workers and reformers who participated in their policies, had already started to become subjects within a political and social project of an entirely different order.

CHAPTER 5

EPILOGUE: MORRISON SWIFT, AMERICAN WORKERS, AND AMERICAN EMPIRE

“Empire as a way of life is predicated upon having more than one needs.”¹

After a decade of organizing the unemployed and agitating against empire, Swift had certainly developed his abilities as an orator, agitator, and radical journalist. But his attempts at organizing a radical third party suited to America's particular political culture had failed, and his militant defense of Filipino independence had gained him more infamy than followers. As the American counter-insurgency in the Philippines receded in the public imagination, the appeals of the relatively respectable Anti-Imperialist League and Swift's screeds against empire certainly seemed to lose urgency, and their paeans to an aging republic began to seem less poignant and increasingly anachronistic. Swift's calls for American workers to honor the radical egalitarian and anti-authoritarian values of “Anglo-Saxon” republicanism certainly seemed to hold less appeal for a rapidly changing American working class, in which fewer and fewer workers, many of them immigrants not of northwestern European origins, had been exposed to republican political ideology. By World War I, however, most American workers had been exposed to a Progressive politics that utilized the antagonisms between a virtuous and undifferentiated “people” and a selfish private “interest” contained within republican

¹ William Appleman Williams, *Empire as a Way of Life: An Essay on the Causes and Character of America's Current Predicament Along with a Few Thoughts About an Alternative* (Oxford, 1980), 31.

ideology, but gave it a middle-class accent that abhorred both corruption and class conflict.²

Perhaps more importantly, radical political positions within the labor movement against domestic militarism and American military interventionism abroad seemed to find less sympathy amongst indigenous trade unionists who had once been concerned about the decline of the venerable republic. Immigrants from European empire-states like Russia or aspiring empire-states like Germany, on the other hand, seemed to be far more conscious about the alleged benefits and considerable costs of empire. But they tended to be socialists and anarchists, not radical republicans. Ideologically, Swift seemed to stand outside of the new and largely immigrant currents in American radicalism. He instead continued to identify with the libertarian and communalist strains of Yankee culture.

Swift also persisted in agitating for a new America by organizing workers to claim the social rights which Swift believed to be inherent in American citizenship. After leaving southern California, Swift lived for a time in Philadelphia, and is alleged by one historian to have been arrested while helping coal miners organize a strike in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. Swift also may have been arrested in the summer of 1906 when he pasted an "Arraignment of American Wealth Kings" on the doors to John D. Rockefeller's New York home.³ In 1907, Swift finally returned to Boston, where he agitated among striking

² Shelton Stromquist, *Reinventing "The People": The Progressive Movement, the Class Problem, and the Origins of Modern Liberalism* (Urbana, 2006).

³ Morrison I. Swift, *Arraignment of American Wealth Kings* (New York: 1906), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge Massachusetts. In this pamphlet Swift reproduced the repetitive, accusatory style of the Declaration of Independence by listing an account of the "crimes" of "John D. Rockefeller, J.P. Morgan, Ogden Armour, and Other Plutocrat Wreckers of the Nation," which reflected his masculinist, republican, "Anglo-Saxon" socialist politics. Rockefeller and his capitalist cohort had "confiscated the nation's wealth," "pitilessly wrecked what was highest in America," namely "Liberty, Opportunity, Equality, Justice, Intelligence, Manhood, Character," and had "fouly assaulted every American

Teamsters and began to serve as chief lecturer and director of the city's Humanist Forum, posts he held until 1914.⁴ But Swift also returned to a position of leadership amongst Boston's poor and unemployed, commanding demonstrations of the unemployed whenever economic recessions or depressions threw thousands of Boston's working class out of work.

On January 8, 1908, Swift once more assembled several hundred unemployed men on the Commons. The crowd endorsed a petition to Boston's mayor, the governor, and the state legislature which reiterated demands for public works jobs and state farms that Swift issued in previous crises. But the petition also contained more advanced proposals including a statewide minimum wage, reduction in rents by 25 percent, and unemployment pensions, a social "right" which implied "no element of charity." The assembled marched to City Hall and presented the petition to Mayor George Hibbard. One week later, after adding to the petition a demand for an agency to prevent suicides of the unemployed (Swift often reprinted *verbatim* in his tracts various newspaper reports of suicides by despondent unemployed workers), Swift led 200 men in delivering the petition to Massachusetts Governor Curtis Guild, Jr. Swift and his followers received little sympathy from any public official. Both the mayor and the governor replied to the protests by insisting that private charity was sufficient and that Swift was "ignorant" of economic conditions in the state.

home...impoverished families, depraved their standard of life, filched their food, starved their children of wealth, joy, intelligence..."

Swift, ever a proud American individualist and socialist idealist, also expressed his values through the first person: "I as one citizen repudiate your sovereignty. I denounce your infamous tax on me and every motion of my life. I cancel your tax on my soul. Where is your title?...I denounce you as traitors [his emphasis]. It is treason to tear the country from its owners and conduct it as a private plantation for your bloated enrichment and their ruin."

⁴ Morrison I. Swift, "Striking Teamsters," April 9, April 15, April 16, 1907, University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Microfilm Collection.

Perhaps Swift's most interesting innovation in this particular crusade of the jobless consisted of a march of 400 men, apparently including German, Polish, Greek, and Yiddish-speaking Jewish immigrant workers, whom he led on Sunday, January 19 into Copley Square and then Trinity Church, the church of the city's Back Bay bourgeoisie. Swift sent a note to the rector, Dr. Alexander Mann, that conveyed interest in hearing him address the plight of the jobless. Mann, who had dedicated the day's sermon to foreign missions (a detail Swift would have appreciated), decided to continue his address. Yet, Mann dedicated his next sermon to Swift's issue and collected more than a thousand dollars for relief. Unlike the 1894 campaign, however, Swift's organizing and social demands in 1908 gained no traction with policymakers and lingered after several more weeks of marches and minor arrests of Swift and others.⁵ Furthermore, once Governor Guild had investigated the "agitator" leading the demonstrations, he refused to entertain more discussion with a man who "openly and publicly reviles all religion, encourages unchastity in women, and advocates house-breaking and theft."⁶

Despite Guild's interest in discrediting Swift before the city on a hill, his remarks were not incorrect. Swift continued to write unsuccessful novels, and even published a

⁵ Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 231-234; *Boston Herald*, January 20, 1908; *Boston Herald*, January 22, 1908. This last newspaper article contained information from Governor Guild which, if true, indicates that Swift probably may have been able to move around the country and publish his own books and pamphlets because he had some independent source of income or wealth. Governor Guild told the *Boston Herald* that "An investigation by the police of the agitator responsible for certain disturbances shows that he has no regular residence in this commonwealth; that his recent stay has been scarcely a month in duration; that although posing as an advocate of Socialism, he did not register and did not vote in behalf of the principles which he says he believes." Furthermore, Guild indicated that Swift may have no longer enjoyed support from AFL officials as he seemed to have in 1894, since he was "not a wage-earner, is ineligible for election in any genuine labor union, and further that he is not recognized as a leader of labor by labor leaders. His own admission shows that he is not unemployed, and that he needs no relief in food, clothing or shelter."

⁶ Keyssar, 233.

book of short stories.⁷ But Swift dedicated the weight of his literary efforts to crafting rather rambling and idiosyncratic critiques of American culture and politics.⁸ Through them he undeniably intended to both challenge and shock conservative American readers. His libertarian socialist writings influenced a few thinkers, including Harvard philosopher and fellow anti-imperialist William James, who cited in *Pragmatism* a long passage from Swift's book *Human Submission* and endorsed Swift's attack upon the amoral abstractions and scholasticism of modern ethics.⁹

Unfortunately, in his book *Marriage and Race Death*, Swift also utilized in a rather awkward fashion the social Darwinist and eugenicist discourse of his day in order to make anti-capitalist arguments against traditional marriage. He claimed that his purpose in the book was to discover "the foundations of a rational conception of the purpose of human life," but his theories of social development were not always entirely logical or rational.¹⁰ Swift praised the state for displacing the Church in supervising marriages, but he argued that marriage and reproduction under capitalism only further degenerated the formerly sacred family, provided employers with surplus labor that

⁷ Walter B. Rideout, a scholar of radical American literature, criticized Morrison I. Swift for trying to revive the moribund utopian American novel in *The Monarch Billionaire* (1903), a "curious book" with a "shallow stream of semiutopian plot at the beginning" which "soon disappears into the barren sands of doctrine." Swift, Rideout accurately noted that Swift was "unable to produce strong literature"; Rideout, *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954: Some Interrelations of Literature and Society* (New York, 1992). See also Morrison I. Swift, *Grimple's Mind* (Santa Barbara, 1901); Swift, *The Damask Girl and Other Stories* (New York, 1906); Swift, *The Horroboos* (Boston, 1911).

⁸ Swift, *The Slavery to which the Present Social System Reduces All Classes* (San Francisco, 1896); *Human Submission: Part Second* (Philadelphia, 1905).

⁹ Deborah J. Coon, "One Moment in the World's Salvation": Anarchism and the Radicalization of William James," *The Journal of American History*, 83 (1996), 70-99. William O. Reichert, a historian of American anarchism, had credited Swift with constructing an original political anthropology in *Human Submission*; see Reichert, "The Melancholy Political Thought of Morrison I. Swift," in *The New England Quarterly*, 49 (1976), 542-558.

¹⁰ Morrison I. Swift, *Marriage and Race Death: The Foundations of an Intelligent System of Marriage* (New York, 1906), 4.

reduced wages and intensified exploitation, and brought women and children into the workplace. Swift trembled that “the time is near when population in civilized countries will be maintained by the breeding of the rotten. They are unamenable to ordinary social restraints. Physically and morally defective, forced to live beneath decency, they will have little capacity of thought for the children they get, a large section of whom will be illicit; while their families, where they exist, will retrogress into rudimental forms.” Swift reinforced the culturalist and racist condescensions and fears of American middle-class progressives, and the strategy he proposed for those “who would rescue the ideal principle of sex union”—“they must attack the social structure fundamentally” and struggle “for a social order in which the best can breed the race, and rear it in the best manner”—was hardly pragmatic, if not outright reactionary.¹¹

Furthermore, Swift tended to reinforce traditional family structures and gendered norms by decrying female and child employment (even though he blamed capitalism and not individuals for this), endorsed working-class temperance, but from a radical and not middle-class rationale (“Drinking men undermine their judgment and are untrustworthy in a matter of such tremendous moment as revolutionary reconstruction . . . They may be moved more easily, but they are worth much less when they are moved. The same is true of sexual profligates”), and betrayed a culturally-specific misanthropy which erred on the rhetorical (“The present American, British, French, German, and Russian races ought to expire, to be supplanted by breeds of higher potentiality . . . The best thing that can happen for them and mankind is extinction.”).¹² But Swift also reversed the racist social biology of his day by praising African-Americans. Swift hoped that blacks in the United

¹¹ Swift, *Marriage and Race Death*, 21-22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 35-38, 80.

States, whom he believed already had “the germs of traits loftier than the white man’s,” if left to develop their own race without copying “the shoddy qualities of the white now viling [sic] human life,” would then “enrich us by interbreeding.”¹³ Swift also clearly displayed anti-Semitism, although he qualified it with a somewhat stereotyped class analysis of the Jewish immigrant community that later pervaded his anti-religious writings in the 1920s.¹⁴

But at least Swift matched his increasingly cranky scribblings with innovative (if not a bit eccentric) policy proposals. In the Progressive era, even conservative Massachusetts enjoyed a tide of progressive legislation.¹⁵ But Swift’s legislative fancies must have alternately provoked and inspired Bostonians, depending on their political views. In 1912, Swift submitted House Bill 564, “A School for Legislators and Judges.” The ignorance most legislators displayed regarding the everyday problems of their constituents could be reduced, Swift suggested, if one year of education were mandated between election and assumption of office. But the school Swift would have them attend did not instruct the fine points of parliamentary procedure or the subtleties of public oratory. Swift would require senators and representatives to live for one month in a Boston slum tenement, pass two nights in cheap lodging houses, spend three consecutive nights in the Hawkins Street Wayfarers’ Lodge (the city’s poor house), and stay five days and nights in different state prisons, all “in order that he may begin to understand practically the basis on which Massachusetts society, culture and wealth rest, to the end

¹³ Swift, *Marriage and Race Death*, 84.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89; Swift, *The Evil Religion Does* (Boston, 1927).

¹⁵ Richard M. Abrams, *Conservatism in a Progressive Era: Massachusetts Politics, 1900-1912* (Harvard, 1964); James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston, 1900-1925* (Cambridge, 1998); and Susan Traverso, *Welfare Politics in Boston, 1910-1940* (Amherst, 2003).

that he may intelligently legislate on the problems of wealth, poverty, capital, labor, crime and disease.”¹⁶

On a more practical level, Swift also urged Massachusetts lawmakers to increase educational opportunities for state prisoners, legalize divorce by mutual agreement, ban strikebreaking, and limit inheritances individuals could bestow to a maximum of \$100,000, with the rest going towards the state in order to “bring about the equality of opportunity which is professed to be our national principle, and to set free the energies of the people which are now chained into inaction by poverty.”¹⁷ Swift certainly joined many Massachusetts progressives who hoped to ameliorate the social and political problems of in a society structured by an unfettered capitalist economy and a relatively weak state. But Swift departed from these reformers not only in his socialist sensibilities. Having discarded his own former interest in settlement work, Swift rejected the moralism and accusatory individualism of middle-class urban reformers. He instead attempted to pressure political and social authorities in Boston and Massachusetts into empowering workers and the poor and recognizing social rights. And he continued to lead more demonstration of the unemployed, particularly in the sharp 1914 depression, before the prosperity induced by military production for the English and their allies in World War I generated widespread employment and a tight labor market.¹⁸

But Swift was once more swimming against the tides of history. He failed to recognize that the same elite culture that promoted expansion abroad also sponsored progressive elements interested in colonizing and reforming the alien cultures of Boston’s

¹⁶ Morrison I. Swift, *Prostitution—A Remedy* (Boston, 1912), 3.

¹⁷ Swift, *Prostitution*, 4-6, 10-11.

¹⁸ *Boston Globe*, March 24, 1914; *Boston Globe*, May 9, 1914.

largely immigrant working class and poor. The fact that Yankee elites like Henry Cabot Lodge hoped to use empire abroad to uplift and civilize foreign cultures while at the same time supporting efforts to assimilate dangerous foreigners in Boston was not a coincidence. As historian Charles S. Maier notes, empires are not merely phenomena that exist outside of the metropole. They reorganize the “center” and the “periphery” at the same time, always reproducing relationships of power to incorporate subordinate cultures and their elite while reinforcing the power of the empire’s most powerful rulers. “Empire,” Maier tells us, “is a form of political organization in which the social elements that rule in the dominant state—the mother country or the metropole—create a network of allied elites in regions abroad who accept subordination in international affairs in return for the security of their position in their own administrative unit (the colony or the periphery).”¹⁹ In the process of empire, these subordinate elites secure an intermediary position from which they negotiate for the subordinate population they represent.

In this sense, the trade union leaders and ethnic ward bosses who dominated the immigrant majority within Boston’s working class represented the leaders of a kind of subordinate *internal* colony. And the very exclusive racial and cultural constructions which Swift adopted in his later writings only reflected and reinforced the middle-class moralism of urban settlement workers whom Swift seemed to oppose. Reformers like the prodigious Robert A. Woods of Boston’s South End literally hoped to “colonize” the urban immigrant poor and working-class in order to fashion them into models of bourgeois American mores. Woods also realized that trade unions tended to be the most effective institutions for acculturation in the city, constituting in effect what labor

¹⁹ Maier, *Among Empires*, 7

historian James Barrett has called “Americanization from the bottom up.”²⁰ Certainly Swift was a socialist who was unhappy with Boston’s corrupt city politics and the conservatism of mainstream AFL unions. But he failed to see that American empire not only exported the exclusionary structures of cultural hierarchy and social inequality of the domestic society abroad; empire actually reinforced domestic structures of oppression as well. Swift understood this relationship in traditional republican terms—he worried that a standing army required by an empire for monopoly capital would increase authoritarianism and militarism at home—but he failed to understand the injurious dialectic between a culture of empire abroad and a culture of empire at home.

By World War I, it certainly seemed that many American workers had accommodated themselves, probably entirely unconsciously, to a kind of unreflective imperial citizenship. While many socialists, anarchists, and even traditional isolationists opposed U.S. military intervention in a war between European empire-states, certainly a majority of American workers supported democratic American ideals invoked by President Woodrow Wilson, supported American intervention, and supported the war effort; many even accepted conscription. As numerous labor and political historians have pointed out, AFL leaders feverishly supported the war effort. They joined labor progressives like Frank Walsh in utilizing growing influence in the Democratic Party to take advantage of national industrial mobilization and the corporatist agencies of the Wilson administration like the National War Labor Board, all in the hopes of establishing “industrial democracy” in America. And they were quite successful, winning a host of

²⁰ Green and Donoghue, *Boston's Workers*, 68; James R. Barrett, “Americanization from the Bottom Up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880-1930,” in *The Journal of American History*, 79 (1992), 996-1020.

reforms like the eight-hour day, federal arbitration of strikes and industrial disputes, and government management of railroads.²¹

Nevertheless, as the potential for a fully interventionist state and corporatist social order waned in the years of reaction following the armistice, American workers and their trade union leaders might have asked themselves whether the benefits of citizenship in an empire were worth the consequences. Undeniably, American integration into world markets and a stable and prosperous Europe ready to buy American goods and American investments led to enormous profits in the 1920s, some of which trickled down to a small percentage of American workers. But at what cost? American workers, previously loyal to a republican vision of a virtuous and roughly egalitarian state without standing armies, now had accepted conscription for a foreign war, not an immediate civil or domestic war. They had tolerated the repression of labor radicals and socialist parties. And they had lost the rather ephemeral social benefits wrought by Progressive policies during the Wilson administration. Such patterns arguably laid the structures for the conservatism of the post-World War II era, in which many American workers developed a robust “working-class Americanism,” accepted the trade-offs of relative affluence and security in a mass-consumer society dominated and militarized by a welfare-warfare state, and faced a nuclearized Cold War for capitalism against communism—all at the risk of being drafted for “peripheral” wars in Korea and Vietnam.²²

²¹ Robert H. Zieger, *Republicans and Labor, 1919-1929* (Lexington, 1969); Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America* (Chapel Hill, 1994), and Joseph McCartin, *Labor's Great War The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill, 1997), 37-106.

²² Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (New York, 1955); William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (New York, 1963); Gary Gerstle, *Working-Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile Society, 1914-1960* (Cambridge, 1989); Michael S. Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s* (New Haven, 1995);

But not all working-class Americans accepted the benefits of empire, either before or during World War I or in the decades that followed.²³ A militant minority of organizers and activists carried on the internationalism pioneered by radicals like Swift at the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, many of them, including and especially members of the Communist Party, sometimes subordinated their anti-imperialism to a politics of internationalism which refused to acknowledge the genuine and valuable patriotism of many American workers.²⁴ Perhaps if Morrison Swift had not been such a terribly eccentric figure in the history of Progressive-era American radicalism, he could have had greater influence on radical movements within the working class, and steered working-class opponents of empire towards both invoking the republican traditions of the American past, and a hope for an egalitarian social order in the future in an American idiom. Indeed, according to his theory of monopoly capital and foreign policy, Swift's ideal social system of "public ownership" necessarily abolished the key economic causes of modern empire. But Swift, ever an idealist and humanitarian, could not be that figure, as he himself succumbed to the Progressive call for an empire of democracy in World War I.

In 1913 and 1914, Swift had helped left-leaning Lettish members of the Massachusetts state Socialist Party capture that organization from moderate socialists.

Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York, 2003); and Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor, 2005).

²³ See Philip S. Foner, *Militarism and Organized Labor: 1900-1914* (Minneapolis, 1987).

²⁴ The most obvious example of the U.S. Communist Party's occasional inability to both practice internationalist politics and appeal to the nationalist politics of American workers is of course their adherence to an anti-war position at the behest of the Comintern after the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939; see Maurice I. Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?: The American Communist Party During the Second World War* (Middletown, 1982).

But when these moderates regained control of the state SP organization, Swift was one of a handful of English-speaking Yankee socialists leading the Lettish-backed Socialist Propaganda League, a proto-Communist and anti-militarist organization that contributed to the founding of America's first Communist Party a few years later.²⁵ But despite his previous antipathy for wars of empire, Swift clearly started to view the European war as a war against German barbarism, and American involvement a lesser evil required to stop an evil of far greater proportions. In May, 1915, following the sinking of the *Lusitania* by a German submarine, Swift averred that world civilization itself was at risk. The United States' neutrality could be justified only if the defeat of the Germans were assured, an assurance Swift could not accept.²⁶

Two months later Swift warned that a victorious Germany would use its supremacy on the seas to extend German power into the Western hemisphere. The only threat less dangerous to the survival of the American republic, argued Swift, were the "peace advocates." Military victory over Germany was the only possible assurance of an end to militarism. In compromising with the Prussian empire, anti-war activists and pacifists were "the chief promoters of undying war and lasting military reign," wrote Swift. "They are giving possession of the world to the fighting Prussians and extending the Hohenzollern throne all over the earth. The most potent enemies of peace and perpetuators of war are these American peace preachers in this terrible crisis of civilization."²⁷

²⁵ Paul Buhle, *A Dreamer's Paradise Lost: Louis C. Fraina/Lewis Corey (1892-1953) and the Decline of Radicalism in the United States* (Atlantic Highlands, 1995), 66; Theodore Draper, *The Roots of American Communism* (New York, 1957), 69.

²⁶ *New York Times*, May 8, 1915.

²⁷ *New York Times*, July 12, 1915.

Almost three years later, and months after American military participation in the war, Swift's support for the war had not dissipated at all; if anything, it increased. Swift, now 62 years old, displayed a growing interest in the health of the "race" which led him to endorse universal military training. Universal and mandatory conscription of American men "would be a means of developing America health and preventing the formation of soft habits of life, which had been steadily growing on the people before the war." To protect civilization after the war had ended, Swift urged his fellow Americans, "men in the democratic nations must be different from what they were before the war came. They must be much more virile physically and much better trained to think. In this country we have learned that we were very lame in both respects."²⁸

The Swift of 1918 was far different than the Swift of 1899, who had scorned Roosevelt for advocating the strenuous life and military adventurism as a means to reclaiming lost American manhood. But Swift still looked forward to a revolutionary reconstruction of western societies in the aftermath of World War I, and he endorsed the Bolshevik revolution as a revolution of the "slaves" against "masters," a revolution which exposed the Wilsonian war for democracy as a war that ultimately established the supremacy of democratic capitalist societies over German autocracy, but still maintained reactionary social inequality.²⁹ His cynicism regarding human institutions now confirmed by the horrors of world war, Swift informed readers that only a revolution in social values would reorganize society in ways that would abolish war and social oppression. The

²⁸ *New York Times*, March 24, 1918.

²⁹ Indeed (and probably for Swift and many others) Boston in 1919 seemed quite close to revolution; the Boston police strike paralyzed the city for days. See Francis Russell, *A City in Terror: 1919, the Boston Police Strike* (New York, 1975).

values of capitalism, the values of “living on others,” would have to be transcended by those willing to reorganize human societies on the basis of equality.

The first step toward this fundamental revolution in human values, argued Swift, was for “these people who regard riches as life” to surrender their desire for wealth. Ultimately, Swift reminded those surveying with him the wreckage of a destroyed Europe and looking anxiously to the Russian revolution and the future, they would have to decide between “selfishness and survival,” in effect, between barbarism or socialism. “The earth could be saved,” Swift cried, “but it will not save itself nor will Nature do it; that work is for you.”³⁰

³⁰ Morrison I. Swift, *Can Mankind Survive* (Boston, 1918), 200. Swift’s last words—he died in 1946 after witnessing another world war and the nuclearization of warfare—were reported to have been “Tell the people to unite or they certainly will be destroyed.” Quoted in Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 236-237.

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