

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: TRADITIONAL VALUES AND
PROGRESSIVE DESIRES: TENSIONS OF
IDENTITY IN THE RHETORIC OF THE
GRANGER MOVEMENT IN ILLINOIS, 1870-
1875

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Communication

In the decade following the Civil War, Illinois Farmers suffered from a variety of economic problems such as deflated currency, increased agricultural production, international competition, high tariffs, expensive farm implements, high transportation rates, high taxes, and the occasional natural disaster. Scattered, powerless, and dependent, Illinois farmers were especially vulnerable to a political and economic system controlled by corporate monopolies, corrupt and unresponsive government, and an endless procession of middlemen waiting to take their share of the farmers' hard-earned profits.

Farmers responded by forming the Granger movement, the first large-scale farmers' movement in the United States and the initial episode of a broader farmers' movement in the late nineteenth century. Granger movement rhetoric constituted Illinois farmers as powerful agents of change by transforming them from individual actors into the agricultural class, a powerful collective identity motivated for political and economic action. Movement rhetoric did so by drawing upon the motivational power of three strands of American public discourse—the agrarian myth, the rhetoric of class, and the legacy of the American Revolution—to create a narrative that empowered Midwestern

farmers to see the dire consequences of their agrarian individualism and to constitute themselves as a class that could adequately respond to their material conditions in the late nineteenth century.

TRADITIONAL VALUES AND PROGRESSIVE DESIRES: TENSIONS OF
IDENTITY IN THE RHETORIC OF THE GRANGER MOVEMENT IN ILLINOIS,
1870-1875

by

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Although at times this dissertation has seemed like lonely work, no project of this size and scope can be a solitary venture. So, I would like to thank the many people who have helped me to write a dissertation that literally has taken two centuries to complete...

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before I did but were gracious enough not to rub it in. Particularly, I want to tell Diane Blair, Leslie Dinauer, Lisa Gring-Pemble, and Amy Heyse: “What a swell bunch of folks you are!” Thanks, also, to all the faculty and staff in the Department of Communication I have had the pleasure to know over the years. Particularly, I would like to thank Leah Waks and Edward Fink for their humor and camaraderie.

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Well, it's finally done. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, writing a dissertation "is an adventure. To begin with, it is a toy and an amusement. Then it becomes a mistress, then it becomes a master, then it becomes a tyrant. The last phase is that just as you are about to be reconciled to your servitude, you kill the monster..."

...and fling the carcass to your dissertation committee.

So, the carcass has been flung and the committee has spoken. At last, the time has come for the rest of you to circle 'round and pick away.

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Chapter One: Constituting Identity in the Granger Movement in Illinois, 1870-1875

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a class of people, suffering from long continued systems of oppression and abuse, to rouse themselves from an apathetic indifference to their own interests, which has become habitual; to assume among their fellow citizens, that equal station, and demand from the government they support, those equal rights, to which the laws of nature, and of nature's God entitles them; a decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to a course so necessary to their own protection.

—Farmers' Declaration of Independence of 1873

This passage, the opening paragraph of an “alternative” Declaration of Independence penned by leaders of the Granger movement in Illinois, adapted the form and language of the original Declaration to reflect the conditions Midwestern farmers faced after the Civil War. In the late nineteenth century, the transformation of the United States from an agrarian society to an industrial and commercial nation created a great sense of dislocation for American farmers. Once seen as the nation's essential class of citizens, farmers were no longer widely regarded as representative of America's economic, political, and social identity. Instead, the nation was increasingly shaped by the rise of large corporations that wielded great economic and political power, a power that many saw as oppressive and corrupt. In this transition, farmers lost much of their economic, political, and social power and status.

In the Midwest, farmers felt the effects of this transition acutely. After the Civil War, the Midwestern farmers' economic conditions slowly deteriorated. The high demand for the Midwest's staple crops during the Civil War marked a period of high profits for these farmers, but when the boom times did not continue after the war, they suffered through an economic depression in the late 1860s and early 1870s due to low

crop prices, high implement costs, high tariffs, unfair tax burdens, excessive interest rates, high transportation and storage rates, deflated currency, international competition, and the occasional natural disaster.¹ The nature of commercial farming exacerbated the Midwestern farmers' economic problems. To take advantage of the needs of distant markets, Midwestern farmers specialized in cash crops such as corn or wheat depending on their area's climate, soil, and general growing conditions. In turn, specialization made farmers dependent upon transportation to ship their crops to distant Northeastern and European markets. When crop prices fell so low that the bulk of a crop's profit was taken by railroads, grain traders, merchants, and other middlemen, the farmers began to have trouble keeping up with their costs.

Midwestern farmers also faced growing political problems as a result of the United States' transition from an agricultural to an industrial nation. In the early years of the republic, farmers had adequate representation in government. After the Civil War, however, government became disproportionately representative of smaller, less numerous groups. Lawyers, for example, greatly outnumbered farmers in many state legislatures and in the federal government, and the farmers' needs and wants were not met by their representatives. Furthermore, corporate monopolies, especially railroads, exerted undue influence over government officials in all three branches of government.

Thus, scattered and powerless, farmers were vulnerable to a political and economic system that appeared to be beyond their control. The basic aspects of their lives

¹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, chap. 1, "Fundamental Conditions"; Schwieder, "Agricultural Issues."

were shaped by the decisions and practices of corporate monopolies, and an endless procession of middlemen waited to take a share of the farmers' hard-earned profits. When farmers turned to their government for help, they found many of their elected representatives to be corrupt and unresponsive to their grievances.

The most significant obstacle Midwestern farmers faced in overcoming their economic and political problems was the lack of organization. After the Civil War, farmers were too isolated, scattered, and poor to pose a significant threat to their larger, more organized, and wealthier opponents. To address their economic and political problems, farmers realized that they needed to organize. "The one thing which presented itself again and again in almost every other industry, but which appeared to be lamentably lacking in agriculture, was organization," claimed historian Solon J. Buck. He continued:

The idea of some form of association among the farmers for cooperation in the improvement of their condition, materially, socially, and intellectually, appealed to them in many ways....An agricultural organization including a great part of the farmers of the nation would be able to demand fairer treatment from the railway corporations and to enforce it with the help of the state; it could use its immense influence to secure more favorable legislation on such matters as the tariff, currency, and taxation; by means of a widespread local organization it could gather and disseminate useful information concerning the crops and the markets; and in general it could foster a beneficent spirit of cooperation and mutual assistance among its members. In this way alone can a satisfactory explanation be found for the widespread and phenomenal movement for organization which appeared among the farmers in the decade of the seventies.²

The result was the Granger movement, the first large-scale farmers' movement in the United States. Named for the National Grange of the Order of the Patrons of

² Buck, *Granger Movement*, 39.

Husbandry, it was the initial episode of a broader farmers' movement that waxed and waned from the end of the Civil War until the turn of the century.³ The movement sought to address the farmers' political and economic problems, especially those that resulted from the growing power of corporations. In Illinois, the focus of this study, the Granger movement began to grow rapidly by 1872. Throughout 1873 and 1874, the most active years of the movement, a substantial portion of the Illinois agricultural population was involved with one or more farmers' organizations in the state. Some estimates claimed up to 150,000 Illinois farmers had joined farmers' organizations during those years.⁴ These organizations, in aggregate, gave Illinois farmers the potential to wield considerable power in local and state politics.

The Granger movement was a significant event in American history because it influenced later farmers' movements and played an important role in shaping public policy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was the first post-Civil war movement to push for agricultural cooperation on a large scale to free members from the

³ "Granger movement" is a slight misnomer, as many movement actions attributed to the Grange either occurred before the Grange had built a substantial following or resulted from the efforts of others. However, many of the movement's advocates and opponents fixed on the Grange as the main force behind the movement because it boasted a large membership and carried the highest profile of the farmers' organizations connected to the movement.

⁴ S. M. Smith, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, December 16-18, 1873, Decatur, Ill., 8; S. M. Smith, "Secretary's Report," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, January 19-21, 1875, Springfield, Ill., 6; Buck, *Granger Movement*, table between 58-59, 76.

influence of middlemen and corporations.⁵ As the American farmers' first large-scale attempt to challenge the power of corporate monopolies, the movement played an important role in pushing political and economic reform in the late nineteenth century.⁶ Some scholars have claimed that the Granger movement ultimately played a role in the establishment of minimum wage and maximum hour laws, bank reform acts, corporate legislation, tax reform, and resource conservation.⁷ In the realm of controlling corporate behavior, the Granger movement played an important role in railroad regulation and helped to shape constitutional law through *Munn v. Illinois* (1877), a landmark U. S. Supreme Court decision.⁸ The Granger movement also led to the rise of independent

⁵ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 303-10. The cooperative aspect was adopted on a much larger scale and apparently to greater effect by the Farmers' Alliance in the 1880s. See Goodwyn, *Populist Moment*, chap. 2, "The Alliance Develops a Movement Culture." Thomas A. Woods argued that the Alliance learned much of their cooperative strategies from the successes and failures of the Grange's efforts in the 1870s and 1880s. See "Knights of the Plow," 30-32.

⁶ Buck, *Granger Movement*, v, 303-12. Many who wrote about the Grange or the Granger movement in the twentieth century have acknowledged Solon J. Buck's work as the standard history. Some, however, did so as prelude for revision or debunking. Two challenges to Buck's perspective can be found in Miller, *Granger Laws*, chap. 4, "Illinois: The Triumph of Judicial Review," and chap. 8, "The Grangers and the Granger Laws"; and Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, preface and chap. 1, "Like a Mighty River."

⁷ Miles, "Social Legislation," 13-15.

⁸ *Munn v. Illinois* was the principal case in a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions that determined the scope of government regulation of private property. These cases are often called the "Granger Cases" because they reviewed the constitutionality of the "Granger Laws," a collection of Midwestern state regulations of private corporations put into effect during the Granger movement. Among these regulations was an 1871 Illinois statute that outlined the maximum rates grain elevators could charge for grain storage. Ira Munn and his partners were found guilty for violating this law. They appealed, claiming that the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment. The U. S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Munn* and the other Granger Cases affirmed state legislatures' power to regulate private industry if necessary for the common good. *Munn* is significant because it outlined the proper role of

agrarian political parties.⁹ Finally, the Granger movement articulated many of the issues and problems that farmers confronted in later movements. Many of the organizational, political, economic, and rhetorical strategies used in later farmers' movements were first shaped by the Granger movement.¹⁰

Given the influence of the farmers' movements of the late nineteenth century and the seminal influence attributed to the Granger movement on agrarian reform of this time, it is surprising that rhetorical critics have not specifically examined the rhetoric of the Granger movement in more detail. In rhetorical studies, the Populist movement has received the most detailed attention of all the late nineteenth century farmers' movements.¹¹ As for the Granger movement, only Paul Crawford's general overview of the rhetoric of the Granger and Greenback movements stands out. Crawford attended to fundamental issues the farmers faced and identified some of the basic rhetorical strategies

government in the American economy, determining the proper balance between the government's dual concern to protect property rights and to defend the general welfare of the people. Since 1934, argued historian Bernard Schwartz, *Munn v. Illinois* "has been the doctrine that has furnished the constitutional foundation for the ever-broader schemes of business regulation that have become so prominent a feature of the present-day society." *History of the Supreme Court*, 165.

⁹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 308-311.

¹⁰ For example, rhetorical critic Paul Crawford argued that the Farmers' Declaration of Independence, a document prepared by members of the Illinois State Farmers' Association during the Granger movement, reflected the basic ideology of agrarian protest from the Granger period to the reform conventions of 1891-92. See "Farmer Assesses His Role," 110. Buck claimed that the more radical agricultural movements in the early 1880s incorporated many features of the Granger movement, and the Grange's 1874 Declaration of Purposes had been incorporated into the platforms of later agricultural organizations. See *Granger Movement*, v, 68.

¹¹ I discuss the nature of this scholarship in more detail on pp. 21-25.

farmers used in response. Crawford characterized the movement's rhetoric as a "recitation of alleged wrongs, often set forth in statistics and examples and a demand that the injustices be eradicated."¹² Crawford also noted an "ideological schizophrenia" within the movement's discourse: Farmers saw huge corporations as a public threat, but were reluctant to give government the power required to regulate corporations effectively. Crawford concluded that Granger rhetoric in the 1870s "arose from genuine economic distress, but it presented an oversimplification of a complex politico-socio-economic situation," a claim that implied the movement did not properly represent the material conditions of the farmer.¹³ Given its historical, political, economic, and social importance, the Granger movement deserves much more attention from rhetorical critics.

This study examines the constitutive rhetoric of the Granger movement in Illinois from 1870 to 1875. The study of the constitutive power of the Granger movement would yield insight into the rhetorical power of American farmers' movements in general. A more complete understanding of the rhetorical nature of the farmers' identity as constituted within the Granger movement would offer critical insight into the rhetorical strategies late nineteenth-century farmers used to perceive their world and their role within it. Many of the themes and strategies of Granger movement rhetoric were also employed in the later and larger Greenback,¹⁴ Alliance,¹⁵ and Populist¹⁶ movements.¹⁷

¹² Crawford, "Farmer Assesses His Role," 108.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁴ The Greenback movement was both a farmers' and workers' movement. Its primary aim was to improve the economic conditions of farmers and workers by increasing the amount of paper currency issued by the federal government. Starting slowly in the postwar years, the popularity of the Greenback philosophy grew as the Granger

Furthermore, greater rhetorical insight into the Granger movement would make a significant addition to the historical, sociological, economic, and political scholarship of American farmers' movements.

movement waned. In 1875, a national political party was formed from the confluence of the Granger and Greenback movements. In many parts of the country, the Greenback movement formed thousands of local Greenback clubs. The party nominated presidential candidates in 1876, 1880, and 1884, and although the party enjoyed some short-lived success by electing candidates to Congress, its presidential candidates failed to garner much significant voter support. After 1880, the movement faded in strength. "Though the forces of agrarian discontent attained national political organization for the first time in the Greenback party," wrote Buck, "its leaders were never able to obtain the support of more than a minority of the farmers." *Agrarian Crusade*, 97, and chap. 6, "The Greenback Interlude." See also Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, part 2, "The Greenback Movement," and Unger, *Greenback Era*.

¹⁵ The Alliance movement was a grassroots agrarian movement that arose in the South and in the Midwest. This movement, which rose slowly in the late 1870s but grew rapidly throughout the 1880s, was predominantly based upon economic cooperation in the South and political mobilization in the Midwest. The Alliance movement was shaped in the South by the consolidation of several fast-growing farmers' organizations into the Southern Alliance and by the rapid growth of the National Alliance in the Midwest. In 1889, the two organizations met to discuss the possibility of cooperation or merger, but their leadership could not agree on conditions to form a truly national farmers' association. After 1890, the Alliance movement lost strength and much of its energy was directed into the Populist movement. See Buck, *Agrarian Crusade*, chap. 8, "The Farmers' Alliance." See also Goodwyn, *Populist Moment* and *Democratic Promise*; Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*; and Scott, *Agrarian Movement in Illinois*.

¹⁶ The Populist movement was formed from the ashes of the Alliance movement and was the prominent farmers' movement of the 1890s. Farmers, largely in the South and the Great Plains, joined with workers in the Knights of Labor to form a political alliance to fight organized capital and the corruption of the Democratic and Republican parties. The Populists sought to offset the power of organized capital through increased government regulation. The Populist Party grew powerful enough to secure fusion with the Democrats in the 1896 presidential election, a move that ultimately played a big role in the dissolution of the movement. See Buck, *Agrarian Crusade*, 125-93. See also Goodwyn, *Populist Moment* and *Democratic Promise*; Hicks, *The Populist Revolt*; and Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*.

¹⁷ Buck, *Granger Movement*, v, 311-12.

The research question this study seeks to answer is: In a society moving away from its rural and agrarian roots toward a more urban, industrial, and commercial future, how did Granger movement rhetoric transform the relatively powerless Illinois farmers into powerful agents of change? To answer this question, I examine the strategies that Granger movement rhetoric employed to constitute Illinois farmers as agents of change. The constitutive power of movement rhetoric was grounded in how it used key symbolic forms—myths, metaphors, narratives, and ideographs—to shape the farmers’ identity and frame the farmers’ situation to motivate action. My answer to the research question is the thesis of this dissertation, that Granger movement rhetoric constituted Illinois farmers as powerful agents of change by transforming them from individual actors into a powerful collective identity, the agricultural class, a collective agrarian identity motivated for political and economic action. In this chapter, I first examine the scholarly literature on the Granger movement. Second, I offer a theoretical and methodological perspective that will yield insight into the power of Granger movement rhetoric. Finally, I offer a précis of the dissertation study.

Agrarian Identity and Agency in the Granger Movement in Illinois: A Review of the Literature

This review offers an analysis of the scholarly literature that examined late nineteenth century farmers’ movements in general and the Granger movement in particular. First, I examine the scholarly dispute over the Granger movement’s significance and influence in the historical literature. I argue that, as a whole, the historical literature underestimated the Granger movement’s influence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Second, I examine how historical scholarship

focused on American farmers in the late nineteenth century depicted the farmers' identity and agency. Taken as a whole, this scholarship portrayed the farmers' identity as fragmented and paradoxical and their agency as diffused and ineffectual. Third, I examine some of the rhetorical strategies used in American farmers' movements in the late nineteenth century. Overall, a mythic approach to analyzing and understanding the farmers' identity and agency best explains the farmers' rhetorical choices. Finally, I argue that the focus of my study, the rhetorical construction of the American farmers' identity by the Granger movement in Illinois, is well justified by the implications of this literature.

The Influence of the Granger Movement

The debates over the Granger movement's influence are part of a larger scholarly controversy over the legacy of late nineteenth century farmers' movements as a whole. Many farmers' movement studies have claimed that these movements failed in the short term but ultimately succeeded in the long term.¹⁸ In the short term, these movements did not achieve many of their immediate policy goals or political victories on the national level. Even their political and economic victories at the local and state levels lasted only a few years at best. However, many scholars have credited these movements with broad impact on the politics and economy of the twentieth century. Arguing for their positive influence, historian Elizabeth Sanders claimed that "agrarian movements constituted the

¹⁸ Representative of the comparisons between short-term and long-term potency of the late nineteenth century agrarian agenda, historian Richard Hofstadter stated that although the Populists didn't reach their goals in the short term, they "released a flow of protest and criticism that swept through American political affairs from the 1890s to the beginning of the first World War." *Age of Reform*, 60.

most important political force driving the development of the American national state in the half century before World War I” and that “by shaping the form of early regulatory legislation...agrarian influence was felt for years thereafter.”¹⁹ Other scholars have identified negative influences, arguing that nationalistic, xenophobic, paranoid, and racist viewpoints expressed by agrarian radicals served as fertile ideological soil for McCarthyism, hate groups, militant separatists, and domestic terrorism and violence.²⁰

Several scholars have claimed that the Granger movement influenced later nineteenth century farmers’ movements and impacted American institutions. Historian Solon J. Buck, whose 1912 monograph is considered the “standard” history of the Granger movement in the 1870s, argued that it was “the first attempt at agricultural organization on a large scale” in American history. The Granger movement fought “big capitalism” wherever it appeared and helped build a national movement for political, social, and economic reform in the late nineteenth century.²¹ According to John Miles, “the Granger movement signified the first major political effort to modify the outworn doctrines of the *laissez-faire* era...which ultimately brought large corporate enterprise

¹⁹ Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 1.

²⁰ Heinze, “Yeoman Farmer,” 6-7 and chap. 5, “Anti-Urbanism, Xenophobia and the Emerging Paradox: Social Retrogression, 1873-1893”; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, chap. 2, “The Folklore of Populism,” and chap. 3, “From Pathos to Parity”; and Stock, *Rural Radicals*, introduction, chap. 2, “The Culture of Vigilantism,” and chap. 3, “Rural Radicalism in Our Time.”

²¹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, v, 303-12. Many who wrote about the Grange or the Granger movement in the twentieth century have acknowledged Solon J. Buck’s work as the standard history. Some, however, did so as prelude for revision or debunking. Two challenges to Buck’s perspective can be found in Miller, *Granger Laws*, chap. 4, “Illinois: The Triumph of Judicial Review,” and chap. 8, “The Grangers and the Granger Laws”; and Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, preface and chap. 1, “Like a Mighty River.”

under government control.” Grangers were “the first proponents of social legislation to effectively enter the political arena” in the United States and the Granger movement’s influence reached as far as later establishment of minimum wage and maximum hour laws, bank reform acts, corporate legislation, tax reform, and conservation of natural resources.²² It was the first postwar movement to push for agricultural cooperation on a large scale to free members from the influence of middlemen and monopolies.²³ The Granger movement also led to the rise of agrarian-based independent parties. The idea that farmers should break from the Democratic and Republican parties to fight for new causes began with the Granger movement.²⁴ Finally, the Granger movement articulated many of the issues and problems that farmers confronted in later movements. Much of the basic ideological vocabulary and many of the organizational, political, economic, and rhetorical strategies used in later farmers’ movements were first shaped by the Granger movement.²⁵

²² Miles, “Social Legislation,” 13-15.

²³ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 303-10. The cooperative aspect was adopted on a much larger scale and apparently to greater effect by the Farmers’ Alliance in the 1880s. See Goodwyn, *Populist Moment*, chap. 2, “The Alliance Develops a Movement Culture.” Thomas A. Woods argued that the Alliance learned much of their cooperative strategies from the successes and failures of the Grange’s efforts in the 1870s and 1880s. See “Knights of the Plow,” 30-32.

²⁴ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 308-311.

²⁵ For example, rhetorical critic Paul Crawford argued that the Farmers’ Declaration of Independence, a document prepared by members of the Illinois State Farmers’ Association during the Granger movement, reflected the basic ideology of agrarian protest from the Granger period to the reform conventions of 1891-92. See “Farmer Assesses His Role,” 110. Buck claimed that the more radical agricultural movements in the early 1880s incorporated many features of the Granger movement, and the Grange’s

In the realm of controlling corporate behavior, many scholars recognized the Granger movement for its role in railroad regulation.²⁶ Members of the Granger movement and those sympathetic with the movement helped draft and pass the “Granger laws,” important Midwestern railroad regulations that established a constitutional precedent by allowing legislatures to regulate the use of private property when that use was related to the public interest. “On the whole,” argued Buck, “if we use the term ‘Granger’ as relating to organized efforts of the farming classes, it must be conceded that the phrase ‘Granger legislation’ is rightly applied to the railway laws enacted in Illinois.”²⁷

However, some scholars have disputed the Granger movement’s influence on railroad regulation in the 1870s. Historian George H. Miller and others have argued that the Granger movement had very little impact on the Granger laws; rather, the principles underlying these laws came from lawyers, merchants, legislators, and railroad officials who drew upon established traditions of regulation. For example, Miller and others argued that Chicago businessmen, lawyers, merchants, lawmakers, and members of the Chicago Board of Trade were more influential in passing the 1873 Granger railroad law

1874 Declaration of Purposes had been incorporated into the platforms of later agricultural organizations. See *Granger Movement*, v, 68.

²⁶ Many standard U.S. histories note the Granger movement’s role in Midwestern railroad regulation. For example, see Morison, Commager, and Leuchtenberg, *Concise History*, 418-23.

²⁷ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 158.

than were farmers.²⁸ While Miller did not entirely discount the influence of agrarian agitation on the laws or on the public's perception of the controversy, he argued that the farmers' influence actually cooled the Illinois legislature's enthusiasm for "radical" railroad regulation. Citing the Illinois State Farmers' Association's (ISFA) demonstrations in Springfield during the 1873 legislative session, Miller argued that agrarian pressure politics and the farmers' militant protests frightened legislators into passing conservative laws because they feared agrarian radicalism would inhibit railroad construction.²⁹

Miller offered three arguments why the farmers' role was overstated. First, farmers were not politically influential when the first Midwestern railroad regulations were passed in the late 1860s. In Illinois, Miller argued, the demand for regulation appeared before the Grange or other state farmers' organizations had built a significant presence.³⁰ Second, the animosity of the Eastern press toward government regulation led commentators like the *Nation*'s E. L. Godkin to associate the railroad regulations with the Grangers in order to stigmatize the laws. Third, the extent of agrarian opposition to the railroads was exaggerated by the major political parties' attempts to gain the farmers'

²⁸ Miller, *Granger Laws*, esp. chap. 2, "Illinois: Railroad Rate Law 1831-71," chap. 4, "Illinois: The Triumph of Judicial Review," and chap. 8, "The Grangers and the Granger Laws"; Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, chap. 10, "Communications, Transportation, and the Grange"; Rothstein, "Numbers, Gains, Losses," 168-69; and Woodman, "Chicago Businessmen," 16-24. See Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 179-81, for a concise summary of the arguments against the farmers' influence on railroad regulation.

²⁹ Miller, *Granger Laws*, 166-67.

³⁰ However, Grange founder Oliver H. Kelley had met with agrarian leaders in Illinois in the early 1870s about forming Granges there. Woods, "Knights of the Plow," chap. 8, "The Rising Tide."

vote. Democrats and Republicans played up reform in their campaigns by denouncing railroads as the farmers' enemy. In truth, Miller argued, farmers were not predisposed to regulate railroads. The factor that determined support or opposition to railroad regulation was not whether one was a farmer but whether one's community had railroad service. Farmers, like other rural citizens, were more likely to support regulation if their community already had a rail line and more likely to oppose it if their community had no rail service at all. Miller argued that people in towns without rail service opposed regulation because they feared it would discourage new construction.³¹

Miller's first argument confounded the farmers' political activism with the arrival of the larger farmers' organizations. In Illinois, many farmers were politically active before the Grange and the Illinois State Farmers' Association had formed. As early as 1858, according to one contemporary agrarian observer, discontent Illinois farmers met at the state fair in Centralia to discuss their railroad problems, although no organized action resulted.³² The *Prairie Farmer*, a leading agricultural journal published in Chicago, had advocated collective agrarian protest, railroad regulation, and association for mutual benefit since the 1850s. Many Illinois farmers were politically active in the 1860s, and some joined a short-lived statewide anti-monopoly association that did not appear to achieve any lasting impact.³³ Generally, however, if Illinois farmers had organized at all before 1872, it was generally in local farmers' clubs. Some farmers participated in anti-

³¹ Miller, *Granger Laws*, 164-65.

³² Periam, *Groundswell*, 204-206.

³³ Unger, *Greenback Era*, 205-206.

monopoly protests with members of other groups and aired their problems with railroad practices. Illinois farmers also played a role in securing provisions for railroad and grain warehouse regulation in the 1870 state constitution and formed a Legislative Farmers' Club in the Illinois General Assembly to help enact one of the first railroad regulations in 1871.³⁴ But it would not be until the rise of the Grange and the ISFA in 1872 and 1873 that Illinois farmers would become a powerful political force.

Miller's second and third reasons, rather than discounting the movement's influence, instead made a strong case for its rhetorical power. That the Eastern press and the major parties exaggerated the link between the Granger movement and railroad regulation by stressing the farmers' influence strengthened the movement. In one sense, the farmers were powerful precisely *because* the politicians and the Eastern press saw them as a threat. Whether the Easterners' fear of redistribution of property came from the farmers' protests against monopolies or from the government's regulation of those monopolies is somewhat beside the point—the fact remains that the link was made rhetorically and had the effect of linking the movement and the regulations in the minds of the audience (and, perhaps more importantly, in the minds of the farmers). That the major political parties co-opted the principles and platforms of potentially strong third parties also acknowledges the farmers' influence. Throughout the late nineteenth century, the Democrats and Republicans, especially in agricultural sections of the country, co-opted the principles, platforms, and planks of independent agrarian third parties when

³⁴ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 131-36; Woods, "Knights of the Plow," chap. 8, "The Rising Tide."

these parties threatened the balance of power.³⁵ So, while Miller may be correct that these connections were overstated—perhaps intentionally so—the point is that the public perception of the farmers’ power was clearly expressed in contemporary discourse.

Other scholars have produced evidence to counter Miller’s claim that the determining factor of railroad opposition came from the presence of railroad service. Mark T. Kanazawa and Roger G. Noll challenged Miller’s assumption that farmers supported or opposed regulation based on a community’s access to railway service in Illinois. They argued that, while areas without railroad service were weaker in their support for railroad regulation, rural communities in Illinois overwhelmingly favored regulation regardless of the structure of the local railroad market.³⁶

Other scholars have challenged claims against the Granger movement’s influence based on the context of twentieth century historiographical debates. Elizabeth Sanders argued that the attacks on the “standard progressive interpretation” (i.e, Buck’s work and the work of other scholars in the early twentieth century) of the Granger movement’s influence on railroad regulation largely came from academic attitudes toward agrarianism in the 1950s.³⁷ Sanders argued that academic skepticism about agrarian movements and

³⁵ Elizabeth Sanders questioned whether legislators would respond more readily to a small number of businessmen rather than large numbers of agitating farmers in an era of universal manhood suffrage and high voter turnout. See *Roots of Reform*, 453 n. 4.

³⁶ The authors based their conclusions on voter information from the ratification of the 1870 Illinois Constitution and its railroad regulation provisions. See Kanazawa and Noll, “State Railroad Regulation,” 13-54; see also Cornelius, *Constitution Making in Illinois*, 81-84.

³⁷ Historian Theodore Saloutos discussed the disagreement over the Populist legacy between progressive and revisionist historians in his article, “Professors and the

motives led scholars like Miller to debunk the farmers' influence and search for the roots of regulation in northern business interests. Sanders claimed that these scholars confused those who *drafted* the Granger laws (legislators and lawyers) with those who *supported* the laws (farmers and businessmen). That the farmers did not create the laws' content did not mean that the farmers' protests did not play a role in passing or implementing the laws. She argued that government attempts to regulate the economy and protect the people from corporations occurred largely because "politically mobilized farmers" demanded it.³⁸

In addition to claims against the influence of the Granger movement, some scholars have disputed the role of the Grange itself in the Granger movement. Because the term "Granger," within the context of the 1870s, has come to mean anyone involved in the Granger movement rather than a member of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, some scholars argued that the Grange received more credit for its political influence than it deserved. Historian D. Sven Nordin argued that "the relationship of grangers to railroad regulations... was one of assistance; it was never one of predominance or initiative."³⁹

Populists." In rhetorical criticism literature, this debate is mirrored in Erlich's "Populist Rhetoric Reassessed," 141-46.

³⁸ Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 179, 439 n. 15. According to Sanders, legislatures more readily responded to grass-roots social movements than do other branches of government: "State and society are particularly entangled in the legislature, that portion of the state that has been historically most penetrated by social forces and has, thus, been most sensitive to social movements." *Roots of Reform*, 6; see also 414.

³⁹ Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 215. Nordin was adamant that the term "Granger" be used only to refer to members of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, but acknowledged that common usage usually has been broader than that. See *Rich Harvest*, vii, 214. Some authors made it clear that when they used the term "Granger," they referred to members

Historian Morton Rothstein argued that “except for reducing some of the cultural isolation of farmers and their families, the Grange did little to address pressing economic concerns...that most farmers confronted at the end of the nineteenth century.” The fact that Grange members often belonged to other farmers’ organizations lessened the Grange’s direct participation in the movement, Rothstein argued. For example, from 1873 to 1877, Illinois, “supposedly the archetypal Granger state,” also had the ISFA, which united unaffiliated farmers’ clubs and at its height claimed a membership between 80,000 and 90,000, or double the membership of the Illinois State Grange.⁴⁰

Other scholars have argued that historians have understated the Grange’s radical character. Historian Michaela Crawford Reaves, who studied the Grange in California, claimed that scholars downplayed the Grange’s role as a social protest group. The Grange, she argued, was politically active and spoke for its members on public policy and, in some cases, even supported vigilantism and violence to support members’ values.⁴¹ Historian Thomas A. Woods examined the early career of the Grange’s principal founder, Oliver Hudson Kelley, and argued that Kelley and other Midwestern agrarian activists favored organization for mutual protection, economic cooperation, and if circumstances warranted it, political action against monopolies. Kelley wished for the Order to protect farmers and grew frustrated with his fellow founders’ conservative stance on issues important to Illinois farmers. While the National Grange was a

of the movement rather than specifically to members of the Grange itself. For example, see Buck, *Granger Movement*, v.

⁴⁰ Rothstein, “Numbers, Gains, Losses,” 168-70.

⁴¹ Reaves, “Farmers’ Revolt,” 78-105; Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, 165-66.

conservative body during the 1870s Granger movement and shied away from political and economic action, local Granges in the Midwest were heavily involved in politics, cooperative ventures, railroad protests, and attacks on monopolies and middlemen.

Although political discussions and economic ventures were handled outside the formal confines of Grange meetings, members of many local Granges were frustrated with the National Grange's reluctance to support economic cooperation and political action.⁴²

Thus, in the literature the determination of whether the Grange played an important role in the Granger movement came down to the definition of what the Grange "was"—the National Grange body itself, the Order as defined by its formal rules, or the individual members.

For studies of the Grange itself and the context of its role in society, such issues are significant. However, this study does not focus on the rhetoric of the Grange itself, but on the movement that bears its name. The character of the Granger movement was not shaped by the character of the Grange alone, but by many agrarian advocates, some who actually opposed the Grange and some of its elements but supported the Granger movement as a whole. In Illinois, the ISFA actually played a larger role in directing and energizing the movement's political action, as state and national Grange leaders hesitated to condone direct political action in the Order's name through subordinate Granges.⁴³

⁴² Woods, "Knights of the Plow," 32-42.

⁴³ Subordinate Granges were the local chapters of the Order. The Grange organizational hierarchy was the National Grange, the State Granges, and the subordinate Granges. After the Order had been established for a few years, it created another institutional level composed of county (Pomona) Granges.

Although scholars have contested the extent of the Granger movement's political, legal, and economic influence, its significant place in the chronology of American farmers' movements and in the timeline of American history cannot be denied. America was at the cusp of a great change, a shift from the age of the farmer to the age of big business. Like other important agrarian movements that arose in times of great change and uncertainty,⁴⁴ the Granger movement arose at a moment when farmers were unsure of their identity, status, and role in American society. The Granger movement united individual farmers as a collective entity, allowing them to effectively address the economic, industrial, commercial, and political issues that threatened their status. Thus, it is curious that the Granger movement has not received more attention from rhetorical critics. Rhetorical studies of American farmers' discourse have focused largely on four areas: the Populist movement,⁴⁵ the agrarian myth,⁴⁶ the role of speaking in farmers' movements and organizations,⁴⁷ and the discourse of prominent agrarians.⁴⁸ I am aware

⁴⁴ The Carolina Regulator movements of the late colonial 1760s, Shays' Rebellion of the post-Revolution 1780s, and the Whiskey Rebellion of the post-Constitutional 1790s all marked moments in American history when both the farmers' role and American national identity were in doubt. The aftermath of the Civil War and the effects of the industrial revolution were similar in ambiguity to those moments.

⁴⁵ See Burkholder, "Mythic Conflict" and "Mythic Transcendence"; Ecroyd, "Agrarian Protest" and "Populist Spellbinders"; Erlich, "Populist Rhetoric Reassessed"; Gunderson, "Calamity Howlers"; and Robert W. Smith, "Comedy at St. Louis" and "One-Gallus Uprising."

⁴⁶ See Blanton, "Agrarian Myth"; Burkholder, "Mythic Conflict" and "Mythic Transcendence"; Peterson, "Jefferson's Yeoman Farmer" and "Telling the Farmers' Story"; and Umberger, "Buffalo Commons."

⁴⁷ See Flynt and Rogers, "Reform Oratory"; Hance, Hendrickson, and Schoenberger, "Later National Period," 129-36; Montgomery, "Speaking in the Oregon Grange"; and Rude, "Farmer-Labor Agitators."

of only two rhetorical studies that examined Granger movement rhetoric in any detail, and only one, rhetorical critic Paul Crawford's general overview of the Granger and Greenback movements, stands out as an in-depth study.⁴⁹ Given that the Granger movement played a role in late nineteenth century social and political change, that it was the first large-scale farmers' movement in America, and that the organizations that played an important role in the Granger movement—the Grange itself and the ISFA—were models (both positive and negative) for later farmers' organizations, the question why the Granger movement has not received more attention requires an answer.

Simply put, the Granger movement has been overshadowed by later farmers' movements. The Populist movement, in particular, has received the lion's share of scholars' attention. From an evolutionary perspective, the Populist movement was the culmination of late nineteenth century agrarian protest. It was more powerful, coordinated, and rhetorically developed than the Granger movement. Populism was also the pinnacle of agrarian high drama. It was classically tragic—with the benefit of hindsight, the roots of its undoing were painfully obvious. The movement ended spectacularly with the ill-conceived Populist-Democrat fusion and the defeat of William Jennings Bryan in 1896. Grangerism, in contrast, rose dramatically only to fade away. The tale of the Granger movement was less compelling than that of Populism.

⁴⁸ Burkholder's dissertation contains several Kansas Populist speech transcripts. See "Mythic Conflict," vol. 2. For other examples, see Clark, "Pitchfork Ben Tillman"; Harpine, "Cross of Gold"; Lazenby, "Garland"; Lomas, "Dennis Kearney" and "Kearney and George"; Miller, "Jerry Simpson."

⁴⁹ Crawford, "Farmer Assesses His Role." Montgomery's "Speaking in the Oregon Grange" was limited to examining the content and purposes of speaking in Grange meetings.

Many scholars saw the Granger movement as an undeveloped first step of the late nineteenth century farmers' movements. Scholars of Populism in particular have described the Granger movement as a weak early attempt at agrarian protest.⁵⁰ Reaves argued that one reason many scholars have dismissed the Granger movement is that they perceived the late nineteenth century farmer largely through the lens of Populism. "Current historiography rarely singles out the Granger," Reaves argued. Instead, it viewed the Grangers and their movement as a small part "of a larger evolutionary whole."⁵¹ From this perspective, the Granger movement's significance was only a reflection cast by later and larger farmers' movements that expressed more sophisticated arguments, used more effective methods, and dealt with larger issues on a national scale. Members of the Greenback and Populist movements were more heavily involved in third party politics, nominated presidential candidates, and advocated federal reform. Their threat to the status quo was more dramatic and prominent than that of the Granger movement. Thus, the Granger movement was often seen as a nascent, underdeveloped protest that did not wield the power or articulation of later movements.

The Populist movement also outshined the Granger movement as a basis for extended scholarship because Populism has been at the center of twentieth century

⁵⁰ For example, Hofstadter argued that the 1870s Granger movement "may perhaps be dismissed as an undeveloped agrarian movement [that] manifested acute agrarian unrest long before the disappearance of the frontier line in 1890." See *Age of Reform*, 49 n. 8.

⁵¹ Reaves, "Farmers' Revolt," xi-xii.

historiographical and ideological debates.⁵² Richard Hofstadter's interpretation of Populism and the Populists in his 1955 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Age of Reform*, was the lightning rod for many of these disputes.⁵³ Hofstadter challenged older, settled progressive interpretations of Populism's meaning and influence. He argued that too few scholars during and after the Progressive and New Deal eras had examined Populism's negative aspects. Hofstadter argued that the Populists' attempts at reform were retrograde, delusive, vicious, and comic; he claimed the Populists' ideology expressed provincialism, nativism, nationalism, and anti-Semitism. Although many scholars have convincingly challenged Hofstadter's evidence and his conclusions, his interpretations still cast a large shadow over the legacy of late nineteenth century agrarianism. Hofstadter's significance as an intellectual figure also has raised Populism's profile as a historiographical and ideological issue, spurring further scholarly debate over the movement's significance.⁵⁴ Although the Granger movement, too, has undergone revisionist challenges over its meaning and influence, it has not received comparable attention.

⁵² See Collins, "Originality Trap"; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 600-614, and *Populist Moment*, 333-42; Hackney, *Critical Issues*; Nugent, *Tolerant Populists*, 3-33; and Saloutos, "Professors and the Populists," for discussion of the controversy.

⁵³ Collins, "Originality Trap," 152.

⁵⁴ The legacy of Populism is still being argued today. Scholars have variously interpreted Populism as the death of American democracy, the last gasp of agrarian radicalism, the first step in progressive reform, and/or a compelling example of political co-optation that allowed Populist principles to shape American policy in the twentieth century. Several historians have made strong arguments against Hofstadter's interpretations and even Hofstadter himself later retreated from some of his claims in *Age of Reform*. See Collins, "Originality Trap."

For scholars of late nineteenth century public address, Populist movement rhetoric was likely far more appealing than Granger movement rhetoric because Populist speechmaking was lively, colloquial, and polemic. Many Populist speakers were colorful characters and, as I have already noted, rhetorical critics have studied the work of several Populist speakers. In rhetorical studies, critics have revisited and challenged earlier scholars' negative conclusions of the Populists and their discourse. The dispute in many ways reflected the larger interpretive controversy and centered on the adequacy of earlier rhetorical methods and the perception of Populists as either "calamity howlers" or legitimate reformers.⁵⁵ In contrast, scholars have not found such compelling personalities in the Granger movement. Few Granger movement leaders and speakers have stood out.⁵⁶ Grangerism, compared to Populism, was largely a "faceless" movement.

Although many scholars have examined the Granger movement, overall it has been undervalued and understudied. We do not have a full understanding of the movement and its significance because too few scholars have examined the full extent of its legacy as a transition between eras in American agricultural history. The Granger

⁵⁵ Some of the historiographical controversy has spilled over into the rhetorical legacy of the Populists. Burkholder blamed the shortcomings of previous rhetorical critiques of Populist discourse on neo-Aristotelian criticism's failure to properly explain Populist speechmaking. He also argued that previous critics' overuse of biographical and historical information limited the usefulness of their conclusions. See "Mythic Conflict," 2-6. See also Erlich, "Populist Rhetoric Reassessed," 141-46, for other weaknesses of previous rhetorical approaches.

⁵⁶ The only significant exception is Minnesota's Ignatius Donnelly, whose notoriety is linked to other aspects of his political and oratorical career, as well. Crawford's unpublished dissertation studied Ignatius Donnelly as an orator, which probably explains why Crawford drew upon Donnelly's discourse as a representative sample of Granger rhetoric. See "Farmer Assesses His Role," 108-13.

movement rhetoric negotiated the tensions between traditional agrarian ideology and the conditions of rapid ideological, social, industrial, technological, commercial, and economic change. While the People's (Populist) Party may have represented the zenith of nineteenth century agrarian movements, the Granger movement marked the farmers' first attempt to address the ambiguities of their status and situation after the Civil War.

Farmers, like many Americans of this era, longed for stability in this time of change and searched for clues as to their identity while the fundamental ideas of their world were in flux. In such transitional moments, when the past seemed lost and the future uncertain, Granger movement rhetors offered new explanations and suggested new strategies that allowed Illinois farmers to not only adapt to their new world but to act as agents who could adapt the new world for their own needs.

Scholars' Depictions of the Farmers' Identity and Agency

The scholarship on American farmers portrayed the farmers' identity as fragmented and paradoxical and their agency as often diffused and ineffectual. First, I will discuss how scholars depicted the farmers' identity through their responses to their economic conditions. Second, I will discuss how scholars depicted the farmers' identity through the lens of myth.

Most scholarship on American farmers and their movements focused on the relationship between the farmers and their changing industrial, commercial, political, economic, and/or physical scene. Many scholars judged the farmers' identity and agency—their power as agents of social change—by how appropriately they responded to their material situation. Often, how scholars portrayed the farmers' identity and agency was based on the kind of material scene scholars emphasized: Scenic choices dictated

which problems the farmers should have responded to and *how* the farmers should have responded. While scholars differed on their methods of depicting material conditions and the quality of the farmers as agents of change, their basic questions were similar: Did the farmers properly understand their situation and their role? Did the farmers' solutions properly address their *real* problems? Were their acts moral and appropriate for the situation?

Overwhelmingly, most farmers' movement scholars have argued that economic conditions were the primary force that shaped the farmers' protests. "The relationship between economic factors and the agrarian protests of 1862-1900 [has] been well documented," historian Kathleen Pickering noted.⁵⁷ Rural sociologist Carl C. Taylor argued that "the tide of American farmers' discontent has ebbed and flowed with economic conditions" because farmers protested when crop prices were low, interest rates were high, and/or when their access to commercial markets was impeded.⁵⁸ Taylor's general claim is representative of most arguments about the causes of farmers' uprisings, although scholars punctuated different economic causes (such as low crop prices, agricultural overproduction, high transportation costs, high tariffs, high taxes, high interest rates, high land prices from land speculation, and high equipment costs) and economic consequences (such as tenancy, bankruptcy, foreclosures, and wide scale depressions).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Pickering, "Agrarian Revolt."

⁵⁸ See Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*, 2.

⁵⁹ Accounts and overviews of the economic elements of agriculture in the 1870s can be found in Anderson, "Agrarian Union"; Atack and Bateman, "Yeoman Farming"; Bogue,

Who or what was responsible for these economic conditions and consequences was a matter of scholarly debate. Farmers' movement rhetoric blamed a wide variety of villains for the farmers' problems: bankers, middlemen, railroads, monopolies, and corrupt politicians. To greater or lesser degree, most scholars justified some, if not all, of the farmers' choices. However, many scholars, even those sympathetic with the farmers' cause, argued that farmers did not fully examine or understand their own role in creating their conditions and were partly to blame for their troubles. Buck, as sympathetic to the farmers' cause as any scholar, argued that Illinois farmers did not understand that conditions of soil, climate, and markets required that they diversify their crops from the ruinous one-crop method. Buck also noted that farmers did not see that their own inertia and lack of progressiveness were partly at fault for their problems.⁶⁰ However, Buck implied that the inadequacy of the farmers as agents of change largely came from constraints imposed by their material conditions. Farming had lost much of its social prestige by the late nineteenth century and many saw farming as an occupation suitable only for those who could not do anything else. Buck argued that this decline in status was not a result of a decline in the farmers' condition but from other classes' increased access to resources that allowed for social and intellectual advancement. The very nature of farm

From Prairie to Corn Belt; "Buck, "Agricultural Organization," *Granger Movement*, and *Agrarian Crusade*; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*; Mayhew, "Reappraisal"; McCabe, *Grange Movement*; Miller, *Granger Laws*; Nordin, *Rich Harvest*; Paine, *Granger Movement in Illinois*; Periam, *Groundswell*; Rothstein, "Numbers, Gains, Losses"; Saloutos, "Agricultural Problem"; Schwieder, "Agricultural Issues"; Scott, *Agrarian Movement in Illinois*; Shannon, *American Farmers' Movements and Farmer's Last Frontier*; Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*; Winters, "Economics of Midwestern Agriculture"; and Woods, "Knights of the Plow."

⁶⁰ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 8.

work was always tedious and difficult, even with the use of new machines; homesteads were scattered and far from the nearest towns; farmers had few opportunities for education, so they were deficient in the general knowledge they needed to learn about the business of agriculture. These circumstances made it difficult for farmers to “reason intelligently in matters in which their own interests were at stake,” Buck argued, and what political power they had was offset by their ignorance of the “true interests of agriculture.”⁶¹ Agricultural historian Theodore Saloutos argued that “farmers had evolved no agricultural policy to cope with the farm problem” and that farmers were hampered by “their inability to agree on the diagnosis and remedy to be considered.” Although the farmers were “hardly as naïve as many of their critics made them out as being,” Saloutos concluded that farmers “stressed one curative to the point of minimizing and obscuring...a multiplicity of factors that contributed materially to the plight of agriculture.”⁶² Rhetorical critic Paul Crawford noted that, although 1870s Granger rhetoric “arose from genuine economic distress...it presented an oversimplification of a complex politico-socio-economic situation.”⁶³

Other scholars were not as gentle about the farmers’ shortcomings. Some claimed that the farmers were not just under-informed because of their physical, economic, and

⁶¹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 37-38. Many other scholars argued along these lines. Rothstein argued that farmers and their supporters made organized protests, expressing grievances and proposing solutions, but never really addressed the “basic problem of surplus production.” See “Numbers, Gains, Losses,” 167. See also Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 129-31; and Saloutos, “Agricultural Problem,” 161-63.

⁶² Saloutos, “Agricultural Problem,” 174.

⁶³ Crawford, “Farmer Assesses His Role,” 115. That farmers made simplistic arguments responding to a complex situation was also argued by Rome, “American Farmer,” 48.

educational disadvantages; rather, they actively resisted the realities of their new conditions. Farmers increasingly fell behind their more progressive contemporaries because they stubbornly adhered to traditional modes of life and farming and generally frowned upon “book farming”—that is, the range of modern agricultural practices that included scientifically-tested farming methods, modern business techniques, judging markets, and using improved farm machinery. They refused to see that the old ways of farming based on independence and self-sufficiency was a poor fit for the increasingly commercial, market-driven agricultural scene.⁶⁴

Whether farmers materially suffered from economic conditions in the late nineteenth century was also an issue scholars debated. Historian Anne Mayhew argued that “economic historians have generally explained the farm organizations and the protests in the same way that the farmers themselves explained them—in terms of low agricultural prices and high costs of inputs resulting in part from the monopolistic organization of the suppliers of those inputs.” However, she added that there existed “considerable evidence indicating that the economic conditions of the time were not as the farmers depicted them”—agricultural terms of trade rose, railroad rates fell, and the farmers’ debt loads were not severe. In fact, Mayhew argued, if it were not for the farmers’ protests themselves, historians “would lack evidence that economic conditions were deteriorating” in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Thus, some scholars noted, the

⁶⁴ See, for example, the first three chapters in Hofstadter’s *Age of Reform*.

⁶⁵ Mayhew, “Reappraisal,” 464-67. Mayhew identified Solon J. Buck, John D. Hicks, Norman Pollack, and Fred A. Shannon as historians who interpreted the farmers’ protests from the farmers’ point of view and Allan G. Bogue and Douglass North as scholars who

economic criteria that signaled hard times simply did not exist or were overstated by protesting farmers. Instead, the farmers' prosperity—while not on par with, nor increasing at the same rate as, the prosperity of other classes—was indeed on the rise when compared objectively to past conditions.⁶⁶

Mayhew argued that the farmers' protests could be logically explained from both the farmers' and the "objective" economists' points of view: To understand the schism between farmers' perceptions and hard economic data, one had to see the farmers' protests as a response to commercialization and changing ideals of success. The shift from self-sufficient farming to commercial agriculture changed the very definition of "success" for farmers—in the late nineteenth century, one could be a "successful farmer" in traditional agrarian terms but ultimately be deemed a failure by the standards of success of being a "good businessman" in commercial terms.⁶⁷

Other scholars have argued that different scholarly interpretations of the farmers' economic conditions emerged from competing academic perspectives. Historian Donald L. Winters explained that disagreements amongst the scholars who examined agricultural history after the Civil War emerged from two general "schools" of interpretation. The first group of scholars argued that Midwestern farmers did not share in the benefits of the nation's economic development because they were victims of "immoral" monopolists, lenders, railroads, speculators, and suppliers. These scholars, argued Winters, implicitly

interpreted the farmers' economic situation as insufficient cause for protest. See 464-65 nn. 1-4.

⁶⁶ Mayhew, "Reappraisal," 475.

⁶⁷ Mayhew, "Reappraisal," 475.

identified with the agrarian reformers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, adopting similar interpretations of class struggle and victimage as found in the discourse of the reformers themselves. These “pro-farmer” scholars indicted the various “money interests” as the main cause of the farmers’ distress and saw the economy as manipulated by powerful economic and political interests. These interests colluded and conspired to take property that rightfully belonged to the farmers, arguing that the farmers’ problems resulted from the money interests’ exploitation of the lower classes. Thus, those without economic and political leverage such as farmers, workers, blacks, and immigrants saw little improvement in their situation.⁶⁸

The second group of scholars sought to test the assumptions of previous scholarship against the empirical and documentary evidence. From their analysis of the farmers’ discontent, they concluded that previous scholars had focused on the farmers’ protests to the point that they failed to examine the farmers’ economic realities objectively. In general, Winters argued, these scholars concluded that, although many Midwestern farmers suffered from occasional financial distress, as a group they enjoyed an improved standard of living comparable to that of the average American. That is, farmers were neither exploited nor left behind. Instead, their difficulties were caused by the character of agriculture as a business and by general economic conditions, not by the economic manipulation of special interests. According to Winters, these scholars concluded that no one economic group had the power to effectively exploit other groups. Instead, economic behaviors followed rational patterns and were constrained by the law

⁶⁸ Winters, “Economics of Midwestern Agriculture,” 88-89.

of supply and demand. While some individuals suffered distress and dislocation, that was the price of economic progress. Overall, these scholars concluded, most groups shared in the benefits of economic progress in the late nineteenth century.⁶⁹

Agricultural historian Paul H. Johnstone argued that the gradual acceptance of commercial success also played an important role in changing the economic and social relationships within farming communities and “generally repudiated the rugged self-reliance and individualism of the older agrarian creed.”⁷⁰ Although Buck clearly argued that economic conditions were hard on the Midwestern farmers, he regarded the Granger movement as a movement based largely on status inequality. He argued that many agrarian uprisings, rather than responses to “depressions in the condition of the agricultural population,” occurred during times of gradual economic improvement. If so, then farmers’ uprisings were attempts to close the gap between the farmers’ status and the status of other classes. For Buck, the causes of the Granger movement were “to be sought primarily in economic conditions, and to a less extent in political, social, and intellectual conditions” that created these gaps in status.⁷¹ Thus, some scholars interpreted the farmers’ movements in the late nineteenth century as farmers’ attempts to regain or enhance their economic, political, and/or social status rather than as a direct response to harsh economic times.⁷²

⁶⁹ Winters, “Economics of Midwestern Agriculture,” 88-89.

⁷⁰ Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 152.

⁷¹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 3.

⁷² Mayhew, “Reappraisal,” 468, 475; Buck, *Granger Movement*, 3.

Myth and the Farmers' Identity

The issue of the American farmers' status in late nineteenth century society emphasized the need to explain how the farmers held a common identity. The studies most useful for examining the processes that shaped the farmers' identity were those that examined the agrarian myth. The agrarian myth was one of the most significant American myths of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁷³ The agrarian myth was a collection of agricultural, political, philosophical, and economic concepts that justified the American farmers' central role and status in society. It established fundamental relationships between the American farmer, God, nature, land, society, and government. The central figure of the agrarian myth was the yeoman farmer. He was a simple, moral, hardworking, vigorous, independent, and content human being. He was the most important American citizen because he was the source of all true wealth: He alone fed the people; thus, all other occupations were derivative and dependent upon his labor.⁷⁴

According to the myth, the yeoman had a close relationship with God and nature. God called on the yeoman to cultivate and care for the land and in return, nature surrendered its bounty in rich abundance. Within the agrarian myth, "nature" was the

⁷³ American Symbolist Henry Nash Smith argued that it was the central American myth of the mid-nineteenth century. *Virgin Land*, 135. See also Burkholder, "Mythic Conflict," 249-50.

⁷⁴ See Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 24-25. See also Buck, *Granger Movement*, 16; Eisinger, "Freehold Concept," 44-45, "Natural Rights," 13, and "Agrarian Nationalism," 164-65; Peterson, "Jefferson's Yeoman Farmer," 13-14, and "Telling the Farmers' Story," 293-94; and Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, chap. 11, "The Garden of the World and American Agrarianism," and chap. 12, "The Yeoman and the Fee-Simple Empire." The image of the yeoman farmer was invariably male. Women were not entirely excluded from the mythic image, but they largely played a supportive and subordinate role with the farm family.

“middle landscape,” a garden realm between the untamed wilderness and the urban civilization, a place where natural order and harmony prevailed. Within the garden, life was quiet, agrarian, and good. Evil could only arise outside of the garden. Cities, in particular, were viewed by adherents of the myth as places of vice, squalor, and corruption.

The myth stressed that the yeoman had a concrete stake in maintaining a democratic society. To keep his independence and his political freedom, the yeoman had to zealously protect his right to own and cultivate land. The government of a democratic, agrarian society was obligated to protect these rights and to protect agriculture in general, because the ability for each citizen to own land and enjoy the fruits of his labor was the foundation of political freedom. A government that failed to perform this duty was illegitimate; any society that failed to support agriculture was doomed to die.⁷⁵

Most scholarship on the agrarian myth revolved around one of these two conflicts: myth versus material conditions, and myth versus myth. Scholars who argued that the myth did not fit reality argued that the myth inappropriately prepared the farmers for the material problems of the late nineteenth century. They argued that the agrarian myth prevented farmers from understanding their new role in industrialized American society and fostered a perception of economic and political conditions that was simplistic and

⁷⁵ The term “agrarian myth” was coined by Hofstadter to denote a “complex of ideas” that reflected a “sentimental attachment to rural living” and represented a “series of notions about rural people and rural life...that represents a kind of homage that Americans have paid to the fancied innocence of their origins.” Hofstadter built this conception of the agrarian myth upon the earlier work of Chester E. Eisinger, Paul H. Johnstone, and A. Whitney Griswold. *Age of Reform*, 24.

mistaken. Historian Margaret Woodward pointed to the identity crisis this created for the Northwestern farmer during the Granger movement:

From 1868 to 1876 the Northwestern farmer was a “forgotten man”.... He was caught in a maze of economic change and political ferment which deeply affected his accustomed attitudes toward himself and the rest of society. He became lost in the burgeoning industrial-commercial economy—the victim of forces beyond his control which were rapidly undermining his traditional status and role. Because he failed to understand the nature, dimensions, and consequences of these forces, he also failed to make a satisfactory adjustment to them. Instead, his futile efforts to “find himself” resulted in a “split personality” as he wavered between the ideology of the past and the reality of the present.⁷⁶

With Woodward, other scholars—Hofstadter and Henry Nash Smith among them—argued that farmers trapped themselves in unrealistic identifications with the agrarian myth. Hofstadter argued that the farmers’ appropriate response was to adopt the business acumen and practices of the urban merchant.⁷⁷ Smith argued that, in the 1890s, people began to realize that the myth had done farmers serious harm by hiding their true material condition under “idyllic clichés.” The myth also became a tool of those who wished to use it against its stated principles.⁷⁸

In the American past, the agrarian myth was an appropriate frame for the farmers’ material conditions. Many scholars argued that the agrarian myth best fit the material conditions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Hofstadter noted that the

⁷⁶ Woodward, “Northwestern Farmer,” 134.

⁷⁷ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 45.

⁷⁸ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, 193. Smith argued that opponents to land reform used the agrarian myth against its own principles of giving farmers free access to frontier lands. See *Virgin Land*, chap. 19, “The Myth of the Garden and the Reform of the Land System.”

agrarian myth best fit when the economic and physical barriers of the frontier— inadequate transportation, limited markets, and a small agricultural workforce—forced farmers to be independent and self-sufficient.⁷⁹ Eisinger argued that it was possible to believe in the freehold concept, a fundamental tenet of the agrarian myth, in eighteenth-century America because the idea of democracy and large amounts of available land were real elements of the farmers' lives.⁸⁰ The American population was overwhelmingly agrarian. In 1790, over 90 percent of working Americans were engaged in farming. Not until 1870 did the number of Americans engaged in agriculture drop below 50 percent of the working population and the 1870 census was the first to show farmers as a minority of gainfully employed Americans.⁸¹

After the Civil War, America underwent sweeping industrial changes and the agrarian myth matched material conditions less and less. By the late nineteenth century, the agrarian myth failed to explain many aspects of the farmers' predicament and became an impediment to properly solving their problems. Smith argued that the agrarian myth ultimately failed because it could not account for change, disaster, and bad times.⁸²

⁷⁹ Hofstadter, however, noted that early in American history “commercialism had already begun to enter the American Arcadia” as opportunities for commercial enterprise were widely available even to farmers who could be described as yeomen in colonial times. *Age of Reform*, 37. See also Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*, chap. 2, “The Farmers' Movement Before 1790,” on the presence of commercial agriculture in colonial America.

⁸⁰ Eisinger, “Agrarian Nationalism,” 165.

⁸¹ Goodwin, “Brief Chronology,” 1184, 1190; Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 117; Rothstein, “Numbers, Gains, Losses,” 165; Stock, *Rural Radicals*, 36.

⁸² Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*, chap. 18, “Failure of the Agrarian Utopia,” and chap. 19, “The Myth of the Garden and the Reform of the Land System.”

Hofstadter claimed that the myth became increasingly fictional as it became less and less useful to interpret the problems created by increased industrialization and commercialization.⁸³ American Symbolist Leo Marx argued that both Hofstadter and Smith saw the farmers' "tendency to idealize rural ways has been an impediment to clarity of thought and...to social progress" and that the pastoral ideal "appeared with increasing frequency in the service of a reactionary or false ideology, thereby helping to mask the real problems of an industrial civilization."⁸⁴

If the agrarian myth lasted too long and inadequately oriented farmers to their situation, the question then becomes how and why a myth exists beyond its ideal material circumstances. Smith argued that, as times change, an enduring myth may still guide action even when material conditions do not match its depiction of reality.⁸⁵ Myth can far outlive its time, even when vigorously attacked, because it spurs vigorous defenses by its believers.⁸⁶ Historian Richard Slotkin noted that mythic longevity comes from a culture's resolve in protecting its values and traditions.⁸⁷ Burkholder argued that Kansas Populists drew upon the agrarian myth to defend their traditional way of life against the influence of the "money interests."⁸⁸ Rhetorical critic Tarla Rai Peterson argued that myth extends

⁸³ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 31.

⁸⁴ Marx, *Machine in the Garden*, 7.

⁸⁵ Smith, *Virgin Land*, xi-x.

⁸⁶ Balthrop, "Culture, Myth, and Ideology," 343-45; Blanton, "Agrarian Myth," 3-4; Burkholder, "Mythic Conflict," 100, and "Mythic Transcendence," 294-95.

⁸⁷ Slotkin, *Fatal Environment*, 12.

⁸⁸ Burkholder, "Mythic Conflict," 100, and "Mythic Transcendence," 294-95.

the figurative world into the literal world, creating a basis to frame and judge “reality.” However, myth can become “literalized,” or accepted as the only perspective on reality, to the exclusion of other myths. A literalized myth can project its idealized mythic scene onto contradictory material conditions and thus become dysfunctional, guiding adherents to react to new situations inappropriately. Rhetorical critic Lynne Blanton argued that if the disparity between myth and “reality” becomes too great, if the facts of practical life conflict too much with a myth, then cynicism, disillusionment, reconstruction, and/or abandonment will result.⁸⁹ Smith argued that myth becomes dangerous if people do not attempt to “verify” myth against material circumstances, to discover whether it appropriately guides their behavior:

Men cannot engage in purposive group behavior...without images which simultaneously express collective desires and impose coherence on the infinitely numerous and infinitely varied data of experience. These images are never, of course, exact reproductions of the physical and social environment. They cannot motivate and direct action unless they are drastic simplifications, yet if the impulse toward clarity of form is not controlled by some process of verification, symbols and myths can become dangerous by inciting behavior grossly inappropriate to the given historical situation.⁹⁰

Peterson also saw the need for verification: “When new scenes create new conditions, traditional images need to be critically reexamined before they are grafted into a new story.”⁹¹ While these judgments, at first, appear to be judgments of myth’s

⁸⁹ Blanton, “Agrarian Myth,” 13-14.

⁹⁰ Smith, *Virgin Land*, xi-x.

⁹¹ Peterson, “Telling the Farmers’ Story,” 306. Peterson argued that rhetorical criticism is one way to critique myth and perform this verification. See “Jefferson’s Yeoman Farmer,” 9.

correspondence to material conditions, both Smith and Peterson emphasized myth's pragmatism. That is, the strength of a myth is judged by its *use*—on whether its interpretation of material conditions leads to appropriate actions—not by its truth or falsity.⁹²

Farmers alone did not promulgate the myth. In fact, several scholars have claimed that groups other than farmers played a significant role in perpetuating the agrarian myth. Hofstadter argued that in the late nineteenth century, “preachers, poets, philosophers, writers, and statesmen” were the “true” advocates of the agrarian myth. They were drawn to the “noncommercial, nonpecuniary, self-sufficient aspect of American farm life” and exalted the agrarian myth in the face of the farmers’ harsh realities.⁹³ Agricultural historian Richard Abbot argued that agricultural journal editors in particular adamantly promoted the agrarian myth because—as early as the mid-1800s—farmers and society in general did not believe in it: “The insistence with which the farm journals discussed the myth seemed to be directly proportional to the degree to which it was rejected by those for whom it was intended.”⁹⁴ Thus, agricultural editors used the myth to redeem the farmers’ failing social and occupational status in a defensive reaction against widespread criticism of farm life. Abbot argued that the editors were largely doing so to sell papers;

⁹² Peterson, “Jefferson’s Yeoman Farmer,” 9.

⁹³ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 23.

⁹⁴ Abbott, “Agricultural Press,” 36.

other scholars argued that the myth was used to stem the tide of farm youth migrating to the cities.⁹⁵

In this clash of the farmers' "harsh reality" and their exalted status as yeomen portrayed in literary depictions of the agrarian myth, some scholars noted that American farmers faced difficult contradictions in their identity. Farmers, Hofstadter argued, were never full adherents of the agrarian myth and the mythic yeomanry was different from the farmers' "true" identity and went against his commercial proclivities: "What the articulate people who talked and wrote about farmers and farming...liked about American farming was not, in every respect, what the typical working farmer liked."⁹⁶ Farmers had always been in the business of farming to make money and agrarian society had always displayed commercial characteristics.⁹⁷ For Hofstadter, the American farmer was not a yeoman, but a "harassed little country businessman who worked very hard, moved all too often, gambled with his land, and made his way alone."⁹⁸ The attractiveness of an agrarian society that praised the farmers as the most valuable citizens, however, was an image farmers found hard to resist, especially when times were bad. This tension between myth and reality created a schism in how American farmers saw themselves and their movements. Hofstadter argued that both had a dual character, a "soft side" and a "hard side." Hofstadter argued that Populist discourse was derived from the

⁹⁵ Abbott, "Agricultural Press," 36; Heinze, "Yeomanry Transformed," 3.

⁹⁶ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 23.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23-39.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

“soft side” of the farmer’s existence, from agrarian radicalism and agrarian ideology based on the agrarian myth. In the years after the Populists’ fall, he added, most farm organizations and activities turned to the “hard side”: agricultural improvement, business methods, and pressure politics. These strategies, he implied, better acknowledged the material conditions the farmers lived in.⁹⁹

What Hofstadter and other scholars characterized as a conflict between myth and material conditions, other scholars saw the farmers’ late nineteenth century struggle as one between competing myths. In shaping the reality and identity of the American farmer, the agrarian myth contended with other powerful American myths in the nineteenth century such as the Southern plantation myth,¹⁰⁰ the myth of the Great American desert,¹⁰¹ and, most importantly, the gospel of wealth.¹⁰² These mythic

⁹⁹ Ibid., 47. Historians Lawrence Goodwyn, Adam Ward Rome, and Thomas A. Woods argued that farmers were actively pursuing the “hard” side of agrarianism before and during the Populist movement. Woods argued that the early Grange addressed the hard economic side of agrarianism through cooperation. Goodwyn made the same argument for the Farmers’ Alliance in the 1880s. Rome argued that farmers understood the commercial changes of the late nineteenth century. See Woods, “Knights of the Plow,” introduction; Rome, “American Farmers,” 46-47; and Goodwyn, *Populist Moment*, chap. 2, “The Alliance Develops a Movement Culture.” See also Cerny, “Cooperation,” and Nordin, *Rich Harvest*, chap. 7, “Granger Business Attitudes and Activities,” for further information on Grange cooperative activities. Hofstadter noted that Populism did have its “hard side,” but that it was dropped in favor of the silver issue. *Age of Reform*, 47.

¹⁰⁰ The plantation myth was built upon idealistic notions of the aristocratic lifestyles of the South’s slave-holding plantation class, drawing upon a romantic view of the South’s feudal agrarianism. Defenders of this myth argued that the leisure time that slave labor afforded to the plantation class was the best way for society to develop and preserve sound political principles. See Smith, *Virgin Land*, chap. 12, “The Yeoman and the Fee-Simple Empire,” and chap. 13, “The South and the Myth of the Garden.”

¹⁰¹ The myth of the Great American Desert was built upon the lack of rainfall in the Great Plains and the obstacle that presented to migrating farmers who depended upon traditional agricultural techniques developed in more water-rich areas of the nation.

conflicts created a crisis of identity for the American farmer. Burkholder, who examined Populist oratory in Kansas, argued that tensions between the Populists and other segments of American society arose from a mythic conflict that went deeper than material conditions or ideology—it was a clash of fundamental principles that created contradictory interpretations of reality. The Populist movement emerged from the conflict between the agrarian myth and the gospel of wealth.¹⁰³ The conflict was also reflected in the agricultural journals: While editors extolled the virtues of the yeoman, they also encouraged farmers to think of their farms as businesses and of themselves as businessmen.¹⁰⁴ Journalism historian Kirk Heinze argued that by the end of the nineteenth century, the Jeffersonian freeholder had almost entirely disappeared from the northern farm press and in his place was the “precursor to the modern agribusinessman

Described by travelers in the early nineteenth century as barren, desolate, and arid, the plains of the desert myth contradicted the powerful frontier and agrarian myths which stressed westward expansion. Ultimately, techniques of “dry farming” made the arid plains farmable and westward expansion progressed. See Smith, *Virgin Land*, chap. 16, “The Garden and the Desert.”

¹⁰² According to Burkholder, the basic premise of the gospel of wealth was an abiding faith in material success. The myth proposed that the economy should be controlled by a natural aristocracy formed from the competitive struggle of the marketplace. Government’s role was to protect private property, a protection which the myth had granted “divine” warrant. The rich were wealthy because of their superior abilities; the poor were impoverished because of their inferior abilities and/or sins. The gospel, however, obligated the wealthy to do good work with their fortunes. “Mythic Conflict,” 36-40. Other scholars referred to this set of tenets as the myth of the self-made man. See Heinze, “Yeomanry Transformed,” 120-25; and Johnstone, “Identification,” 37-44, and “Old Ideals,” 137-38, 143-52.

¹⁰³ Burkholder, “Mythic Conflict,” 37-38.

¹⁰⁴ Johnstone, “Identification,” 37-44, and “Old Ideals,” 137-38, 143-52; Blanton, “Agrarian Myth,” chap. 6, “Summary, Comparison and Contrast.”

who has emerged during the twentieth century.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, even in the pages of those media sources that espoused the agrarian myth, the image of the businessman was powerful.

Similar to the conflict other scholars saw between the agrarian myth and the farmers’ material conditions, the conflict between the agrarian myth and the gospel of wealth created contradictory identifications for farmers. The farmers’ identity as the “ultimate producers” under the agrarian myth led them to identify with other producing classes such as craftsmen, factory workers, and other groups involved in creating goods. The identification of landowning farmers with businessmen under the gospel of wealth, however, also allowed them to see themselves in the roles of employers rather than as workers. As employers, farmers were often at cross-purposes with urban workers, especially when those workers called for more pay and shorter work days. The agrarian myth’s implication to distrust anything from “outside of the garden”—especially the city—also helped to widen the split between organized labor and politically motivated farmers.¹⁰⁶

The employer-worker split also stretched the gap between landowning farmers, tenant farmers, and hired hands. The agrarian myth encouraged farm ownership; only

¹⁰⁵ Heinze, “Yeomanry Transformed,” 5-7.

¹⁰⁶ Johnstone, “Identification,” 37-41, and “Old Ideals,” 151-52. This is not to say that farmers at different times did not attempt to bridge the gap. Burkholder argued that Kansas Populists attempted to “stretch” the boundaries of the agrarian myth to include diverse causes as organized labor, temperance, and women suffrage. “Mythic Transcendence,” 296-303. Sanders also argued that farmers were always trying to draw organized labor into their political movements, but with little success. She argued, however, that the problem came from the reluctance of organized labor, not from the farmers. *Roots of Reform*, 1.

landowning farmers could be politically free. Thus, the farmers' movements focused on issues most important to landowning farmers such as high property taxes, high interest rates, low crop prices, and so on. Ultimately, most messages for the farmers were directed, implicitly and explicitly, to landowning commercial farmers.¹⁰⁷ However, the emphasis on landowning farmers also came from a business perspective. For example, toward the end of the nineteenth century, agricultural journals implicitly suggested that farmers actually suffered from the working of the "agricultural ladder" because it siphoned off the best workers and did not provide incentives for farm hands to stay on to work as cheaply as possible.¹⁰⁸ If farm workers strived for farm ownership, current landowning farmers could not be guaranteed a reliable workforce.¹⁰⁹ Agricultural historians Peter H. and Jo Ann E. Argersinger argued that farmworkers' interests were often at odds with the interests of landowning, machine-using, wage-paying farmers. However, the relationship between the farmers and the farmworkers was more complex than just a division of economic interests. Many landowning farmers supported the

¹⁰⁷ Pickering, "Agrarian Revolt."

¹⁰⁸ The agricultural ladder, an element of the agrarian myth, was a metaphor that depicted a natural progression from hired hand or tenant farmer to independent landowning yeoman. It offered a concrete connection between small landowning farmers and agricultural workers. The agricultural ladder rewarded hard work and stressed farm ownership as a hierarchical ideal: Only by owning land could farmers be economically and politically free. In the nineteenth century, this progression was embraced and it made the relationship between a farmer and his hired hand was a close one. Hired hands were often considered family members rather than employees. However, when farmers stressed their role as employers and hired hands as employees, this challenged the mechanism of the agricultural ladder: If hired hands left when they could afford their own farms, farmers could not be guaranteed a reliable, cheap workforce. Johnstone, "Identification," 37.

¹⁰⁹ Johnstone, "Identification," 37.

protests of farmworkers against farmers who used farm machines and wage-cutting to save on labor costs, showing that identity divisions created within mythic conflicts could lead to vastly different approaches to the farmers' problems.¹¹⁰

In addition to class divisions, mythic conflict also led to divisions by race, ethnicity, and gender. Pickering argued that "presenting all 'farmers' as uniform with identical interests obscures any sense of local conflict or dissention over legitimate agrarian grievances." While Grange rules encouraged women to join, many Populists endorsed women suffrage, and many Populist factions supported including blacks in their movement, strong schisms still existed. The image of the yeoman was that of a landowning white male, and farmers' movement members were mostly white, "native," male, rural landowners who were generally better off economically than many of their peers. Thus, movement membership was not a representative cross-section of the Midwestern agricultural population. Differences in gender, class, and ethnicity of the agricultural population meant that women, immigrants, American Indians, and farmworkers were often left out of the farmers' movements in the late nineteenth century. The movements "reflected politically organized efforts by landowning commercial agriculturalists. . . . Issues that presented a challenge to the orthodoxy of Plains capitalism, like land redistribution, voting rights, or fair wages for rural workers, were excluded from the political consciousness of these movements."¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Argersinger and Argersinger, "Machine Breakers," 395-96, 401 n. 20. For other issues related to the farmer-farmworker distinction, see Cox, "Agricultural Wage Earner."

¹¹¹ Pickering, "Agrarian Revolt." Pickering focused on the Great Plains from 1862-1900, but many of her observations applied to the Midwestern Granger movement of the 1870s. Other sources that discuss divisions in gender and ethnicity are Anderson, "Agrarian

Many scholars took note of these divisions within agrarian discourse. Hofstadter, as I noted earlier, saw strands of provincialism, nativism, nationalism, and anti-Semitism in Populist discourse. Hofstadter and other scholars connected these traits to principles of the agrarian myth that stressed sectionalism and class distinctions (West vs. East, farm vs. city, America vs. Europe, producers vs. non-producers, and so on). Heinze found that these schisms resulted in another image of the farmer that developed in the northern agricultural press in the late nineteenth century. This identity, a “more ominous alter ego who was anything but progressive,” was the agrarian xenophobe who vilified urban life, scapegoated immigrants, denigrated minorities, and scorned anything other than Protestant fundamentalism.¹¹²

Historian Catherine McNicol Stock argued that two separate, but linked, strands of rural ideology that explained this schism. One was rural producer ideology, marked by the “desire to own property, to produce crops and foodstuffs, to control local affairs, to be served but never coerced by a representative government, and to have traditional ways of life and labor respected.” Rural producer ideology was the egalitarian, populist, and democratic foundation for rural social movements, such as the Granger, Greenback, and Populist movements, that challenged urban economic and social dominance. The other

Union,” chap. 2; Conzen, “Immigrants”; Fox-Genovese, “Women in Agriculture”; Marti, “Sisters of the Grange,” *Women of the Grange*, and “Women’s Work in the Grange.” Agricultural historian Roy V. Scott examined the demographic composition of the Champaign County, Ill., Grange between 1873-77 and found that the members were mostly white, male, middle-class landowning farmers who were, on average, more well-to-do than the average farmer in Champaign County. One third of the members were women, but most were wives of male Grange members. A few members were tenants and one was a farm worker. See “Grangerism in Champaign County,” 147.

¹¹² Heinze, “Yeomanry Transformed,” 5-7.

strain was rural vigilantism, marked by “brutal act[s] of violence which, in [their] broadest manifestation, sought out men and women who threatened the safety and economic stability of their communities.” The victims of rural vigilantism tended to be deviant, poor, working-class Americans. This strain reflected conservative, far-right overtones of anti-foreignism, racism, and violent protection of community norms. The latter strand had a darker heritage of lynching, demonstrating armed resistance to non-local authority, ostracizing non-conformists, and practicing domestic terrorism. While many farmers may never have gone so far as to defend their communities in such fashion, Stock made a strong historical argument that this strand of ideology was a thread present in many rural uprisings.¹¹³

Thus, the scholarship on the farmers’ movements in the late nineteenth century depicted the farmers’ identity as contradictory and fragmented and the farmers’ short-term agency as diffused and often ineffectual. In the literature, the farmers’ failures emerged from their incongruous relationship to their situation and the appropriateness of their acts. Given the general scholarly perception that farmers did not adapt well to their material conditions or mythic complexities (and even today still have not),¹¹⁴ scenic aspects of the farmers’ dilemma—material and mythic—dominate the scholarly description of the farmers’ identity and agency in the late nineteenth century. From the

¹¹³ Stock, *Rural Radicals*, 16, 91. Stock, like Hofstadter and others, saw undertones of McCarthyism and Nazism in many rural movements.

¹¹⁴ Peterson argued that farmers’ “unconscious” adherence to the agrarian myth, the frontier myth, and various metaphors of land use have prevented them from discovering new ways to address their sometimes difficult relationships with land, government, and the economy. See Peterson’s “Jefferson’s Yeoman Farmer,” “Telling the Farmers’ Story,” and “Will to Conservation.”

literature, it is clear that the complexities of the farmers' situation were reflected in the conflicting identities formed in the confluences of competing myths and/or material conditions.

If the farmers were confused about their mythic worldview and could not properly interpret their situation, they would have difficulty determining who they were as agents. Although myth can compensate for a great deal of contradiction and paradox, different mythic worldviews that interpret the same scenic conditions in disparate ways often cannot be reconciled fully through an ill-fitting mythic merger.¹¹⁵ Without a “comfortable” sense of identity or situation, how could farmers ultimately know their role? How could they know *what* to do much less *how* to do it? In many ways, this literature depicted the farmers as lacking agency because they were not *rational* agents; they could not interpret their situation coherently. Yet, ultimately, the farmers did act collectively. Despite their confusion as depicted in the literature, the farmers fixed upon some sense of identity that allowed them to act with a sense of purposeful agency.

Rhetorical Strategies in American Farmers' Movements

In the previous sections, I discussed how scholarly portrayals of the farmers' economic situation and mythic status have influenced scholarly claims about the farmers' identity and agency. Mythic criticism, as a rhetorical perspective, offers a compelling explanation of the farmers' motivations, worldview, and identity. The mythic approach also best explains the rhetorical choices farmers made based on their perceptions of

¹¹⁵ It was clear that most scholars felt that the farmers never fully chose one worldview over another: “Unable to distinguish between fact and fancy, past and present, [they] vacillated madly from one to the other.” Woodward, “Northwestern Farmer,” 142.

identity and agency. Mythic conflict tied together rhetorical strategies farmers used in their movements in the late nineteenth century.¹¹⁶ In this section, I briefly discuss some of those core rhetorical strategies.¹¹⁷

The rhetorical strategies most scholars identified could be categorized under “merger and division,” and these are the strategies most pertinent to my focus on identity and agency. Merging strategies included identification and mythic transcendence; division strategies included polarization and confrontation. These strategies manifested themselves in discourse when speakers used mythic elements to either unite or divide groups to initiate action and/or build strategic identifications.

Identification was widely used in farmers’ movement rhetoric. I have already discussed some of these identifications earlier in this essay: the identification of farmers with other businessmen as “employers,” the identification of farmers with urban workers as “producers,” and the identification of farmers with farm hands and farmworkers as progressive “stages” or rungs upward on the agricultural ladder toward yeomanry. Identification allowed farmers, at times, to take advantage of mythic ambiguity to create alliances as situations dictated. For example, Hofstadter argued that “when times were persistently bad, the farmer tended to reject his business role and its failures to withdraw

¹¹⁶ See Burkholder’s critique of neo-Aristotelianism as a method for examining Populist discourse in “Mythic Conflict,” 2-6.

¹¹⁷ I offer this brief overview with this caveat: Clearly, some of these strategies and symbolic forms discussed here occurred after the period of my dissertation study, the 1870s. My goal here is not to focus on Granger movement strategies and forms only, but to examine the range of rhetorical strategies and forms used in agrarian discourse in the late nineteenth century. Ultimately, I hope to use them as points of comparison in future studies to see how these strategies changed over this thirty-year period.

into the role of the injured little yeoman.” Such strategies diminished the perceived differences between landowning farmers and other “victims of exploitation” to build common ground for action.¹¹⁸

Mythic transcendence was a specific form of group identification that enabled rhetors to bridge ideological differences by appealing to mythic “first principles.” For example, Burkholder argued that Kansas Populists drew upon the first principles of the agrarian myth, which included natural rights, democratic ideals, patriotism, and the labor theory of property and value, to overcome ideological differences in their audiences. Because the yeoman farmer was the “ultimate” American producer, Populist speakers used the yeoman image to transcend differences between farmers and urban workers and connect them under the umbrella term “producers.” Because mythic imagery is inherently ambiguous, it works enthymematically: Members of the audience—urban workers, farmworkers, and farm owners—could look beyond perceived differences by incorporating the agrarian myth into their own experiences.¹¹⁹

Strategies that called for unity also implied division (and vice versa). The agrarian myth allowed for adherents to use division as a rhetorical strategy. Burkholder argued that the myth provided criteria for creating polarities between good and evil to emphasize confrontation, rather than cooperation, as the Populists’ key strategy. According to the agrarian myth, evil could only originate outside of the garden; everything not within the

¹¹⁸ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 47.

¹¹⁹ For examples, see Burkholder, “Mythic Conflict,” chap. 3, “An Approach to the Analysis of Kansas Populist Speechmaking,” and chap. 6, “An Evaluation of Kansas Populist Speechmaking.”

middle landscape was suspect and chaotic. The agrarian myth urged farmers to search for external villains and external causes of their problems. Farmers were exposed to a myriad of concrete examples and stories that made it easy for them to place blame on others.¹²⁰ Seeing other groups prosper during hard times encouraged farmers to single out monopolies, businesses, and middlemen as responsible for their problems—after all, the money the farmers were not getting from their crops was going *somewhere*.

The key Populist division was between “the people” and the “money interests.” The Populists’ search for external causes allowed farmers to hatch not only a conspiracy theory with which to blame the money interests, but to create a “conspiracy theory of history,” a common feeling that farmers and workers had been consistently and maliciously oppressed by the money interests. Hofstadter argued that many Populists believed that “all American history since the Civil War could be understood as a sustained conspiracy of the international money power.”¹²¹ When Kansas Populists united farmers and workers under the title “producers,” it was to position them in opposition to those who would exploit producers—middlemen, monopolies, and other

¹²⁰ Charles F. Adams, Jr., for example, argued that the deplorable behavior of railroad agents toward customers made it easier for farmers to focus their anger on the railroads. Not that farmers needed more encouragement: Even Adams, who largely disagreed with the farmers’ complaints and methods, argued that the farmers had good reason to dislike the railroads for their many corrupt practices. “Granger Movement,” 402-403.

¹²¹ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 70. Hofstadter did not deny that conspiracies occurred—corruption was rampant in the Gilded Age—but he argued that a “conspiracy theory of history” was especially attractive to those with little education, power, and a distinct sense of oppression. *Age of Reform*, 71. Burkholder argued that Hofstadter’s consistently negative opinion of the Populists came from a simple cause: He equated myth with fiction, thus opposing myth with reality. Burkholder argued that seeing myth itself as real—with real effects and consequences—was a more fruitful and accurate way to interpret the Populists’ discourse. “Mythic Conflict,” 244-46.

groups identified with the “money interests.” Populist polarization focused on a variety of dialectical pairs that fleshed out this core division. They aligned good vs. evil under dialectical pairs based on class, regional, and national distinctions: rich and poor, the few and the many, the people against the money power, local and national, corrupt government and the oppressed, yeoman and the capitalist, East and West, urban and rural, and Europe and America.¹²²

The discourse of the Granger and Greenback movements also reflected the core division of the people against the money power. Crawford argued that the 1873 Farmers’ Declaration of Independence outlined the basic ideology of the farmers’ protest from the Granger period to the Populist conventions of 1891-92. This ideology embraced the Jefferson’s doctrine of natural rights expressed in the original Declaration and singled out corporation officers, bankers, and plutocrats as the villains who violated the rights of the people.¹²³ Granger and Greenback discourse stressed that farmers were only asking for a restoration of those rights as set forth in the Declaration.¹²⁴ Greenback discourse stressed that the yeoman and the laborer were a debtor class, victims of a corrupt system where finance capitalism had a strong hold on politics. Crawford noted that Granger discourse “railed against villainous corporations, alleging that they conspired against the interests

¹²² Burkholder, “Mythic Conflict,” 16-17, and chap. 3, “An Approach to the Analysis of Kansas Populist Speechmaking.”

¹²³ Crawford, “Farmer Assesses His Role,” 110-11.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 127.

of the plain people of the farms” and was a catalog of complaints and a demand for state regulation of corporate abuses.¹²⁵

This brief overview of some of the major rhetorical strategies of farmers in the late nineteenth century suggests that the underlying mythic conflict identified explicitly by Burkholder and implicitly by Hofstadter, Johnstone, Henry Nash Smith, Woodward, and others, offers a compelling framework with which to analyze the key strategies of Granger movement rhetoric.

Justification for Studying Granger Movement Rhetoric

From the preceding sections, a pattern in the literature has emerged. The predominantly “historical” literature on American farmers’ movements has focused largely on the material causes of the farmers’ discontent. These histories offered accounts of the issues that prompted episodes of agrarian “revolt” and the nature of the farmers’ political and economic responses.¹²⁶ The rhetorical scholarship on farmers’ movements has focused on the rhetorical strategies employed by farmers as they responded to their material conditions. An important set of these studies examined the mythic features of farmers’ movement rhetoric by offering accounts of the development and power of important American myths and how they shaped the farmers’ perception of, and responses to, their situation. This literature included studies of the most potent American

¹²⁵ Ibid., 111-15.

¹²⁶ The history of the agrarian movement of the 1870s can be found in several sources. The most useful for this study were Buck, *Granger Movement and Agrarian Crusade*; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*; Knapp, *American Cooperative Enterprise*; Paine, *Granger Movement in Illinois*; Periam, *Groundswell*; Shannon, *American Farmers’ Movements* and *Farmer’s Last Frontier*; and Taylor, *Farmers’ Movement*.

myths of the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ Many of these works examined various combinations of speeches, newspaper stories, classical and popular literature, poetry, political documents, and philosophical tracts to trace the rhetorical power of these myths.¹²⁸

Rhetorical scholarship that focused specifically on the Granger movement, however, has been sparse, with Paul Crawford's book chapter on the Granger movement as the most useful extensive rhetorical treatment.¹²⁹

A more complete understanding of the rhetorical nature of the farmers' identity and agency would offer critical insight into how and why farmers addressed their problems and would be a valuable addition to the historical, sociological, economic, and rhetorical scholarship on American farmers' movements. In examining the literature, I argued three points: First, the literature on American farmers' movements underestimated the Granger movement's influence on later movements and on the relationships between government, corporations, and the people. Second, the literature portrayed the farmers' identity as fragmented and paradoxical and their agency as diffused and ineffectual. Third, the rhetorical strategies farmers used in their movements implied that, of the current claims in the literature, the mythic conflict best explains the complexity of the farmers' identity and agency and many of their rhetorical strategies the late nineteenth century movements. Further examination of the farmers' identity and agency by delving

¹²⁷ The list includes the agrarian myth, the frontier myth, the Southern plantation myth, the myth of the Great American desert, and the gospel of wealth.

¹²⁸ See Blanton, "Agrarian Myth"; Eisinger, "Freehold Concept," and "Physiocratic Doctrines"; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*; Johnstone, "Old Ideals"; and Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land*.

¹²⁹ Crawford, "Farmer Assesses His Role."

more deeply into the nature of this mythic conflict could offer insight into the complexity of the farmers' rhetorical situation and the farmers' actions.

Although the scholarship illuminated the motivations of late nineteenth century farmers, it also left several questions to be answered about farmers' movements in general, the Granger movement in particular, and the rhetorical processes by which the farmers framed their material conditions into successful warrants for action. The focus of my dissertation, the rhetorical construction of the American farmers' identity in Granger movement rhetoric, is justified by the implications of this literature. After briefly noting some of the lacunae of the literature, I will list some of those unanswered questions that motivate my study.

Burkholder clearly identified the mythic conflict that pitted yeoman against self-made man in 1890s Kansas, but did not focus on that conflict as a problem of identity. He focused on how Kansas Populists drew upon the agrarian myth for cultural defense against challenges to their way of life (that is, to oppose the infringement of the gospel of wealth and the perils of the immediate economic situation) and as a means to bridge ideological differences with potential allies. Burkholder did not seek to examine the tensions that the mythic conflict created in the farmers' own identity. For Burkholder, the Kansas Populists were unambiguous adherents of the agrarian myth. Any identity struggles occurred more with the Populists' audiences than with the Populists themselves. (Many groups, after all, were not drawn in by the various transcendence and identification strategies the Kansas Populist speakers used. Instead, they either rejected the invitation outright or were torn by the contrary nature of their identification with the

Populists' cause and their own immediate issues.) Thus, in Burkholder's study, the Populists' agency was not limited specifically by tensions of identity, it was limited by the agrarian myth's inability to accommodate multiple groups adequately within its perspective. The closest Burkholder came to emphasizing tensions of identity came from the Populist speakers' acceptance of industrialization as a fact of life. Instead of demanding that growing industrialization should be stopped, Burkholder argued that Kansas Populists "sought to infuse the new order with the old morality: equal justice for all, special privilege for none."¹³⁰ Contradictory identifications and conflicted identity were not central to Burkholder's study, but he did imply that the elements of that tension were there.

Contradictions were central to the work of Hofstadter, Johnstone, Henry Nash Smith, and Woodward, who did not focus on mythic conflict so much as the conflict between myth and reality. Hofstadter, Smith, and Woodward argued that the agrarian myth ill-prepared farmers for the harsh economic realities of commercialization and industrialization. Smith also emphasized the myth's inability to deal with physical conditions in sections of the frontier or adjust to the rise of urban values and tastes. Johnstone charted the emergence of the underlying tensions of identity implied by the ascendancy of the self-made man at the expense of the yeoman during the nineteenth century. Johnstone and others discussed the implications for the farmer of changing meanings of success and the rise of urban values as the American standard. These authors punctuated the mythic conflict differently than Burkholder did by stressing the material

¹³⁰ Burkholder, "Mythic Conflict," 239.

and commercial aspects of the farmers' situation more as "reality" rather than just another configuration of mythic properties. But almost all of these authors stressed the same central conflict at the heart of the farmers' situation, the dialectic struggle between tradition and reality or tradition and progress. They saw conceptual change—of success, property, the people, government—as central to that tension. New rhetorical studies could add to that discussion by examining the rhetorical processes that transform fundamental cultural concepts and offering deeper rhetorical accounts of the motivations for the farmers' acts.

From the implications from my review of the literature, I have come up with two sets of questions—one set regarding identity, the other agency—that could further motivate my dissertation study. The first set of questions seeks connections between the Granger movement and the literature on the agrarian myth. By and large, the scholarship on the agrarian myth I examined in this essay was focused on origins, development, and influence of the myth in the popular press, agricultural press, and literature; in the discourse of movements (especially Populism); and in the discourse of the farmers themselves. Little has been directly associated with the 1870s Granger movement except by implication and inference. How was the agrarian myth adapted to changing times during the 1870s Granger movement? What form did the agrarian myth take in Granger movement rhetoric? How did Granger movement rhetoric in Illinois negotiate the tensions of identity brought about by mythic conflict?

The second set of questions deal with the farmers' agency. If the "crisis of identity" the farmers faced in the late nineteenth century was debilitating, as some

authors have suggested, how did the farmers build large social movements in the late nineteenth century? How can groups discover agency when discourse offers ambiguous or even contradictory depictions of identity and situation? How do groups warrant their acts in such situations? What motivated collective action if mythic conflict made identity problematic? Did the farmers resolve their contradictory identities brought about by conflicting myths? If so, how did the farmers overcome their “crisis of identity” to organize? To become powerful economic, political, and moral actors?

A Constitutive Rhetoric Perspective

To study Granger movement rhetoric, I draw upon a rhetorical perspective that examines the constitutive power of discourse, a critical perspective based upon the premise that language has the power to create, maintain, and transform identity, community, and culture. Thus, at the heart of the constitutive rhetoric perspective is the claim that identity, community, and culture—that is, the key components of our social reality—are discursive effects.

Constitutive Rhetoric: Shaping Collective Identity and Action

Discourse connects individuals and brings them together by appealing to their sociality. The essential function of rhetoric is “the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.”¹³¹ The key term of rhetoric is identification rather than persuasion because identification has to occur logically and (by perception) temporally before persuasion can occur.¹³² Simple forms of

¹³¹ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 43.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 55.

identification are claims of commonality between individuals—sharing the same work, knowing the same people, living in the same town. However, when claims of commonality forge bonds, shape identity, and induce action, identification becomes a powerful rhetorical strategy. Differences between individuals are transcended, avoided, or faded by abstraction and ambiguity through the resources of language. In such community- or culture-building rhetoric, Michael C. McGee argued, “individuals must be seduced into abandoning their individuality, convinced of their sociality... [They must] assume an anonymous mask.”¹³³ Individuals surrender something of their “former selves” when they adopt new social identities.

Through such discourse, individuals forge bonds based on shared lifestyles, common heritage, shared suffering, and common foes. Through these connections, they share interpretations of the world that provide the social motives for action. Through these connections, they form social, economic, and political organizations and institutions. Kenneth Burke proposed that such shared interpretations and motives occur *specifically* in language:

Motives are distinctly linguistic products. We discern situational patterns by means of the particular vocabulary of the cultural group into which we are born. Our minds, as linguistic products, are composed of concepts (verbally molded) which select other relationships as meaningful. These relationships are not *realities*, they are *interpretations* of reality—hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is.¹³⁴

¹³³ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 242-43.

¹³⁴ Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 35.

The power of a culture or community to shape its members' social reality emerges from the power of that collective's discourse. Although *rooted* in the material world, such discourse *transforms* the "material world into support for the social order."¹³⁵ Ernest Bormann claimed that "when there is a discrepancy between the word and the thing, the most important cultural artifact for understanding events may not be the things or 'reality' but the words or the symbols."¹³⁶ Symbols frame events, give them meaning, and guide responses to those events.

Thus, a constitutive rhetoric perspective explains how discourse shapes collective identity and motivates action. In rhetorical studies, an early view of the power of discourse to constitute audiences came from Edwin Black, who argued that rhetorical discourses present a "second persona," an implied auditor who holds a particular ideology. This second persona, Black claimed, was a "model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become."¹³⁷ But, more significantly for the rhetorical critic in terms of constitutive rhetoric, empirical audiences look to discourse for cues as to how to interpret and respond to the world. In this interaction between the empirical audience and the second persona, the seeds of building identity are sown.

Moving from the second persona to the constitution of a collective, McGee argued that the most important aspect of the identity-shaping process was the creation and development of "the people," a collective body with particular attitudes toward

¹³⁵ Klumpp and Hollihan, "Rhetorical Criticism," 91.

¹³⁶ Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision," 400-401.

¹³⁷ Black, "Second Persona," 113.

action. The seeds of “the people” are dormant in the popular reasonings (aphorisms, maxims, and commonplaces) of a culture until advocates organize these dormant, unconnected ideological commitments into an incipient myth of collective life and present that myth to others. If successful, the masses respond to this myth by behaving as a collective—they give up control over their individual destinies for a collective dream and behave as “the people.”¹³⁸ However, McGee did not focus on the specific rhetorical practices that organized dormant ideological commitments into identity-building discourse.

Building further on Black’s idea of the second persona and McGee’s concept of “the people,” Maurice Charland examined the specific strategies and processes through which discourse shapes social identity. Examining the Quebecois social movement’s push for Quebec’s independence from Canada, Charland started where Black left off—at the moment when an audience accepts the second persona with all its implications for identity and action. For Charland, that moment is significant, as discourse performs an essential “ideological trick”:

[Constitutive rhetoric] presents that which is most rhetorical, the existence of a [people], or of a subject, as extrarhetorical. These members of the [people] whose supposed essence demands action do not exist in nature, but only within a discursively constituted history. Thus, this rhetoric paradoxically must constitute the identity...as it simultaneously presumes it to be pre-given and natural, existing outside of rhetoric and forming the basis for a rhetorical address.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 243.

¹³⁹ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 137.

Constitutive discourse not only presumes, but *creates*, the very audience it is designed to move. Constitutive rhetoric posits a “people” that transcends the individual and presents the past as an extension of the present to create a “people” that existed long before the discourse that drew them into being.

Charland posited three narrative ideological effects of constitutive rhetoric. First, constitutive rhetoric constitutes a collective subject through a narrative that makes the world understandable “with respect to a transcendental collective interest that negates individual interest.” Second, it “collapses” time as it posits a transhistorical subject that transcends and connects individuals across history. Third, it offers the illusion of freedom because constitutive narratives offer “a logic of meaningful totality.” Those who are constituted must be true to the motives with which the narrative constituted them.¹⁴⁰ Thus, constitutive rhetoric creates a collective identity that binds individuals across time and space, an identity that serves as the motivation for particular forms of collective action.

The Constitutive Continuum: From the Managerial to the Transformative

Most discourse is largely “managerial”—that is, it operates through appeals to commonly held facts and values, reinforcing or changing attitudes and behaviors through persuasion. Persuasion theory asks rhetors to identify their audience, thus generally holding identity steady as it lodges its appeals within the facts and values that mark cultural identity.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 139-41.

Black and McGee altered that view of rhetoric because they posited that in moments of rhetorical appeal, identity itself might not be constant but can be susceptible to rhetorical change. For Black and McGee, audiences are *not* givens in rhetorical acts. Rather, they are subject to creation and subtle alteration through rhetorical action. From this viewpoint, constitutive rhetoric is a “perspective” in that it provides a theoretical reinterpretation of rhetorical moments, emphasizing different key components and fostering different accounts of the rhetorical act. It is appropriate, then, from this viewpoint, to claim that all rhetorical acts *are* constitutive or that they have constitutive implications.

However, we also recognize important strategic moments in which discourse fundamentally alters identity, evident in explicitly constitutive acts such as the Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution. Within these moments, the common fabric of managerial discourse is challenged by competing discourses and/or material situations that create recognizable rhetorical crises of identity, strategic moments of decision within which subjects are cast into scenes that suggest, if not demand, not only adjustment but transformation.

Such moments become extraordinary opportunities for constituting identity. The rhetorical tensions that arise in these strategic moments, argued Charland, “render possible the rhetorical repositioning or rearticulation of subjects.” When these tensions become great enough, “successful new constitutive rhetorics offer new subject positions that resolve, or at least contain, experienced contradictions. They serve to overcome or define away the recalcitrance the world presents by providing the subject with new

perspectives and motives.”¹⁴¹ Here, I discuss some of the problems and processes of identifying constitutive moments and constitutive acts.

The differences between the general “constitutive perspective” of discourse and the more dramatic “transformative” moments of constitution mark the evolution of thought from McGee to Charland. McGee’s political myth and Charland’s constitutive rhetoric both explained the rhetorical formation of “the people,” but they offered different views of the “constitutive moment.” McGee argued that, in a rhetorical sense, “the people” is more process than phenomenon, that “the people” takes shape within the political myth(s) that constitute it. These myths coalesce, take potent form, and eventually decay, constrained by the rhetorical resources of the culture in which “the people” come to be. McGee did not offer a precise account of an “opportune moment” for rhetorical constitution because the ebb and flow of the process made discrete starting and ending points for a particular “people” difficult to identify.¹⁴²

In contrast, Charland argued that subjects are potentially constituted at the moment of “interpellation,” the instant when they are *addressed* by constitutive discourse. Identification occurs at the moment an audience recognizes it is being addressed. If the audience actively participates in the discourse, it “inhabits” the persona the discourse provides for it, becoming that subject position within that discourse.¹⁴³ If the act is truly constitutive, then the moment itself is constituted as a *rhetorical situation*:

¹⁴¹ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 142, 147. See also McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 243-47.

¹⁴² See McGee, “In Search of ‘The People.’”

¹⁴³ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 138.

It calls for discourse to (1) frame or create an exigence and (2) create an acting subject with the power and will to address that exigence. To fully inhabit the subject position suggested by the discourse, the audience must then consummate the constitutive act by acting to resolve the exigence.¹⁴⁴ Like the rhetorical subject, the rhetorical situation appears extrarhetorical, but it is constituted within discourse. The situation derives its shape and texture from prior rhetorical acts, but it is fully invoked only through the constitutive act.¹⁴⁵

Charland's focus on interpellation alluded to specific times when discourse would and could call a subject into being. "At particular historical moments," he argued, "political rhetorics can reposition or rearticulate subjects by performing ideological work upon the texts in which social actors are inscribed."¹⁴⁶ The characteristics and signs of such moments, I argue, are embedded in the very need for the re-constitution of identity. The tensions between competing myths and the tensions between myths and the material world mark the rhetorical fissures in which ambiguity arises and potential divisions and

¹⁴⁴ This comes from Charland's third ideological effect of constitutive narratives, the illusion of freedom. An audience, once incorporated into the narrative, adopts the drives and motives inherent in the narrative. To become fully constituted, the subjects must act consistently with those motives by responding to the narrative's persuasive appeal that serves as its persuasive goal. "Constitutive Rhetoric," 141. McGee also referred to this consummating act: A political myth shapes "the people" when individuals "begin to *respond* to a myth, not only by exhibiting collective behavior, but also by publicly ratifying the transaction wherein they give up control over their individual destinies for the sake of a dream." "In Search of 'The People,'" 243. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁵ Charland argued that for rhetorical theory to overcome constraints of ideology, it must see through the "'givenness' of what appears to be the delimitable rhetorical situation, where the ontological status of speaker, speech, audience, topic, and occasion offer themselves as unproblematic." "Constitutive Rhetoric," 148.

¹⁴⁶ Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric," 147.

re-alignments form. At those moments, when “the people” can no longer adequately interpret the material world through its original constitutive myth, potential spaces for new myths arise and individuals grow increasingly “susceptible” to new identities. These new acts connect events and discourses in new ways as old patterns unravel. Signs that such a historical moment has arrived appear in discourse as new ways of describing events, signaling the dissipation of old myths and the rise of new ones.

Signs of the constitutive moment also are found in the rhetorical situation created by the constitutive act itself. The exigences presented in constitutive rhetoric imply that “the people,” imbued with the proper agency, can address and solve those exigences. If that “people” has not yet appeared fully constituted in previous discourses, the appeals for such a “people” to act in a particular fashion could indicate that a constitutive moment is at hand. Thus, social movements that call for members of a society to challenge established economic, political, and/or social relationships, such as the Granger movement did, can serve as evidence that a crisis of identity and constitutive moment has arrived. Such movements create tensions in established cultural identities in order to offer new possibilities for identity and to establish new hierarchies for societal relationships.

The Constitutive Act: Weaving Together the Strands of Rhetorical Context

No matter how compelling or powerful, no single rhetorical act can constitute a fully realized collective identity. Constitutive acts are the culmination of many rhetorical acts that form the context within which identity is shaped. As Charland claimed, the “rhetoric of identification is ongoing, not restricted to one hailing, but usually part of a

rhetoric of socialization.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, much of the creative power of constitutive acts comes from invoking certain elements of the universe of rhetorical acts that precede and surround them. Constitutive acts pull in and weave together the strands of this rhetorical context, strands such as cultural myths, narratives, metaphors, ideographs, and so on, to construct identity.¹⁴⁸ In turn, these acts themselves serve as the rhetorical context for other constitutive acts. “Constitutive rhetoric is part of the discursive background of social life,” argued Charland. “It is always there, usually implicitly, and sometimes explicitly articulated. It is more than a set of commonplaces, but is the con-text, the pre-rhetoric that is necessary to any successful interpellation.”¹⁴⁹ It is within this larger discursive context that rhetorical resources are brought to bear to bring potential subjects to the brink of constitution.

Thus, explicit constitutive acts do not occur in a vacuum. They draw upon broader universes of discourse. However, constitutive acts are not fully determined and shaped by their rhetorical or material contexts. As acts, they always add something novel to their rhetorical and material situations, something new that is not reducible to its antecedents. The issue then becomes how to identify and examine the specific relationships between a constitutive act and its context. Constitutive acts can reshape existing identities in new ways and/or rearrange the relationships between existing

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 138.

¹⁴⁸ McGee argued that the “seeds” of collective identities are found in the “total ideology” of a culture. These dormant arguments do not define “the people” at any given moment, but they mark the boundaries of what any collective identity within that culture could possibly become. “In Search of ‘The People,’” 243.

¹⁴⁹ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 147.

identities. It is from this “irreducibility” to what has come before that constitutive acts go beyond their rhetorical and material situations and transform them.¹⁵⁰

To fully apprehend the power of the constitutive act, the critic must fully study its wider rhetorical context, such as the discourse of a social movement or revolution or campaign or historical moment. The relationship between rhetorical context and its constitutive act is one of whole to part: both imply and re-present the other.¹⁵¹ A constitutive act is not merely a “trigger” that initiates the full force of constitutive rhetoric. Instead, it arises at an opportune rhetorical moment to both imply and invoke, in condensed form, the full complexity of a larger universe of discourse that defines the identity of “the people” and the nature of a rhetorical situation. In other words, the context circumscribes and contains the “building blocks” of the constitutive act; in turn, the constitutive act consummates the identity and motivates the action required by its context. Thus, the constitutive act can be conceived as a *representative anecdote* of the larger set of discourse that encompasses the rhetorical resources for that particular collective identity. I examine the representative anecdote as a critical method in the next section.

A Method to Analyze Granger Movement Rhetoric and Select Texts

Kenneth Burke claimed that critical perspectives imply ontological and methodological questions. Ontological questions ask “what to look for and why”;

¹⁵⁰ Wess, *Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, 146.

¹⁵¹ See Burke on the relationship between act and scene, especially the relationship between “the container and the thing contained” and the term “circumference.” *Grammar*, 3-20, 77-85.

methodological questions ask “how, when, and where to look for it.”¹⁵² A method based on the constitutive rhetoric perspective should explain how Granger movement rhetoric transformed the Illinois farmers’ identity and framed their material conditions into motivation for action. This method must enable the critic (1) to identify the symbolic forms through which Granger movement rhetoric constituted the farmers’ identity and how those forms performed the constitutive function of language; and (2) to select the discourse that contains those symbolic forms.

Identifying Symbolic Forms

Certain symbolic forms are crucial to constitutive rhetoric. In public discourse, the framework of relationships between symbolic forms shapes the collective commitments of a public and motivate public action. These forms and how they interact perform Charland’s identity-building “ideological tricks.” They create a “people” that transcends individuality and history, a “people” induced to act in specific ways. McGee argued that to understand a culture’s repertoire of meaning, a critic must study how its symbolic forms gained meaning through usage over time. The development of cultural meaning by examining how symbolic forms were used through a society’s history—a diachronic study—sets the table for a “slice of time” study of symbolic interactions. Knowing how a symbolic form was used in the past helps the critic see the full range of uses available to a rhetor who uses that symbolic form at a particular point in history. The second chapter of this study, in part, examines the diachronic development of several

¹⁵² Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 68-9.

important symbolic forms to better understand how these forms framed Granger movement rhetoric.

For this study, I drew upon several kinds of symbolic forms that carried the potential for constitutive power. Stylistic tokens that shape the “second persona,” such as *metaphors*, hint at the ideologies that ground the rhetorical identities created through discourse.¹⁵³ *Narratives* and *fantasy themes* tie events, actions, characters, and settings together and give them coherence.¹⁵⁴ *Myths* are stories that serve as the key organizing principles of cultural memory and underlie the formation of “the people.”¹⁵⁵ Aspects of narratives and myths rarely appear in discourse fully formed; instead, their elements appear piecemeal, and it is the critic’s task is to link those disparate parts together to frame the whole. *Ideographs* are highly abstract, culture-bound, ordinary language terms central to political discourse that play a role in constituting “the people.”¹⁵⁶ A culture’s hierarchy of fundamental principles is shaped by the diachronic and synchronic relationships of its underlying ideographs. Specific manifestations of these symbolic forms in Granger movement rhetoric are the rhetorical building blocks with which the movement constituted the Illinois farmers’ identity.

¹⁵³ Black, “The Second Persona,” 113-19.

¹⁵⁴ Bormann, “Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision”; Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric”; Fisher, “Public Moral Argument.”

¹⁵⁵ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People.’”

¹⁵⁶ McGee, “Ideograph,” 5. See also the preface to Condit and Lucaites, *Crafting Equality*.

A useful method to examine the constitutive power of a large set of discourse such as a social movement is the representative anecdote. The notion of the representative anecdote is Kenneth Burke's "method" for designing and testing a critical vocabulary (or theory) of human motives.¹⁵⁷ With it, the rhetorical critic can identify a "core" constitutive act representative of the constitutive power of a larger body of discourse. If this core constitutive act is truly representative, the critic can perform a close textual analysis of the anecdotal text and derive insights about the constitutive power of the larger body of discourse it represents. In the case of the Granger movement in Illinois, the text I claim served as the representative anecdote of movement rhetoric was the Farmers' Declaration of Independence of 1873, a document composed by movement rhetors.

Rhetorical critics have used the representative anecdote as a critical method to reveal the full complex of symbolic motivation within an individual text and within larger bodies of discourse such as social movements, political campaigns, and rhetorical genres. Some critics identified the representative anecdote as "an individual linguistic act which is representative of a broader text"; others have conceived it as "a narrative form embedded within a text" that must be teased out and reconstructed by the rhetorical critic. Either way, the "representative anecdote... synecdochically represents its originating text," whether that text is a single rhetorical act or a much larger universe of discourse, and offers insight into the motivational power of that discourse.¹⁵⁸ To examine the

¹⁵⁷ Burke, *Grammar of Motives*, 323-25.

¹⁵⁸ Madsen, "Representative Anecdote," 209. The central distinction between the two critical uses was whether the critic discovered or created the anecdote. The basic procedure of the "discovery" method was to choose one text out of a larger selection of texts (such as one campaign speech out of an entire political campaign) and designate it

constitutive power of a representative anecdote, and thus of the rhetoric it represents, the critic must perform a close textual reading of the anecdote itself.

The usefulness of the representative anecdote as a critical method is only as good as the adequacy of the anecdote's representation of a broader set of discourse. Rhetorical critic Arnie Madsen argued that the critic must use three criteria to test an anecdote's representativeness. An anecdote must (1) properly reflect the motives and symbol use contained within the discourse it represents; (2) possess adequate scope; and (3) have a synecdochic relationship with the discourse it represents. An anecdote can neither be so simple that it does not fully represent the symbolic complexities of the larger discourse nor so complex that it makes critical examination unwieldy. Without adequate representation, an anecdote will not generate the critical insight that draws upon the full range of human motivation and symbolic action present in the larger field of discourse. To ensure adequate representation, the critic must ground interpretations upon direct reference to the language and form of the larger body of discourse. It allows the critic to "identify where the various rhetorical periods under examination share (or do not share) a common underlying form."¹⁵⁹ Thus, the constitutive act of the Granger movement must be identified within the framework of (1) the rhetorical situation as constituted by the constitutive act itself and (2) the role of the act as the representative anecdote of Granger movement rhetoric.

as a representative anecdote, or (2) craft a narrative that incorporates the central motivations of the text(s) studied. Madsen preferred the former, although his method involved other nuances.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 213-15, 225-26.

Selecting Discourse

The next methodological issue is to select the discourse that contains the symbolic forms, relationships, and rhetorical strategies of Granger movement rhetoric. For this study, I examined Granger movement rhetoric in Illinois from 1870 to 1875. The year 1870 marked the earliest significant efforts of movement leaders to organize Illinois farmers for the movement. By 1875, the agitation of farmers, their opponents, and their supporters sharply decreased or was co-opted into new movements. Although agrarian unrest continued in Illinois after the 1870s, the locus of the national movement had moved west.¹⁶⁰

I focus on movement rhetoric in Illinois for several reasons. First, in the states where the movement was most strongly manifest—in the Midwest, the South, and the Pacific West—thousands of local organizations arose with hundreds of thousands of members. Because the movement spanned such a large area and membership, to examine Granger movement rhetoric in full would demand examining hundreds of newspapers, thousands of documents and speeches, and countless meetings and conventions spanning

¹⁶⁰ The claim that the center of greatest agrarian agitation moved west is a common thread in many farmers' movement histories. Roy V. Scott, for instance, who studied Illinois farmers' organizations in the 1880s and 1890s, drew a sharp distinction between the Granger movement of the 1870s and the movements that followed because farmers in Illinois after 1880 were generally better off than their counterparts in Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. In short, agrarian protest moved west as the exigences facing American farmers moved west. See Scott, *Agrarian Movement in Illinois*, chap. 1, "The Nature of Discontent in Illinois."

several years.¹⁶¹ This would be a task far beyond the scope of a single study. Thus, I limited the scope of this study to a single state.

Second, Illinois was at the heart of the Granger movement. Historian Solon J. Buck, whose work, though almost a century old, still remains the most comprehensive historical overview of the Granger movement in the 1870s, wrote that “though national in its scope, [the movement] was strongest in the states of the upper Mississippi Valley and in no state did it have more important or permanent results than in Illinois.”¹⁶² Illinois farmers were politically active, built strong agricultural organizations, and exerted substantial legislative influence. Illinois boasted one of the largest state Grange memberships and was home to the Illinois State Farmers’ Association (ISFA), the movement’s most substantial and significant independent political farmers’ organization.¹⁶³ Prominent members of the ISFA were also leaders in other regional and national agricultural organizations.¹⁶⁴ Several of the strongest and most widely-read pro-

¹⁶¹ For example, in Illinois alone, there were over 500 newspapers in 1870. That number grew to over 1,000 newspapers by 1880. Of course, most of these papers were not directly connected to the movement, but several of the new or “converted” papers that sprung to life in the 1870s were devoted specifically to the Granger and/or Greenback movements. Scott, *Newspapers and Periodicals of Illinois*, xcii, c-cii.

¹⁶² Buck, “Agricultural Organization,” 3.

¹⁶³ See Buck, *Granger Movement*; Rothstein, “Numbers, Gains, Losses,”; Taylor, *Farmers’ Movements*; Unger, *Greenback Era*.

¹⁶⁴ ISFA president W. C. Flagg was also the president of the National Agricultural Congress and was invited to provide testimony before the Windom committee, a U.S. Senate committee that gathered evidence about the railroad problem. S. M. Smith, secretary of the ISFA, was a key organizer of the state’s independent political party and also played a key role in organizing the National Independent (Greenback) party. For more on Smith’s role in the Greenback movement, see Unger, *Greenback Era*, 207-377 passim.

movement newspapers—the *Prairie Farmer*, *Western Rural*, and *Industrial Age*—were published in Chicago.¹⁶⁵ Illinois was also at the center of one of the largest farmers’ protests of the movement, the Farmers’ Fourth of July, where farmers gathered in hundreds of locales across the Midwest to celebrate Independence Day, voice their grievances, and hear readings of the Farmers’ Declaration of Independence.

Third, some of the most important legislative events connected to the movement occurred in Illinois. In 1870, Illinois citizens overwhelmingly approved a new state constitution that mandated the state legislature to regulate railroad corporations, one of the movement’s most powerful adversaries. This constitution, especially its railroad provisions, served as a model for other state constitutions in the 1870s.¹⁶⁶ One of the most influential of the various Midwestern railroad rate regulations, or “Granger Laws,” was passed in Illinois. The Granger Laws were hotly debated in the regional and national press and ultimately became the subject of the Granger Cases, a series of U. S. Supreme Court decisions which included the landmark constitutional decision in *Munn v. Illinois* (1877).

Thus, important to this study is the discourse that was widely circulated amongst Illinois farmers during the movement. Although the symbolic forms of constitutive rhetoric certainly appear in the individual discourse of Illinois farmers (such as diaries, personal journals, and local letters to the editor) and in the discourse of small farmers’

¹⁶⁵ I do not downplay the influence of farmers in the other Granger states, where they won dramatic political victories. But Illinois farmers had the most long-term success, especially in legislative action.

¹⁶⁶ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 194-202.

groups (such as minutes and proceedings of local Granges and farmers' clubs), the important uses of the symbolic forms that constituted the Illinois farmers as a collective and framed them as agents of change are also to be found in discourse that reached broad audiences. That discourse reflects the wider acceptance (or rejection) of those forms.¹⁶⁷

Thus, this study largely drew materials available through the state's daily and weekly print media, which reached a broad audience throughout Illinois and across the Midwest. In addition to publishing "local" discourse such as letters to the editor from Midwestern farmers, reports and resolutions of local farmers' meetings, and excerpts from other newspapers, these papers published materials from "broader" sources of movement rhetoric. These included the proceedings of state and national farmers' meetings and conventions, the speeches of state and national movement leaders, movement songs and poetry, and other forms of general protest discourse. Some of these papers were also organs or close affiliates of various farmers' organizations. Other discourse available through mass print media included subscription books about the movement and documents distributed directly by the farmers' organizations themselves, such as pamphlets, broadsides, and circulars.

¹⁶⁷ Knowing if and how individual farmers adopted constitutive language would be significant. However, there are practical as well as methodological obstacles. The individual and small group discourse of Illinois farmers is fugitive and difficult to find. A comprehensive picture of individual and small group discourse goes far beyond the scope of this study, especially in time and travel. It may be impossible to get a complete, or even meaningfully representative, picture of individual farmers' discourse from the material that survives from that period. In this study, I adopt the working assumption that the broader public and popular discourse offers a better indication of the agrarian vision, fully understanding that certain perspectives might be left out.

Illinois farmers lived within an environment rich with discourse. They found many venues to read and talk about their political, economic, and moral issues. In addition to conversations with neighbors and meetings of their local granges or farmers' clubs, Illinois farmers had their local and state newspapers. Agricultural journals like the *Prairie Farmer* were filled with news of the farmers' movement, and Solon J. Buck noted that "next to the state grange proceedings, the Grange and other agricultural papers are the most valuable sources for the study of the movement in particular states or localities."¹⁶⁸ State newspapers such as the *Chicago Tribune* often carried news of the farmers' movement mixed with national viewpoints of the farmers' actions. Most of the constitutive symbolic forms that reached individual Illinois farmers came from these periodicals. Ultimately, newspapers were the best source for farmers' rallies, meetings, speeches, events, legislation, court decisions, and other materials related to the Illinois movement. George H. Miller, who wrote extensively on Granger railroad legislation, argued that

[for] much of the basic legislative action the daily newspapers of the state capitals and other major cities are the only source [of information]. Since state politics were reported very fully during [the 1870s], it is possible to obtain extensive information in the press....Newspapers are also the principal source of information on antimonopoly meetings and conventions.¹⁶⁹

The state agricultural journals Illinois farmers probably read most were the *Prairie Farmer*, the *Western Rural*, and the *Industrial Age*, which were all published in Chicago. These journals were the important vehicles for distributing Granger movement

¹⁶⁸ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 321.

¹⁶⁹ Miller, *Granger Laws*, 267.

rhetoric throughout the state. The *Prairie Farmer* was a large-circulation agrarian paper that supported the agrarian movement and published the arguments and perspectives of Illinois farmers. Buck wrote that the *Prairie Farmer* supported the Grange and the Illinois State Farmers' Association, favored railroad regulation, and looked with approval upon the independent party movements. The *Prairie Farmer* "claimed a circulation of twenty thousand in 1876."¹⁷⁰ The *Western Rural* was more important in the 1880s as the organ of the Northwestern Alliance than it was as a Granger movement paper, but the journal "claimed a circulation of twenty-five thousand in 1876."¹⁷¹ According to Buck, *Industrial Age* was started in August 1873 as an organ of the farmers' movement. The *Chicago Tribune* was the largest state paper, and it covered events important to the Agrarian movement while offering a wide range of views on the movement. Buck noted that "the *Tribune* supported the Grangers in their struggle for railroad regulation [until] 1874. It is an important source of information on the Granger movement in all the western states." Buck added that the *Prairie Farmer* and the *Chicago Tribune* were, in the early 1870s, "filled with resolutions of farmers' meetings on the railroad question."¹⁷² These periodicals contained many of the symbolic forms that constituted the Illinois farmers as a collective.

The agricultural press was an important outlet for disseminating Granger movement rhetoric. The editors, correspondents, and contributors of Midwestern

¹⁷⁰ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 323.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 83, note 2.

agricultural papers played a significant role in shaping the farmers' identity. From its inception, American agricultural journalism perpetuated the myth of the American farmer as an independent, self-sufficient individual living on a small farm.¹⁷³ The agricultural press, along with agricultural societies, clubs, and fairs, advanced scientific farming and supported the interests of American farmers throughout the nineteenth century. The agricultural press strongly advocated scientific farming, technological innovations, agricultural fairs and societies, agricultural and industrial education, and sought "the liberation of rural folk from physical drudgery and mental apathy."¹⁷⁴ From its inception in the early nineteenth century, the agricultural press had covered a wide range of subjects, including agricultural statistics, agricultural tours and reports, farmers' correspondence, rural life and activities, climate, conditions, farmers' organizations, interests of rural women, migration from the country to the city, features for younger readers, architecture, education, internal improvements, reform, popular literature, health and medicine, and politics.¹⁷⁵ So persistent, prevalent, and prolific were the editors of the agricultural press that

no other economic group in the early nineteenth century was the recipient of so much free advice, practical as well as impractical, as were the farmers; nor, by the [1830s and 1840s], was any other group so well represented by state and national societies, by fairs, by weekly and monthly journals, and by numerous "experts" who wrote on its problems regularly for newspapers and periodicals.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Johnstone, "Old Ideals," 132.

¹⁷⁴ Demaree, *American Agricultural Press*, 231-2.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 234-6.

¹⁷⁶ Gates, *Farmer's Age*, 338.

Of course, movement coverage was not limited solely to agricultural papers. Other papers and journals in Illinois followed the movement and reported on related events. The *Chicago Tribune*, one of the state's largest newspapers, published a wide variety of articles, editorials, and correspondence about the movement.

The proceedings of statewide farmers' meetings and conventions were among the richest sources of movement rhetoric. These meetings included the platforms and resolutions of the larger farmers' associations in the state and the convention proceedings contained symbolic forms that constituted the Illinois farmers as a collective. The proceedings of most interest in this study are the 1870s proceedings of the Illinois State Farmers' Association and the Illinois State Grange. Buck noted that State Grange proceedings

vary in fullness, in some cases containing but a bare record of business transacted and in others containing speeches and reports of committees in full. Possibly the most valuable parts of them are the numerous resolutions or sets of resolutions which were almost invariably adopted at each session of each state grange.¹⁷⁷

The minutes and proceedings of local clubs and subordinate Granges, as they appeared in the agricultural and mainstream press, were also useful.

Contemporary popular books about the movement written specifically for pro-movement audiences were another source of movement rhetoric. Many of these were subscription books, sold door to door by salespeople with "specimen books" for prospective customers to see.¹⁷⁸ Many of the symbolic forms of the movement are

¹⁷⁷ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 318.

¹⁷⁸ The American Antiquarian Society noted that specimen books "were used by the itinerant agents of subscription publishers to entice customers to agree to purchase a copy

contained in these works. These books created a common repository of facts, rhetorical devices, and argumentative strategies that Illinois farmers could use to support the movement. There are several texts of this genre pertinent to this study: Stephe R. Smith's *Grains for the Grangers* (1873), D. C. Cloud's *Monopolies and the People* (1873), James Dabney McCabe's *The History of the Granger Movement* (1874), and Jonathan Periam's *The Groundswell* (1874). Each book—in varying degrees—contained documentary material, speech excerpts, position statements on various issues, and polemic discourse comprised of the symbolic forms I want to examine.

Granger movement scholars have not given these books the critical attention they deserve as Granger movement rhetoric.¹⁷⁹ Even those scholars who viewed the books as meaningful expressions of the farmers' perspective, like Solon J. Buck and Carl C. Taylor, gave them only cursory examination. Taylor was enthusiastic about the books' value, overstating the case somewhat when he argued that “nothing better represents the

of a work in advance of delivery. This form of marketing was common in America during the years just before and after the Civil War.” Salespeople would carry sample bindings, prospectuses offering the virtues of the work with recommendations from well-known people, and subscription forms where buyers wrote their names, addresses, sometimes occupations, and the number of copies purchased. Thus, these subscription forms contain the demographics of book ownership and offer insight into who had access to the agrarian discourse within those subscription books on the movement. See American Antiquarian Society, “Book Salesman's Samples.”

¹⁷⁹ The exception is Kelley's *Origin and Progress*, which received critical examination from Thomas A. Woods concerning Kelley's true motives for founding the Grange. Woods argued that *Origin and Progress* did not accurately reflect Kelley's radical mindset as he organized the Grange; instead, Woods argued, the book was “cautiously written” and moderate in tone to appease conservative members of the National Grange. Woods claimed that Kelley originally intended the Grange to endorse mutual protection, promote economic cooperation, and take up direct political action against monopolies. See “Knights Of The Plow,” 32-33; see also Barns, “Reappraisal.”

mental attitudes and convictions of the farmers of the early [1870s] than the titles and subtitles of some of the Granger books.” He excerpted Smith, Cloud, McCabe, and Periam to sample the “tone” of the farmers’ language, but his analysis ended there.¹⁸⁰

Buck, too, recognized the insight these books could offer to movement scholars:

When each wave of the movement for agricultural organization was at its crest, enterprising publishers seized the opportunity to bring out books dealing with the troubles of the farmers, the proposed remedies, and the origin and growth of the orders. These works, hastily compiled for sale by agents, are partisan and unreliable, but they contain material not elsewhere available, and they help the reader to appreciate the spirit of the movement.¹⁸¹

Neither Taylor nor Buck examined in depth how these books expressed the farmers’ “mental attitudes and convictions” or the “the spirit of the movement.” Perhaps the hasty, partisan, and unreliable qualities Buck saw in these books reduced their usefulness as accurate historical sources and limited the extent to which Granger movement historians drew upon them.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Taylor, *Farmers’ Movement*, 166-71.

¹⁸¹ Buck, *Agrarian Crusade*, 203.

¹⁸² Buck drew upon Periam and Kelley for historical and documentary material. Buck noted that Periam “presents the farmers’ side of the various questions and contains considerable documentary material, especially with reference to the movement in Illinois.” Of Kelley’s book, Buck wrote that it was “a detailed account of the inception and development of the order, with a large number of letters and other documents. Invaluable for the early history of the Grange.” Of McCabe’s work, Buck was less charitable. He noted that McCabe’s book was “especially useful for giving an insight into the Grangers’ point of view,” but argued that it was also “prejudiced, unreliable, and carelessly put together.” Buck wrote little about Cloud and Stephe R. Smith other than to include them in his bibliographies. See *Granger Movement*, 330, 338, 339; *Agrarian Crusade*, 203-4.

These books, however, can hold considerable value for rhetorical critics. Compared to other contemporary sources of Granger movement rhetoric, these books had the advantage of comprehensiveness: They offered complete coverage of the movement under a single cover. Their significance as repositories of rhetorical themes, strategies, and symbolic forms also came from their commercial focus on what would attract pro-movement audiences at the height of the movement's popularity. Also, Cloud, McCabe, Periam, and Smith, along with their publishers, were likely aware of what elements would enhance their books' potential popularity before they were even finished because these books were sold by subscription. Sales by subscription was a process that differed from post-publication direct sale in that sales would be made before the book was published. Selling books by subscription "was common in America during the years just before and after the Civil War."¹⁸³

Given the advantages such texts offered to contemporary readers and movement scholars, they deserve rhetorical analysis. However, their strength as convenient and concise repositories of movement themes is limited by the difficulty in determining who read these books, and in what numbers, in the 1870s.¹⁸⁴ Book circulation figures are

¹⁸³ American Antiquarian Society, "Book Salesman's Samples."

¹⁸⁴ I have no specific information on the actual or approximate circulation of any of these books. I base all claims of potential circulation on book reviews, advertisements, and calls for book agents in contemporary periodicals. Stephen R. Smith's *Grains for the Grangers*, Cloud's *Monopolies and the People*, and Periam's *The Groundswell* received specific editorial attention from the *Prairie Farmer* and the *Western Rural*. *Industrial Age* reviewed Cloud's book and published several of his essays. Representative advertisements and calls for agents for the Cloud, McCabe, Periam, and Smith books can be found in issues of the *Prairie Farmer*, *Western Rural*, and *Industrial Age* in late 1873 and early 1874. The same can be found for Kelley's book in late 1875.

difficult to find because records are scattered and incomplete. Calculating the circulation for books sold by subscription—like those written by Cloud, McCabe, Periam, and Smith—is also difficult. However, what remains of subscription book records are incomplete and scattered, making the number of readers difficult to estimate. Because these books were designed primarily for audiences who supported the movement, the nature of the subscription business might have exposed many farmers to these books because they were sold door to door during a time when farming families might not have patronized town bookstores. The books might have been shared through the libraries of farmers' clubs and subordinate Granges. These uncertainties make it difficult to empirically evaluate the books' impact.

The material evidence of the rhetorical strategies underlying the constitution of farmers and the power of their voice are to be found within these objects and within the public discourse of the people who carried out their daily business in Illinois—the farmers themselves, movement leaders, lawmakers, lobbyists, pamphleteers, newspaper editors, merchants, and so on. Rhetorical critics Celeste M. Condit and John Louis Lucaites argued that the rhetorical foundation of a community “grows from ordinary public conversations far more than extraordinary political tracts and philosophical treatises.”¹⁸⁵ It also grows from the discourse of people who were *not* farmers and did not have a direct connection to agriculture or the agrarian lifestyle. These rhetors—prominent Illinois citizens, attorneys, legislators, judges, businessmen, newspaper editors, agricultural journalists, and the like—crafted discourse with implications for forming an

¹⁸⁵ Condit and Lucaites, *Crafting Equality*, xvii.

agricultural collective. Interactions between the discourses of the group(s) constituted and the groups that oppose or support them were part of the constitutive processes that form a “people.” Robert Cathcart argued that dialectical enjoinment is a key feature of social movements because movements are characterized by the moral conflict between the established order and those who question that order’s moral legitimacy.¹⁸⁶ I would extend that claim to argue that identity is also shaped through dialectical enjoinment. Those the farmers opposed played a key role in shaping their collective identity.

Granger movement rhetoric in Illinois is significant because of the constitutive power it derived from its material and rhetorical circumstances. This discourse is also important, in a larger sense, for the insight it offers as the opening stanzas of the nineteenth century farmers’ movement. Indeed, the power of the Greenback, Alliance, and Populist voices owe no small debt to the rhetorical work of Illinois farmers and their contemporaries in the 1870s. The revitalization of increasingly “outdated” symbolic forms such as the agrarian myth to warrant political and social action was, perhaps, a needed rhetorical move for the Populists to build upon. The richness of the farmers’ voice in the 1870s Midwest still has not gotten its full due, and this study is a step toward recognizing its importance.

Précis of the Study

This dissertation develops my thesis that Granger movement rhetoric constituted Illinois farmers as powerful agents of change by transforming them from individual actors into a powerful collective identity, the agricultural class, a collective agrarian

¹⁸⁶ See Cathcart, “Confrontation as Rhetorical Form,” “Defining Movements Rhetorically,” and “Defining Social Movements.”

identity motivated for political and economic action. The argument supporting this claim unfolds in five chapters. In this chapter, I have examined the scholarly literature about the Granger movement, offered my critical perspective for the study, and here outline the organization and purpose of the remaining chapters.

In the second chapter, I argue that American farmers in the late nineteenth century faced a crisis of identity shaped by an underlying mythic conflict that began more than a century earlier. I offer a brief historical context of the genesis and growth of the Granger movement and its key organizations in Illinois. I then examine how mythic tensions created a crisis of identity that framed the farmers' material, social, political, and economic conditions in the Granger movement. I then conclude with a brief discussion about the implications of the agrarian myth.

In the third chapter, I examine the Farmers' Declaration of Independence of 1873, the most important rhetorical document of the Granger movement in Illinois because it served as the movement's core constitutive act and its representative anecdote. Through a close textual reading of the document, I argue that the Farmers' Declaration played an essential role in crafting an identity that would empower Illinois farmers as collective agents of change, as members of a "producing class" empowered to enact political reform. To craft that collective identity and build motivation for action, the Farmers' Declaration drew upon the rhetorical power of the original Declaration to warrant political reform. By adapting the Declaration of Independence to address the farmers' material conditions, the Farmers' Declaration motivated political reform by positioning the railroad monopoly's oppressive acts in opposition to American principles;

constructing a protagonist empowered and motivated to challenge the railroad monopoly's power; and prescribing what the protagonist must do to end the railroad monopoly's oppression. I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of using the representative anecdote as a critical method.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the rhetoric of the movement itself. I argue that movement rhetoric, by juxtaposing two antithetical visions of the farmers' material conditions, created a narrative that empowered Midwestern farmers to see the dire consequences of their agrarian individualism and to constitute themselves as a class that could adequately respond to their material conditions. These antithetical visions drew upon the motivational power of three strands of American public discourse: the rhetoric of class, the agrarian myth, and the legacy of the American Revolution. The first vision portrayed the world "as it is" through a narrative that enabled Midwestern farmers to see their material conditions as a pervasive system of oppression in which they were complicit. The second vision depicted the world "as it ought to be" through a narrative that enabled the farmers to transform their oppression into a brighter future grounded in America's founding principles. The juxtaposition of the visions culminated in a crisis of identity, drawing the farmers into a strategic moment of choice in which they had to choose either slavery or independence. Ultimately, the farmers chose independence, constituting themselves as the agricultural class, an identity empowered to challenge the oppression of their conditions. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the representative anecdote as a critical method.

In the fifth and final chapter of the dissertation, I offer a brief overview of the Granger movement after 1875 and discuss the implications of the study.

Chapter Two: The American Farmers' Identity from the Colonial Period to the Granger Movement

The yawning gap between agrarian theory and the actual circumstances of the West after the Civil War must have contributed greatly to the disillusionment which comes out in the farmers' crusades of the last quarter of the century....The scope of this contrast between image and fact, the ideal and the actual, the hope and the consummation, defines the bitterness of the agrarian revolt that made itself felt with increasing force from the 1870's onward.¹

—Henry Nash Smith

The rise and fall of the farmer's prominence in American society is an important thread in the fabric of American national identity. The first attempts to define the farmers' identity came from agrarians who depicted them as virtuous yeomen in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Later attempts emerged in the early and mid nineteenth century as the agricultural press portrayed them both romantically as yeomen and pragmatically as businessmen. Other media, however, began to develop a portrait of a class left behind—ignorant, backward, and low. Such multiple portrayals created deep fissures in any unified identity of a landowning farming class, and these contradictory depictions led to the farmers' bitter crisis of identity after the Civil War.

Late nineteenth century American farmers faced a crisis of identity shaped by an underlying mythic conflict that began more than a century earlier. First, I offer a brief historical context of the genesis and growth of the Granger movement and its key organizations in Illinois. Second, I examine how mythic tensions created the crisis of

¹ Smith, *Virgin Land*, 192-93.

identity that framed the farmers' material, social, political, and economic conditions in the Granger movement.²

The Historical Context of the Granger Movement in Illinois

The swift transformation of the United States from an agrarian society to an industrial and commercial one had huge implications for American farmers. In the late nineteenth century, farmers, once seen as America's essential class, were no longer widely regarded as the economic, political, or social core of American society. After the Civil War, farmers were faced with a compelling choice: either accept their new marginal status, or rise up and challenge the forces that relegated them to a lower standing. As made clear by the succession of farmers' movements in the late nineteenth century, many farmers chose the latter.

The most significant obstacle farmers faced in exerting their collective voice was organization. After the Civil War, Illinois farmers were too isolated, scattered, and poor to pose a significant threat to their larger, more organized, and wealthier opponents. Although many farmers belonged to agricultural organizations of all types, these groups were usually small and few had overt political or economic agendas. Many of these organizations were the descendants of the early agricultural societies that first formed in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These early societies were dedicated to agricultural reform, improvement, and progress and focused on the technical and

² Because my dissertation focuses on post-Civil War Illinois, I am more concerned with the context of the Midwest rather than the East, West, and South. In this study, I use the term "Midwest" to refer to the states of the upper Mississippi Valley, the center of the 1870s Granger movement: Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

scientific aspects of agriculture rather than on political, economic, or social issues.³

Although later organizations such as the Grange and the Farmers' Alliance shared similar educational goals, these early societies were not forerunners of the large-scale farmers' organizations of the late nineteenth century. Rather, they were the precursors of horticultural societies, government agricultural agencies, agricultural colleges, and agricultural experiment stations.⁴

Other early farmers' associations were formed for mutual protection. One example was the frontier claim association. These organizations were composed of squatters and settlers who organized to protect their land claims from speculators. Claim associations appeared in the 1820s and became common in the 1830s, with many lasting long afterwards. These organizations played an important role in frontier life by registering titles before local governments were in place, dealing with claim disputes, and handling claim jumpers.⁵ Many of the large-scale farmers' organizations after the Civil War mirrored the mutual protection aspects of these associations, such as using economic cooperation to protect farmers from groups that would exploit them.

Other farmers' organizations had more explicit political agendas. These organizations attempted to address the economic and political problems of their members. For example, the New England Association of Farmers, Mechanics, and Other Workingmen, formed in 1830, was the first farmers' organization to participate in a

³ Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*, 77-86.

⁴ Johnstone, "Old Ideals," 114.

⁵ Gates, *Farmer's Age*, 67-68.

“farmers’ movement.” Farmers and workingmen, considering each other natural allies as producers, joined together during a time when workingmen had little protection or job security. Throughout the 1820s and 1830s, similar societies sprang up around the country. Many others formed in the 1850s. Historian Carl C. Taylor argued that their basic demands included militia system reform, suffrage, land tenure law reform, tax reform, bank and monopoly law reform, abolition of imprisonment for debt, protection for labor instead of capital, work laws for women and children, better education systems, and shorter hours.⁶ In many respects, these associations were forerunners of the more active late-nineteenth century farmers’ organizations and third-party political movements.

After the Civil War, the number of farmers’ clubs and associations increased and many became forums where farmers gathered to discuss their mounting problems. More became involved in politics. For example, in Illinois, farmers’ clubs played a role in pushing for state railroad regulation in the 1860s. However, few of these clubs joined with their neighbors to form larger organizations, so they remained local in outlook and in size.

To combat the stronger coordination of effort by other groups, farmers needed to organize on a scale beyond the scope of any farmers’ association of the past. Merchants, speculators, corporations, and other groups were more successful at organization, had greater access to state and federal government, had more wealth, had clearer goals, and

⁶ Taylor, *Farmers’ Movement*, 77-79. Taylor argued that one reason the farmers supported the mechanics was because many farmers’ daughters worked in factories. Taylor also added that farmers might not have been completely loyal members of these societies, suggesting that the addition of “farmer” to the names of these associations probably was to add strength to a workingmen’s movement.

used more effective methods to achieve those goals than the farmers.⁷ Without regional or national organization, farmers could do little to control the distribution and price of farm commodities. They could not share crop information or gain access to independent market information apart from brokers and middlemen. Without this information, farmers were at a disadvantage when they needed to decide whether to sell or store their produce based on supply and demand.⁸ Without organization, farmers could not move state and federal governments to respond to their problems. The Democratic and Republican Parties increasingly failed to acknowledge new issues important to the farmers in the Midwest.

The National Grange of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry

By the early 1870s, as American farmers began to develop a “new class consciousness...that made them receptive to any medium that would make possible organized expression of their views,” several organizations arose to connect the scattered farmers and the independent clubs into larger networks.⁹ The National Grange of the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry was the largest of the movement’s national agricultural organizations. Other national farmers’ associations formed in the 1870s, but

⁷ See Saloutos, “Agricultural Problem,” for more details on the advantages other business groups had over farmers in the nineteenth century.

⁸ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 293-96. For information on how farmers’ organizations and the federal government addressed the farmers’ lack of information on a variety of subjects, see Gates, *Farmer’s Age*, chap. 15, “Government Concern for the Farmer,” and chap. 16, “Agricultural Periodicals and Journalists”; and Shannon, *Farmer’s Last Frontier*, chap. 12, “Governmental Activity in Agriculture.” Other authors argued that the farmers were not ignorant about matters of market conditions thanks to the educational efforts of the agricultural press. See Rome, “American Farmers as Entrepreneurs,” 46.

⁹ Benedict, *Farm Policies*, 95.

none with the grassroots growth and popularity of the Grange. The Grange gave farmers an opportunity to gather their collective might and challenge railroads and other powerful monopolies. In its heyday in the mid-1870s, the Grange boasted a presence in almost every state and became the first truly national farmers' association. Through consolidation and shared membership, the Grange became a potent vehicle through which individual farmers and independent farmers' clubs could participate in statewide and nationwide networks.¹⁰

The Grange was formed largely through the efforts of Oliver Hudson Kelley. Born in Boston in 1826, Kelley moved to Minnesota as a young man and tried his hand at farming. Kelley was an agricultural innovator, agrarian activist, and prolific writer. From his earliest days in Minnesota, he argued that farmers should find ways to share agricultural information, heed the results of systematic scientific study, and push government to establish agricultural agencies to study and solve farming problems. In 1867, as a clerk for the Department of Agriculture in Washington, D.C., Kelley toured the South to gather information about postwar farming. The Southern farmers' economic problems and their adherence to antiquated methods of agriculture disturbed him. He felt that the farmers' lack of social opportunities made them incapable of changing their attitudes toward work and life. Kelley decided that the time was right to build an organization to bring farmers together for social interaction, education, mutual protection, and economic cooperation. When Kelley returned to Washington, D.C., he formed the Grange with six other men. They worked out the basic structure and purposes of the

¹⁰ Johnstone, "Old Ideals," 132-34. Alexis de Tocqueville also noted Americans' proclivity for association for almost any reason. See *Democracy in America*, 513-17.

organization and created a secret ritual to unite the members and to form a strong basis for large-scale organization.¹¹

Between 1867 and 1872, the Grange grew very slowly. In 1869, as the National Grange secretary, Kelley decided to drum up membership by traveling from state to state to form local chapters. During his travels, he wrote articles for leading agricultural journals, published the Grange constitution in newspapers around the country, and wrote press releases to put the organization in the public eye. With the help of prominent agrarian activists and agricultural editors such as W. W. Corbett of Chicago's *Prairie Farmer*, one of the largest agricultural papers in the Midwest, Kelley spread the myth of a powerful national order even though the Grange was struggling to survive.¹² With the

¹¹ Buck, *Agrarian Crusade*, 2-3. Although many accounts of the Grange's beginnings argued that this Southern trip inspired Kelley to think about a large-scale farmers' organization, historians William Barns and Thomas Woods argued that Kelley hit on this idea years earlier. See Barns, "Reappraisal," 231-35, and Woods, "Knights of the Plow," 137-43.

¹² Agrarian activists in Illinois played an important role by helping Kelley expand the Grange in the Midwest. Historian Thomas Woods argued that the *Prairie Farmer*, an agricultural journal published in Chicago, deserved credit for spreading the word about the Grange. Published by H. D. Emery and edited by W. W. Corbett, the *Prairie Farmer* had long been an outspoken opponent of monopolies. The paper had argued for organizations to protect the farmers' interests and called for economic cooperation since the 1850s. In 1868, Emery and Corbett ardently supported Kelley's efforts to build the Grange and gave the young Order space in the *Prairie Farmer*. Corbett saw huge possibilities for the Grange, envisioning it as the means for farmers to fight railroads, insurance companies, warehouses, telegraph companies, and monopolies in general. In fact, Corbett's vision for the Order may have exceeded Kelley's. As Corbett helped organize an Illinois Producers' Convention in 1870, he invited Kelley to tell Illinois farmers that the Grange was dedicated to battling monopolies. Kelley decided not to attend, perhaps fearing repercussions with the more conservative National Grange officers in Washington. Later in the year, however, Kelley established the Illinois State Grange with officers who were affiliated with the *Prairie Farmer*. Woods, "Knights of the Plow," 227-35.

support of agrarian leaders he met in Minnesota and Illinois, Kelley revised the founders' conservative Grange circulars so that they appealed to the farmers' interests and economic situation by emphasizing that the Grange could battle monopolies and offer opportunities for cooperative buying and selling.¹³

Kelley's perseverance and his rhetorical reframing of the Grange paid off when the panic of 1873 hit, followed by hard economic times that pushed disgruntled farmers to join the Grange and other farmers' organizations in large numbers.¹⁴ Many farmers saw the Grange as an outlet to vent their grievances, organize for protest, and band together for economic cooperation and protection. The Grange gained momentum and was most powerful in the upper Mississippi Valley states of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. It was also strong in the South and on the Pacific coast.¹⁵ At its height in the mid-1870s, the Grange boasted a presence in almost every state and was the first large-scale national farmers' association. Through consolidation and shared membership, the Grange became a potent vehicle through which farmers could participate in statewide and nationwide networks. By 1873, however, the Order had found its stride and began to attract farmers in large numbers, and between 1873 and 1875, its numbers swelled dramatically. In May 1873, the nation's farmers had established and/or joined 3,360 subordinate Granges; by March 1874, there were over 14,000; by January 1875, hundreds

¹³ Buck, *Agrarian Crusade*, 3-9.

¹⁴ Johnstone, "Old Ideals," 133-34.

¹⁵ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 56-57.

of thousands of farmers belonged to nearly 22,000 subordinate Granges scattered throughout the nation but concentrated in the Midwestern states.¹⁶

In Illinois, the Grange was the first large-scale farmers' organization to successfully build membership, but it took four years—from 1868 to 1872—to show meaningful growth. In 1868 and 1869, Kelley failed several times to organize subordinate Granges in Illinois. His first attempt, in Chicago in April 1868, included H. D. Emery and W. W. Corbett of the *Prairie Farmer* as inaugural members, but the organization did not last long. In July 1870, Kelley, Emery, and Corbett tried to organize a temporary State Grange to get the farmers' attention, but this move failed to attract enough farmers to establish permanent subordinate Granges in the state.¹⁷ Through the steady work of stalwart Patrons in Illinois and neighboring states, however, active subordinate Granges eventually took root. Kelley returned to Illinois to re-organize the State Grange on March 5, 1872, this time with the Masters of twenty active subordinate Granges present. The body elected Alonzo Golder as the first Master of the Illinois State Grange.¹⁸ In December 1872, the *Prairie Farmer* announced that it would establish a department in its newspaper to report news of the Order and spread the word of its mission and growth.¹⁹

¹⁶ According to Buck, few records of the Grange's actual membership were kept except for October 1875 and July 1876, when the membership of the National Grange was 758,767 and 588,525, respectively. The membership of the Grange at its largest can only be estimated. See Buck, *Granger Movement*, table between 58-59.

¹⁷ Kelley, *Origin and Progress*, 269-71.

¹⁸ "Illinois State Grange," *Prairie Farmer*, December 21, 1872, 404; Fanning, *Proceedings of the State Grange of Illinois at the Third Annual Session*, January 12-15, 1875, Springfield, Ill., 15.

¹⁹ "A New Department," *Prairie Farmer*, December 21, 1872, 404.

After the State Grange was established, the Order began to grow quickly in Illinois. The number of subordinate Granges grew from approximately seventy in December 1872 to over 1,500 in early 1875, lagging behind only Missouri, Indiana, and Iowa.²⁰ The growth of the Grange in Illinois during this period mirrored the Order's rapid increase throughout the United States.

In Illinois, the Grange did not create the farmers' discontent, nor did it serve as the only outlet for the farmers' grievances. Before the Civil War, Illinois farmers called for measures similar to those proposed by movement activists fifteen years later. At the 1858 Illinois State Fair in Centralia, a group of farmers met for a convention.²¹ Documents from this meeting called for farmers to unite in common cause and adopt the same strategies as their more organized enemies. These documents stressed important agrarian themes, such as the protection of agriculture by government, equal reward for agriculture as for other occupations, and that middlemen should not determine the price of farmers' produce. Farmers at the convention called for farmers' clubs, purchasing and selling agencies, a national agricultural bureau, and electing farmers to political office.²² Historian Carl C. Taylor argued that the Civil War possibly interrupted a growing farmers' movement begun at the 1858 convention.²³

²⁰ Buck, *Granger Movement*, table between 58-59.

²¹ Taylor noted that there is some question as to whether this convention actually happened. The only person to document the convention was Jonathan Periam, later the editor of two notable agricultural papers in Illinois, the *Western Rural* and the *Prairie Farmer*. See Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*, 83-84; Periam, *Groundswell*, 204-206.

²² Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*, 84-86.

²³ Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*, 86.

After the Civil War, Illinois farmers were politically active and had come together for a variety of political purposes before Kelley had begun his organizing efforts in the state. Between 1865 and 1870, farmers participated in several anti-monopoly conventions and protests. In 1869 and 1870, Illinois farmers helped secure provisions for railroad and grain warehouse regulation in the 1870 state constitution, the basis for future Illinois railroad laws. Farmers in the Illinois General Assembly formed a Legislative Farmers' Club to help enact the railroad law of 1871.²⁴

The Illinois State Farmers' Association

Starting in 1870, Illinois farmers held three large state conventions in which Illinois farmers sought to define their common interests and issues and create a state organization to champion their cause. The first of these was the Bloomington producers' convention. In March 1870, agrarian Henry C. Wheeler called for farmers to attend a producers' convention to discuss their railroad problems and to find a way to present "the rights, wrongs, interests, and injuries (with their remedies) of the producing masses of the Northwest" to the state and federal governments.²⁵ Several "leading" Illinois farmers met in Bloomington on April 20, 1870, to share their concerns and to form a permanent state organization.²⁶ They talked about their problems with the railroads, agreed that collecting statistics on agriculture and transportation was essential to inform their actions, and

²⁴ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 81-82.

²⁵ H. C. Wheeler, "The Transportation Question," *Prairie Farmer*, March 26, 1870, 89. See also Periam, *Groundswell*, 225-27.

²⁶ Periam, *Groundswell*, 227. The proceedings of the convention were reported in the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Prairie Farmer*.

resolved to limit the power of monopolies. The convention delegates formed an organization and elected officers, but it did not last long enough to act on the convention's resolutions.²⁷ "Great results were expected from the meeting of this body," wrote Jonathan Periam, but "nothing practical...came of it." Despite this, Periam added, the convention succeeded "as to its moral bearings. It was the plow that broke into the stubborn soil of monopoly."²⁸ It brought together farmers from across the state to raise their collective consciousness, shape and define their shared interests, and more fully comprehend of the nature, scope, and magnitude of their problems.

Other movement advocates saw the organizational possibilities of Wheeler's convention. W. W. Corbett, an editor at the *Prairie Farmer*, sought to build up the Grange by capitalizing on the energy of the Bloomington convention and the Illinois farmers' growing unrest.²⁹ The week prior to the convention, the *Prairie Farmer*

²⁷ "The Producers' Convention," *Prairie Farmer*, April 30, 1873, 130.

²⁸ Periam, *Groundswell*, 230.

²⁹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 44; Periam, *Groundswell*, 222-31. On April 11, 1870, W. W. Corbett, editor of the *Prairie Farmer*, wrote to National Grange secretary Oliver H. Kelley that something "could be done for the cause of the people, and for the Patrons of Husbandry" at the upcoming Bloomington producers' convention on April 20. The convention's purpose, Corbett argued, was to "devis[e] means to combat the vast railroad monopolies that threaten to overwhelm the country. *Organization* is the one thing needful to attain the end sought for." The Grange would be "an efficient organization for this purpose" and he offered to "hint" to the convention that the Grange could furnish "the possible means of deliverance." In order to do so, Corbett argued that it would be necessary to back up this hint with "a full declaration of the objects and aims of the Patrons, and to show people present that something may be done." Corbett urged Kelley to make that appeal in person, arguing that he could do more organizing at the Bloomington convention than he could in months of building Granges "in the usual manner." For reasons not clear, Kelley demurred and did not attend. Kelley, *Origin and Progress*, 245-6. Also see Woods, "Knights of the Plow," 229-30.

published the National Grange's constitution and exhorted Illinois farmers to attend the convention to strike "the first blow...for a peaceful revolution that shall wrest from monopolies the power to oppress the people." The *Prairie Farmer* recommended that farmers turn to the Grange to sustain the energy of the convention.³⁰

In 1872, Illinois farmers made a second attempt to form a state organization. Early in the year, the Union Farmers' Club of Avon reached out to other farmers' clubs in the state to decide whether to meet "for the purpose of comparing views, discussing such subjects as interested them as farmers, and inquiring into the causes of, and if possible discover some remedy for, the present depressed condition of the agricultural interests of the West."³¹ The overall reaction was positive, so S. M. Smith, at that time the secretary of the Wethersfield Farmers' Club, issued a call for Illinois farmers to meet "for the purpose of comparing views, and consulting together on the best means of organizing a general union of farmers, for their mutual benefit and protection against the monopolizing tendencies of the age."³² In October, around fifty delegates from the state's subordinate Granges and independent farmers' clubs, representing over 1,000 farmers,

³⁰ "Devote One Day to the Cause," *Prairie Farmer* April 16, 1870, 113.

³¹ S. M. Smith, *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, January 15-16, 1873, Bloomington, Ill., 1; Periam, *Groundswell*, 232-33.

³² S. M. Smith, *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, January 15-16, 1873, Bloomington, Ill., 1; S. M. Smith, "A Convention of Farmers' Clubs," *Prairie Farmer*, October 5, 1872, 316; S. M. Smith, "Convention of Farmers' Clubs," *Western Rural*, October 5, 1872, 686.

attended the convention in Kewanee.³³ During the two-day meeting, the delegates appointed a committee to correspond with local farmers' organizations and to organize a statewide farmers' convention.³⁴

In December 1872, the executive committee called for another convention to meet in Bloomington in January 1873. The purpose of the convention was to initiate

such action as shall secure the co-operation of the various agricultural organizations of the State, and of farmers generally, in improving and perfecting the work of mutual improvement in the theory and practice of Agriculture; in attacking and breaking down the monopolies that by combination and undue influence in State and National legislation are securing exorbitant [*sic*] profits in transportation, manufactures, and trade; and generally in promoting the intelligence and prosperity of the agricultural classes.³⁵

The call and its mandate drew a much larger attendance than the 1870 Bloomington and 1872 Kewanee conventions. On the convention's first day, 275 delegates representing forty counties and ninety local farmers' organizations attended, along with "volunteers enough to fill the large hall to overflowing."³⁶ The overwhelming response to the 1873 Bloomington convention call was a sign that Illinois farmers had awakened to the need of organization to protect their interests.

³³ S. M. Smith, *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, January 15-16, 1873, Bloomington, Ill., 1; "The Kewanee Meeting," *Prairie Farmer*, October 26, 1872, 337.

³⁴ S. M. Smith, *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, January 15-16, 1873, Bloomington, Ill., 1.

³⁵ W. C. Flagg, "Organization of Farmers," *Western Rural*, November 16, 1872, 738.

³⁶ *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, January 15-16, 1873, Bloomington, Ill., 11; W. C. Flagg, "President Flagg's Report," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, December 16-18, 1873, Decatur, Ill., 6.

From this convention, the Illinois State Farmers' Association emerged. The most prominent leaders of the ISFA were its president, Willard C. Flagg, and its secretary, S. M. Smith. Both men were also the most visible and active movement leaders in Illinois. Both men served the organization in these capacities from its inception through January 1877, the last documented annual meeting of the ISFA. Both men were tireless speakers and farmers' advocates, attending hundreds of meetings and delivering hundreds of speeches throughout Illinois and the Midwest during the movement. Both men also actively engaged in associations and campaigns that were regional and national in scope. Other notable movement advocates who belonged to the ISFA included Prof. M. M. Hooton, Prof. Jonathan B. Turner, Illinois state senator L. D. Whiting, Prof. C. C. Buell, S. T. K. Prime, and Charles E. Barney.

The Illinois State Farmers' Association shared much of its membership with the Illinois State Grange. The ISFA united politically unaffiliated farmers' clubs and subordinate Granges to build a statewide network to push forward political agendas. The ISFA claimed both independent farmers' clubs and subordinate Granges in its membership, but the total numbers of each was never entirely clear and the total constituency of the ISFA was never calculated with any precision. At the December 1873 ISFA convention, S. M. Smith, whose voluminous correspondence with farmers' organizations across the state might have given him the best overall picture of movement membership, claimed that the convention delegates represented a constituency of over

200,000 Illinois farmers.³⁷ In his annual secretary's report at the January 1875 ISFA convention, Smith estimated that Illinois held 1,600 Granges and almost as many independent farmers' clubs. "If, therefore, we allow fifty members to each, which is a fair average," he reported, "we have a grand total of 150,000 members, a grand army, which, if acting in harmony, would be invincible for good to themselves."³⁸ Another estimate of the ISFA's membership was between 80,000 and 90,000, or double that of the state Grange.³⁹

The Illinois State Farmers' Association was responsible for some of the most dramatic political victories for Illinois farmers in 1873. When the ISFA formed in January 1873, it arrived on the scene as the Illinois Supreme Court declared an 1871 state railroad law in violation of the state constitution. ISFA leaders called for a convention in the state capital in April during the legislative session to push for a stronger version of the 1871 law that could pass constitutional muster. The legislators got the hint and enacted the most potent and enduring of the "Granger" railroad laws in the Midwest. The ISFA was not done yet, however. In the 1873 summer judicial elections, members of the ISFA

³⁷ S. M. Smith, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, December 16-18, 1873, Decatur, Ill., 23. In his earlier secretary's report to the convention, Smith noted that from the incomplete reports he had received from organizations in eighty-four of the state's 102 counties, 820 farmers' clubs with a combined membership of over 46,000 members and 549 subordinate Granges were associated with the ISFA. He claimed he could not provide an accurate membership count for the Granges because the Granges would not give him that information. *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting*, 8.

³⁸ S. M. Smith, "Secretary's Report," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, January 19-21, 1875, Springfield, Ill., 6.

³⁹ Rothstein, "Farmer Movements," 169.

campaigned to remove the Illinois Supreme Court chief justice who overturned the 1871 law. To many people's surprise (and to the chagrin of some Eastern critics), the farmers were successful. In the statewide fall elections, Illinois farmers elected their candidates to offices in 55 of the 66 counties in which they ran a candidate. Politically, this was the high point of the ISFA's power.⁴⁰

The Granger movement in Illinois was marked by a slow early growth followed by rapid and dramatic gains in membership and active participation in late 1872, throughout 1873, and steadily through 1874. In 1873 and 1874, the most active years of the movement in Illinois, a substantial portion of the Illinois agricultural population were involved with one or more farmers' organizations. Some estimates claimed up to 150,000 Illinois farmers—out of an estimated agricultural population of 400,000 in the state—had joined the Grange, independent farmers' clubs, and/or the Illinois State Farmers' Association during those years.⁴¹ Thus, these organizations, in aggregate, carried the potential to wield considerable power in local and state politics.

Many of the strategies and themes employed in Granger movement rhetoric had been central in agrarian rhetoric of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries. The ideological basis of the Granger movement did not simply arise after the Civil War; American farmers had long drawn from a deep reservoir of rhetorical myths,

⁴⁰ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 82-89, 158.

⁴¹ S. M. Smith, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, December 16-18, 1873, Decatur, Ill., 8; S. M. Smith, "Secretary's Report," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, January 19-21, 1875, Springfield, Ill., 6; Buck, *Granger Movement*, table between 58-59, 76.

commonplaces, and strategies that were first given expression in colonial and early national discourse.

Mythic Tensions and the American Farmers' Identity

The identity and status of the American farmer has been a central issue in American public discourse since the seventeenth century. Many colonists' growing desire for more local control challenged traditional European practices of land tenure, political representation, and aristocratic privilege. Central to this conflict was the growing rhetorical tension between a democratic brand of American agrarianism that privileged an idealized farmer-citizen and a more aristocratic ideology that privileged a wealthy ruling class. In the colonies, this tension was manifested geographically between the growing western frontier and the more populous, wealthier, and urban eastern seaboard. Rhetorically, the conflict was expressed in the tensions between the symbols that comprised an "agrarian myth," other powerful American myths, and material conditions.⁴²

The American farmers' identity in the Granger movement was shaped by these mythic tensions. Myth is constitutive because it is a powerful cluster or pattern of symbols that depicts and organizes a people's collective experience,⁴³ contains

⁴² Scholars have used a variety of aliases for concepts that share important aspects of the agrarian myth: the myth of the garden, the Edenic myth, the freehold concept, the middle landscape, American pastoralism, agrarian fundamentalism, agrarian philosophy, agrarian ideology, Jeffersonian democracy, and rural producer ideology. Although not completely interchangeable—each term comes from a different theoretical and/or methodological emphasis—these terms embody many of the same fundamental assumptions.

⁴³ Blanton, "Agrarian Myth," 2-4.

commonly held ideologies of a particular time,⁴⁴ identifies and defines important aspects of a people and its culture, constitutes a complete world of values, and shapes collective behavior.⁴⁵ Every people expresses its profound convictions through myth. Myth is dynamic; it emerges within social groups and evolves through symbolic interaction as a shared system of interpreting common experiences.⁴⁶ Because it is rooted in group and influences group action, myth is a powerful source of identification and a form of constitutive rhetoric: It is discourse that shapes the identity of its audience and gives them the power to make sense of their world. Because myth makes claims about what is real and frames material conditions for its believers, McGee argued that

myth most obviously conflicts with “objective reality.” Because it is a response, not only to discomfort in the environment, but also to the failure of previous myths to cope with such discomfort, a...myth also conflicts with all previous myths. Each new vision of the collective life, in other words, represents a movement of ideas...from one “world” of attitudes to another.⁴⁷

By studying mythic discourse, the critic can examine the rhetorical consciousness of a people during a particular moment in time and understand how that people interpreted the world.⁴⁸ Thus, the critic can apprehend the identity of a people at any given time by

⁴⁴ Heinze, “Yeomanry Transformed,” 25 n. 17.

⁴⁵ Burkholder, “Mythic Conflict,” 246-49.

⁴⁶ Blanton, “Agrarian Myth,” 2-7.

⁴⁷ McGee, “In Search of ‘The People,’” 245.

⁴⁸ Blanton, “Agrarian Myth,” 2-7.

examining the complex rhetorical interactions and relationships between competing myths and material conditions.⁴⁹

In this section, I will describe and explain the origins and underlying principles of the agrarian myth, the agrarian myth's evolution, and how the tensions between the agrarian myth, other myths, and material conditions shaped the American farmers' identity in the late nineteenth century.

Origins and Principles of the Agrarian Myth

The agrarian myth was a collection of agricultural, political, philosophical, and economic concepts that justified the American farmers' central role and important status in society. The agrarian myth established fundamental relationships between the American farmer, God, nature, land, society, and government. These relationships emerged from the confluence of classical agrarianism, Romantic imagery, John Locke's natural rights doctrine, Physiocratic economics, and Thomas Jefferson's political philosophy.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ McGee, "In Search of 'The People,'" 245.

⁵⁰ Accounts of the nature, history, and conceptual development of the agrarian myth and related symbolic forms can be found in these works: Abbott, "Agricultural Press Views the Yeoman"; Blanton, "Agrarian Myth"; Brass, *Peasants, Populism and Postmodernism*; Burkholder, "Mythic Transcendence" and "Mythic Conflict"; Burns, *Success in America*; Conlogue, *Working the Garden*; Eisinger, "Almanac," "Agrarian Nationalism," "Freehold Concept," and "Natural Rights"; Griswold, *Farming and Democracy*; Heinze, "Yeomanry Transformed"; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*; Johnstone, "Identification," "In Praise of Husbandry," "Old Ideals," and "Turnips and Romanticism"; Marx, *Machine in the Garden*; Montmarquet, *Idea of Agrarianism* and "Philosophical Foundations"; Morrow, "Agrarian Myth and Farm Editors"; Peterson, "Jefferson's Yeoman Farmer," "Telling the Farmers' Story," and "Will to Conservation"; Smith, *Virgin Land*; and Thompson, "American Philosophical Tradition" and *Spirit of the Soil*.

Classical Greek and Roman writers lavishly praised farming and farmers. They created a set of agrarian commonplaces that became the basis of European and American agrarian ideology: Agriculture was the only essential occupation and thus was superior to all other occupations; agriculture was the mother of all arts; and farmers were superior to city dwellers and made the best soldiers and citizens.⁵¹

The classical commonplaces were echoed and extended by European writers. Renaissance writers added biblical elements to classical ideals by connecting the images of an agrarian “Golden Age” to the Garden of Eden. Those who led a simple agrarian life were divinely blessed and close to God.⁵² European agricultural literature perpetuated the classical notions of the importance, dignity, and virtue of agriculture and of country life. The most important European extensions of classical themes came from Romantic literature, John Locke’s natural rights doctrine, and the French Physiocrats’ economic philosophy. Romantic writers, preoccupied with rural themes and imagery, echoed the classical conception of agriculture in their literature and poetry and found a widespread audience in those who wished to venerate nature and agriculture.⁵³ John Locke’s political theory shaped important foundations of the agrarian myth by connecting private property to agriculture, giving those who tilled the earth the strongest claim to the land. The Physiocrats developed an economic theory based upon agrarian fundamentalism, the idea that agriculture was the foundation of any nation’s economy and that farmers were the

⁵¹ Johnstone, “In Praise of Husbandry,” 80-82.

⁵² Blanton, “Agrarian Myth,” 66-67.

⁵³ Johnstone, “In Praise of Husbandry,” 93-94. See also Johnstone, “Turnips and Romanticism.”

only producers of true wealth. Because agriculture was uniquely important to society, the Physiocrats argued, it required and deserved the special protection of government.⁵⁴ Locke's theory connected property to society and the Physiocrats' theory connected property and society to agriculture.

The agrarian myth achieved its most complete American form in the writings of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson extended the agrarian myth by linking American democracy to the yeoman farmer, the ideal American citizen. Jefferson, believing that the greatest good was the political freedom of the individual, argued that the best society was one composed of small farmers. For Jefferson, "political independence rested upon social equality and economic security, of which a small farm was the surest foundation." Only on small farms could farmers develop independence and self-reliance, two qualities "most readily converted into enlightened self-government." Those who governed themselves must "own their souls," and only those who owned property could do so, as property was the best means to achieve economic security and independence. In turn, to maintain economic security, small landowning farmers needed to be involved in public affairs because they needed to protect their rights to the land and, thus, their political freedom.⁵⁵ Thus, for Jefferson, the yeoman was the paragon of simple virtue, the life-source of the nation, the protector of American democracy, and his independent character was shaped by an "enlightened" individualism. Although rugged, self-reliant, and independent, the yeoman's self-interest was integrally entwined with the welfare of the

⁵⁴ Eisinger, "Natural Rights," 13-15; Johnstone, "Old Ideals," 113.

⁵⁵ Griswold, *Farming and Democracy*, 36.

American people. This enlightened self-interest, corresponding to what Tocqueville had called the “principle of interest rightly understood,” identified the yeoman’s individual concerns with the concerns of community and society.⁵⁶

From these origins, the basic assumptions of the agrarian myth were formed. The central figure of the agrarian myth was the yeoman farmer, the ideal citizen of agrarian democracy. The yeoman was a simple, moral, hardworking, vigorous, independent, and content human being. He had a close relationship to God and nature because God called man to cultivate and care for the land. In return, nature would surrender its bounty in rich abundance. Nature, according to the agrarian myth, was the “middle landscape,” a place between the untamed wilderness and the corrupt cities. The middle landscape was a garden tended by the yeoman farmer, a place where natural order and harmony prevailed. Anything outside the garden was suspect and chaotic. Evil could only originate outside of the garden; the myth depicted cities in particular as strongholds of evil, vice, and corruption.⁵⁷

At the heart of the identification of the yeoman’s interests with the interests of the American people was his connection to the land. The yeoman farmer’s mythic relationship with the land was of particular social and political importance in America. In the middle landscape, the yeoman owned a small farm and carefully tended it with his family. He had a concrete stake in society because he had to protect his right to own and to tend his land. He was the most important citizen because he was the source of all true

⁵⁶ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 525-30.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Virgin Land*, 187.

wealth: He alone fed the people. All other occupations were derivative, for none could survive without the farmer's labor.⁵⁸ Thus, it was the government's obligation to protect agriculture and the yeoman farmers' right of freehold tenure, the ability for each citizen to buy and cultivate land and enjoy the fruits of his labor. Any government that failed to perform this duty was illegitimate; any society that failed to support agriculture was doomed to die.

Land ownership was also central to the yeoman as an icon of American exceptionalism. The yeoman cut a figure far superior to that of the tenant serf of Europe because he owned the land he cultivated. Jefferson held up the American yeoman as the protector of democracy because the yeoman's interests as an individual and as a citizen—especially the ideal and the practice of freehold tenure—coincided with the interests of the nation, and vice versa. Thus, his self-interest was not narrowly circumscribed merely to the well-being of himself and his family. Instead, as Jefferson conceived it, his self-interest was absolutely essential to the practice of American democracy. Because the yeoman's interests were tied to land ownership, the yeomanry's steady access to abundant cheap land and to the rights of freehold tenure was paramount. To protect those rights, the yeoman had to be politically active and knowledgeable. He had to remain ever vigilant to protect individual rights from state encroachments. Thus, this Jeffersonian

⁵⁸ See Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 24-25. See also Buck, *Granger Movement*, 16; Eisinger, "Freehold Concept," "Natural Rights," and "Agrarian Nationalism"; Peterson, "Jefferson's Yeoman Farmer," 13-14, and "Telling the Farmers' Story," 293-94; Smith, *Virgin Land*, chap. 11, "The Garden of the World and American Agrarianism," and chap. 12, "The Yeoman and the Fee-Simple Empire." The image of the yeoman farmer was invariably male. Women were not entirely excluded from the mythic image, but they largely were depicted playing a supportive and subordinate role with the farm family.

political vision of the myth bonded agrarian individualism to the welfare of community and nation, imbuing the yeoman farmer's self-interest with a sense of public purpose.⁵⁹

Thus, as constituted by the Jeffersonian vision of the agrarian myth, farmers had an inherent understanding of how their individual self-interest—defined in large part by the need to protect their land and other property rights—was linked to the greater good, the protection of individual rights and the welfare of the American people. Protecting their own rights merged with the larger purpose of protecting everyone's rights. This idea of self-interest as enlightened individualism was reinforced in Jefferson's first inaugural address:

I believe this...the strongest Government on earth. I believe it the only one where every man, at the call of the law, would fly to the standard of the law, and would meet invasions of the public order as his own personal concern.⁶⁰

The self-interest of every American citizen was bound to the interests of the community or the nation. Because each farmer's self-interest shared a common basis with the self-interests of his fellows—sustaining political equality, maintaining property rights, and so on—acting according to those individual interests was, in practice, acting for the collective interests of all farmers. In this sense, private interests and the general welfare could be merged under such an “enlightened” individualism.

Evolution of the Agrarian Myth

Through the agrarian myth, the roots of the American farmers' identity were planted in the colonial period. The agrarian philosophy that took shape from classical and

⁵⁹ Griswold, *Farming and Democracy*, 36.

⁶⁰ Jefferson, “First Inaugural Address.”

European sources was quickly adapted and applied to the New World. America gave agrarianism a place in the world where the symbolic landscape of an ideal pastoral society could be realized. American and European writings were filled with visions of unbounded opportunities in the unexplored continent. America was a new beginning, a “virgin land” where the corrupt practices and oppressive class distinctions of the Old World could be discarded and society could start fresh.⁶¹ As the population moved west, agrarian writers saw that “settlement beyond the Alleghenies promised an even more perfect realization of the agrarian ideal on a scale so vast that it dwarfed all previous conceptions of possible transformations in human society.”⁶² While the economic, political, and social circumstances of colonial farmers did not fully match the Edenic ideals of the myth, the concrete fact of a vast, uncultivated continent in which to start civilization anew tapped into the vision of the ideal agrarian society.⁶³ The myth motivated settlers to push into the wild and subdue new lands. The myth depicted untamed nature as wilderness, a frightening and dangerous place antithetical to an idyllic pastoral society. To achieve paradise, nature first had to be cultivated and the American mission became the conversion of wilderness into arable land.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Eisinger, “Agrarian Nationalism,” 161-63, 178.

⁶² Blanton, “Agrarian Myth,” 72-73; quote from Smith, *Virgin Land*, 129. For more on how the myth shaped American thought, see Eisinger “Freehold Concept,” “Natural Rights,” and “Agrarian Nationalism.”

⁶³ Eisinger, “Agrarian Nationalism,” 161-63, 178.

⁶⁴ Blanton, “Agrarian Myth,” 79-81.

American writers used the agrarian myth to compare and contrast the New World to Europe. An agrarian nationalism appeared in writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, first to entice settlers to come to the colonies and then later to distinguish the colonies from Europe. Agrarian writing in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries revealed an emerging consciousness of the special qualities of American life contrasted to Europe, largely by comparing the quality of American farmers to European peasants. American farmers were freeholders, independent and productive citizens; they were not dependent, trapped serfs like their European counterparts. As the American yeoman was heralded as superior to the European farmer, he became a powerful symbol to distinguish the promise of America from the corruption of Europe.⁶⁵ As discontent with England rose and an American national identity emerged, the yeoman farmer became a central symbol in the war against England: brave yeoman confronting and defeating an empire.⁶⁶

During the colonial period, farmers collectively protested against many issues that conflicted with ideals of the myth. Colonial farmers desired “to own property, to produce crops and foodstuffs, to control local affairs, to be served but never coerced by a representative government, and to have traditional ways of life and labor respected.”⁶⁷ Colonial farmers were particularly aroused when their rural independence and local self-rule were challenged or disregarded by colonial and English governments. Frontier

⁶⁵ Eisinger, “Agrarian Nationalism,” 161-63, 178.

⁶⁶ Eisinger, “Freehold Concept,” 46, and “Agrarian Nationalism,” 160.

⁶⁷ Stock, *Rural Radicals*, 16.

farmers challenged both the British and the eastern colonial elite over these ideals, many central to the ideology of the American Revolution itself, years before the Revolution took place.⁶⁸ Movements after the Revolution challenged state and federal government on issues such as access to land, unfair court systems, unduly harsh taxes, and unrepresentative government.⁶⁹ In all of these movements, farmers wanted more control over local affairs and more representation in the colonial and state governments.

The separation between the urban seats of government and the rural frontier was especially pointed during this time. The inherent tension between farm and city emphasized in the agrarian myth made it easier for colonial farmers to perceive that urban dwellers and the colonial aristocracy controlled and corrupted government in opposition to the farmers' needs and desires. Throughout the colonial period, the tensions between the agrarian frontier and the urban seacoast grew and became a great source of tension throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Although many of the colonial era farmers' protests ended in violence or with the threat of violence, in most of the uprisings farmers first turned to legitimate political means to address their problems. They petitioned legislatures for redress of their grievances and demanded more equitable representation in the colonial governments. When attempts to resolve problems through legitimate channels failed, they turned to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁹ The more significant of the colonial era movements were the tobacco uprisings of the early and mid-seventeenth century, Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, the North and South Carolina Regulators' uprisings in the late 1760s, Shays' Rebellion in the mid-1780s, the Whiskey Rebellion in the mid-1790s, Fries' Rebellion in the late 1790s, and the various quitrent revolts throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

direct action.⁷⁰ Between 1650-1750, frontier colonists challenged Eastern centers more than forty times; between 1750-1850, twenty such uprisings occurred. When pushed to act, farmers often formed local militias, destroyed the homes of landlords, merchants, lawyers, and tax collectors, and prevented courts from holding session.⁷¹ Militant action in Shays' Rebellion created fears among creditors that the state governments' inability to put down future revolts could lead to debt cancellation or property redistribution. Many Federalists used Shays' Rebellion as "the final argument to sway many in favor of a stronger federal government"⁷² and to call for a Constitutional Convention. Much of the public debate over the U.S. Constitution pitted centralized federal control against local control. When the Constitution was ratified, it signaled a partial victory for Eastern urban capitalism over agrarianism: The establishment of a strong federal government with a stronger legislature, expanded tax power, and a central judiciary went against principles of the agrarian myth that called for government to protect agricultural interests and agrarian independence.⁷³ Ironically, it would be this powerful central government to which farmers would turn after the Civil War to control the growing power of corporations and monopolies.

The farmers' resentment of the growing power of federal government was partially assuaged by Thomas Jefferson's "Revolution of 1800," the year in which he

⁷⁰ Shannon, *American Farmers' Movements*, 23-26.

⁷¹ Stock, *Rural Radicals*, 4, 16, 18-19.

⁷² Morison, Commager, and Leuchtenburg, *Concise History*, 113.

⁷³ Taylor, *Farmers' Movement*, 43-45.

won the presidential election. “Jefferson was primarily interested in the political implications of the agrarian ideal,” wrote Henry Nash Smith. “He saw the cultivator of the earth, the husbandman who tilled his own acres, as the rock upon which the American republic must stand.”⁷⁴ Jefferson honored small producers and venerated rural life, so the farmers’ interests were high on the federal government’s agenda.⁷⁵ Although Jefferson freely used the powers of a stronger central government, he used those powers to advance an agrarian agenda. For example, the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 guaranteed an expanded frontier for the next generation of pioneer families and increased the opportunity for yeoman farmers to own land. As America entered the nineteenth century, the promise of an agrarian nation seemed quite possible.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the yeoman farmer became a core symbol of American nationalism and patriotism, representing a new nation built upon democratic and agrarian principles.⁷⁶ American writers of the time—among them Thomas Jefferson, John Taylor, Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur, Thomas Paine, Philip Freneau, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, and George Logan⁷⁷—propounded the principles of the agrarian myth and exalted the yeoman farmer. “The career of [the yeoman] symbol deserves careful attention,” argued Henry Nash Smith, “because it is one of the most

⁷⁴ Smith, *Virgin Land*, 128.

⁷⁵ Stock, *Rural Radicals*, 49-50.

⁷⁶ Eisinger, “Freehold Concept,” 46, and “Agrarian Nationalism,” 160; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 26-30.

⁷⁷ Eisinger, “Freehold Concept,” 47-59.

tangible things we mean when we speak of the development of democratic ideas in the United States.”⁷⁸

The period between the Revolution and the Civil War has been called the age of the American farmer because the material, political, social, and economic conditions of America came closest to the ideal of the agrarian myth. The American population was overwhelmingly agrarian. In 1790, over 90 percent of working Americans were engaged in farming. Not until 1870 did the number of Americans engaged in agriculture drop below 50 percent of the working population and the 1870 census was the first to show farmers as a minority of gainfully employed Americans.⁷⁹

Under the aegis of the agrarian myth, the expanding frontier offered the possibility that all Americans, no matter how rich or poor, could own land and become productive citizens. The agrarian myth offered compelling economic, political, and social motives for frontier settlement based on the idea of a self-sufficient, independent American yeomanry cultivating small freehold farms. “The image of this vast and constantly growing agricultural society in the interior of the continent became one of the dominant symbols of nineteenth-century American society—a collective representation, a poetic idea...that defined the promise of American life.”⁸⁰ The agrarian myth justified pushing the frontier ever West, for farmers to establish homesteads and cultivate the

⁷⁸ Eisinger, “Agrarian Nationalism,” 164-66; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 28; Smith, *Virgin Land*, 135.

⁷⁹ Rothstein, “Farmer Movements,” 165; Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 117; Stock, *Rural Radicals*, 36; Goodwin, “Brief Chronology,” 1184, 1190.

⁸⁰ Smith, *Virgin Land*, 123.

prairies and plains, and to remove American Indians from the interior so that it could become the mythic middle landscape. Thus, national policy of the early nineteenth century focused on creating the “fee-simple empire,” a nation filled with small farms tended by yeoman farmers and their families.

Land distribution was the central agrarian issue of the farmers’ age. The farmers’ mythic relationship with government and the rest of American society rested upon the farmers’ ability to own and develop land, especially on the frontier. Most agrarian agitation during this time urged the federal government to distribute public lands to as many settlers as possible. For settlers, securing homesteads from the public domain was the most important political issue and became a dominant theme in Western politics throughout most of the nineteenth century. Thus, it was not surprising that “the business of surveying, sectioning, advertising, selling, and collecting the proceeds [of U.S. lands] constituted the largest single area of economic activity in the country and a major obligation of the federal government.”⁸¹ Between 1800 and 1860, the U.S. government distributed public lands by auction, through land grants, and by granting title to settlers through pre-emption, squatting, and homesteading.⁸²

Although many U.S. land policies were, on their surface, designed to distribute land to those who wished to start small farms, they often had different results. The justification for homesteading legislation came directly from the agrarian myth and the principle that “the only valid title to land was that of the man who applied his own

⁸¹ Gates, *Farmer’s Age*, 51.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

physical labor to its cultivation.”⁸³ However, many U.S. land policies favored wealthy speculators and large land companies and undermined fair distribution. Farmers seeking homesteads faced the inequitable distribution of national lands and rules of ownership that increasingly favored “paper” legal title over the agrarian “labor” title to land through improvement.

Land speculation spurred Western settlement, but it was an obstacle to the equitable development of the American West.⁸⁴ Speculation increased the cost of starting and maintaining a farm and forced many settlers to buy their land on credit, pouring much of their farming profits into paying exorbitant interest rates and guaranteeing that much of the profit from rising land values and improved land did not end up with the smaller farmers.⁸⁵ Although small farmers would eventually own a great deal of the public land, only a small portion came from free homesteads, pre-emption rights, squatting, or direct purchase from the federal government. Much of the public land was first granted to railroads and states and/or sold to rich speculators, corporations, and land companies. They then sold the land to settlers and to small-scale farmer-speculators.⁸⁶

⁸³ Smith, *Virgin Land*, 169.

⁸⁴ Gates, *Farmer's Age*, 77.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁶ Gates, *Farmer's Age*, 94-98; Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 55; Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 129-31; Shannon, *Farmer's Last Frontier*, chap. 3, “Disposing of the Public Domain.” Buck argued that even though the railroads, speculators, and land companies were intermediaries, land ended up with farmers for low costs overall. Buck, *Granger Movement*, 26-27. For a comparison between those who saw land policies as detrimental to farmers and those who saw them as fairly positive, see Winters, “Economics of Midwestern Agriculture,” 76-79.

Land speculation in the West came from a perspective antithetical to the agrarian myth. Paul H. Johnstone called the mindset that fueled the craze for buying and selling “boomer psychology,” the speculators’ pervasive optimism that frontier land values would rise indefinitely. Farmers, squatters, and settlers who framed their approach to land this way

did not look upon [the land] as a lifetime investment, a precious possession whose resources were to be carefully husbanded, whose soil they could enrich and would ultimately pass on to their children more valuable and more productive than when they acquired it. To them land was not an enduring investment but a speculation which they were prepared to part with when the opportunity came to sell at a favorable price.⁸⁷

This concept of land value stood in sharp contrast to the value of the land in the agrarian myth. According to the myth, the land, properly cared for and cultivated, not only held its own intrinsic value, it also nurtured the virtuous qualities of the yeoman. The soil imparted virtue and offered a direct connection to God; it gained further value through the yeoman farmer’s honest labor.⁸⁸ Yet, except for farmhands, tenants, and agricultural laborers, almost all economic classes on the frontier engaged in land speculation in the nineteenth century. In addition to Eastern capitalists, moneylenders, land companies, and railroads, many squatters also participated in land speculation.⁸⁹ Contrary to the spirit of pre-emption, they would find plots of land, make some improvements, and then sell their claims when the next wave of settlers arrived. After sale, they moved further into the

⁸⁷ Gates, *Farmer’s Age*, 399-400.

⁸⁸ Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 129-31.

⁸⁹ Gates, *Farmer’s Age*, 81-82.

frontier ahead of the settlers to repeat the process. These competing interpretations of land value were part of the farmers' larger identity conflicts later in the nineteenth century.

Mythic Tension in the Late Nineteenth Century

The shortcomings of the agrarian myth became more glaring as America changed from an agricultural nation to an industrial and commercial one. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the agrarian myth increasingly failed to adequately reflect, explain, or predict the farmers' world and the farmers' place in it. The disparity between the agrarian myth and material conditions led to a crisis of identity for American farmers.

Increasingly, the agrarian myth failed to offer meaningful interpretations of the industrial revolution and the technological and scientific advances in agriculture, the farmers' economic problems, the farmers' social status, and the farmers' political power.⁹⁰

The agrarian myth could not account for the great changes brought about by the industrial and agricultural revolution. Henry Nash Smith noted that the West

had nourished an agrarian philosophy and an Agrarian Myth that purported to set forth the character and destinies of the nation. The philosophy and the myth affirmed an admirable set of values, but they ceased very early to be useful in interpreting American society as a whole because they offered no intellectual apparatus for taking account of the industrial revolution. A system which revolved about a half-mystical conception of nature and held up as an ideal a rudimentary type of agriculture was powerless to confront issues arising from the advance of technology. Agrarian theory encouraged men to ignore the industrial revolution altogether, or to regard it as an unfortunate and anomalous violation of the natural order of things.⁹¹

⁹⁰ Smith, *Virgin Land*, 192-93.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

As the very nature of agricultural practice changed from advances in machinery, scientific farming methods, transportation, finance, and growing national and international markets, the agrarian myth and the notion of the independent, self-sufficient yeoman farmer explained less and less of the American farmers' material conditions. Increasing yields and mass markets meant the farmer relied more on the cash system than on providing a small surplus beyond what he and his family could consume.

The agrarian myth did not adequately explain the economic issues that faced Illinois farmers. Except in special circumstances, very few farmers in the late nineteenth century were subsistence farmers, although many tried to raise and produce what they could on the farm to be as self-sufficient as possible.⁹² Most farmers, especially those on the prairies, grew cash crops for commercial sale. The independent yeoman farmer quickly gave way to the commercial farmer who, with access to larger markets, began to specialize in particular cash crops. Such dependence on the markets ensured that farmers entered interdependent relationships with consumers, middlemen, suppliers, and transportation companies.⁹³ Illinois farmers were now at the mercy of railroads,

⁹² Subsistence farming is the ability of a farming family to grow, raise, or gather all the food it needs to survive without reliance on outside sources. Few American farmers in the late nineteenth century, however, were subsistence farmers except by necessity—that is, they had no immediate access to local or distant markets and, thus, no easy access to manufactured implements and no easy way to transport and sell any surplus crops to those markets in which there might be a demand for them. The ideal image of the yeoman farmer was, in part, a self-sufficient subsistence farmer independent of the fluctuations and vices of a market economy. Taylor argued that American farmers went from a high degree of self-sufficiency to a high degree of commercialization between the American Revolution and the Civil War. See *Farmers' Movement*, chap. 2, "The Farmers' Movement Before 1790."

⁹³ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 23-39.

monopolies, unsympathetic politicians, and the unpredictable markets of Europe and the East. Many were deep in debt and falling crop prices made it difficult for many to avoid foreclosure. Thus, the agrarian myth's emphasis on the producer's essential role in the economy was undermined by an increasingly complex economic system based on worldwide markets. The myth's focus on the yeoman farmer's economic independence, based on access to farmable land, was blunted by the looming possibility that many small farmers would lose their land because they could not afford to pay their mortgages.

The agrarian myth could not explain the farmers' loss of social status. Despite the work of many agricultural editors and agrarian proponents to maintain that the farmer was the most important citizen, most people in the United States no longer saw American farmers as the ideal citizens of an American society. Producers were no longer held in high esteem; in direct contrast to the agrarian myth's depiction of agriculture, farming increasingly was framed as tedious, harsh, and unrewarding work—even by farmers and sympathetic agricultural editors. Furthermore, the superiority of the producing class was undermined by the rise of urban tastes and values, as the rise of the catalog business showed. Reluctantly at first, rural residents and farmers slowly joined urban consumer culture, coveting many of the same luxuries and items as their city-dwelling counterparts—but without the same economic standing.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Barron noted that “the growing centrality of cities and the rise of a consumer culture threatened to erode traditional sources of authority and diminish the social and cultural primacy of local communities.” *Mixed Harvest*, 8. For more information, see chap. 5, “With All the Fragrant Powders of the Merchant: Mail-Order Buying in the Rural North.” Also see Danbom, *Born in the Country*, chap. 7, “Rural America in the Age of Industrialization”; Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 159-61.

The agrarian myth could not explain the farmers' loss of political status. In the mid-nineteenth century, individuals and corporations with vast amounts of wealth had more access and held more sway with state and national government. Legislatures were not as responsive to the farmers' needs and no longer gave agriculture the special treatment it deserved according to agrarian fundamentalism. Western farmers, once assured by mythic principles that government would preserve their access to land, a living, and a way of life, saw other groups usurp their rightful role as ideal political, economic, and social citizens. The speculator, the tycoon, the banker, the merchant, and the corporation were emerging as the central figures of American society. By the 1870s, the growing influence of big business in politics revealed that the agrarian myth's conception of America outlived its usefulness as an interpretive framework.⁹⁵

As the post-Civil War years unfolded and the agrarian myth's explanatory power ebbed, the farmers' relationships and identifications within the agrarian myth increasingly competed with those of other strong American myths, especially the myth of the self-made man.⁹⁶ The agrarian myth was inclusive and democratic; the myth of the self-made man was largely exclusive and elitist. The agrarian myth emphasized that people were equal according to their inalienable natural rights; the myth of the self-made

⁹⁵ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 34-36; Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, chap. 4, "Farmers in Politics, 1873-1896"; Smith, *Virgin Land*, chap. 18, "Failure of the Agrarian Utopia," and chap. 19, "The Myth of the Garden and Reform of the Land System."

⁹⁶ I use the term "self-made man" here because other myths similar to this concept—such as the gospel of wealth or Social Darwinism—have their own specific attributes and are connected to particular time periods, especially time periods that came later than the time period of my dissertation study. However, they shared basic symbols and ideals and my discussion here is an amalgamation of these qualities as they appeared in opposition to the agrarian myth.

man stressed that people were unequal according to their abilities and that government action to equalize people through democracy and the majority's will was contrary to the principles of the self-made man. Such action interfered with the natural order of things by allowing those with inferior abilities to rise through redistribution of wealth.

Both the agrarian myth and the myth of the self-made man stressed individualism and success. For the yeoman farmer, success meant independence, self-sufficiency, and owning land to farm. Land was essential to the yeoman farmer's success because it was necessary for political and social status. Land ownership was the path to independence and gave the farmer a stake in society. The farmer's moral claim to property was based on the natural right to own land and to own the fruits of his labor. For the self-made man, success meant accumulating wealth, power, and material goods. The myth of the self-made man did not acknowledge that each person had a natural right to land, prosperity, or in more extreme instances, even subsistence or survival. Land was connected to status only insofar as it was a material possession with value determined by extrinsic, not intrinsic, factors, like all property. Land merely reflected an investment and offered a path to wealth. The myth of the self-made man emphasized the "paper" concept of ownership based on legal title as opposed to the older "use" concept from agrarianism. The self-made man myth's perspective toward ownership conflicted with "older pioneer and agrarian notions which considered material wealth as the product of toil which by right should be distributed only on the basis of productive work actually performed, on actual possession and use, rather than on the basis of possession of paper symbols and insignia or by their manipulation." The agrarian myth required contact with and direct use

of the land to hold moral title; the myth of the self-made man required only that the owner hold the deed.⁹⁷

The symbolic conflict between the agrarian myth and the myth of the self-made man pulled farmers between two compelling identities: the yeoman farmer and the agricultural businessman. After the Civil War, agrarian spokesmen and agricultural journal editors encouraged farmers to think of their farms as a business and of themselves as businessmen: “One of the longest and most unrelenting propaganda campaigns in history,” wrote Paul H. Johnstone, “has been directed toward convincing the farmer that he is a businessman.” Yet, many of these same spokesmen and editors simultaneously extolled the virtues of the farmer according to the agrarian myth. The changing, conflicting character of the farmer in the nineteenth century came from this concerted effort to fit the farmer into the mold of the urban merchant and to boost his status as the noble yeoman. Yet, by accepting the merchant’s bookkeeping perspective and methods, farmers saw their farms as investments rather than as homes and measured labor according to its monetary value rather than its moral virtue. The “business” view of farming was a radical departure from the agrarian myth. Farmers began to think of success in terms of commercial rather than agrarian criteria. Thus, many small land-owning farmers turned to a new vocabulary of farming. Proud as they were of their heritage as Jeffersonian yeomen, they saw a richer future as speculators, entrepreneurs, and small business owners.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Burkholder, “Mythic Conflict, 39; Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 143-44; quote from Johnstone, “Identification,” 38.

⁹⁸ Johnstone, “Old Ideals,” 138, 143-44.

The conflict between the agrarian myth and the myth of the self-made man led to contradictory identifications for farmers. These identifications impacted the farmers' alliances in their movements after the Civil War. The farmers, long having seen themselves as society's true producers, could identify their interests with other producers such as craftsmen, artisans, and factory workers. However, the farm-city tension of the agrarian myth also moved farmers to distrust anything from the city, an interpretation that widened the split between organized labor and politically motivated farmers and prevented widespread joint action between the two groups.

Insofar as landowning farmers identified themselves as businessmen, they also saw themselves as employers, which put them at odds with urban workers' demands for more pay and shorter workdays. The employee-employer split also widened the gap between landowning farmers, tenant farmers, hired hands, and farm workers. The idea of ascendancy to freehold tenure in stages—the “agricultural ladder” that depicted a natural progression from hired hand or tenant farmer to independent landowning yeoman—offered a progressive hierarchical connection between small landowning farmers and farm workers. The ladder metaphor fit nicely within the agrarian myth because it implied rewards for hard work and stressed farm ownership as an attainable ideal after passing through the non-ownership stages of farming. Any individual at any particular rung in the ladder could identify with the image of the yeoman farmer of the agrarian myth, and in the early nineteenth century, this progression was embraced by many American farmers. The relationship between a farm family and its hired hands was a close one. In many instances, hired hands were often considered family members rather than employees, and

it was accepted that when the young farm hand had saved enough money, he could leave without guilt to start his own farm.

The disparities between farmers at different rungs on the ladder, however, created tensions. Farm workers saw that they could only be economically and politically free as farmers by owning their own land, not by gathering the crops and improving the fields of their employers. As the emphasis on farming-as-business increased, landowning farmers challenged the mechanism of the agricultural ladder, watching it siphon off the best workers and reduce the incentive for farm hands to work cheaply. If hired hands left when they could afford their own farms, farmers could not be guaranteed a reliable and inexpensive workforce.⁹⁹

As rhetorical strategies that emerged from fundamentally different mythic worldviews, the farmers' contradictory identifications are important aspects of understanding the full rhetorical significance of the Granger movement. When the Granger movement arose, the farmers' identity was already in a state of crisis. Exhorted by editors and agrarian leaders to adopt business methods, the farmers were also praised and exalted for their adherence to their traditional roles as yeoman caretakers, nourishers of civilization, and protectors of democracy. A multiplicity of problems called for farmers to negotiate between these competing identities, often at the expense of coherently "naming" their situations. Were they yeomen defending their natural rights within the confines of the "garden," or were they agricultural businessmen fighting for a larger share of the profits as another special interest in a commercial economy? Each

⁹⁹ Johnstone, "Identification," 37.

persona, as the basis for the farmers' collective identity, called for different group identifications and different strategies, tactics, and justifications for their acts. Each persona influenced how farmers justified organizing on a large scale and how they interpreted the purposes of their organizations. The Granger movement came at a time when the farmers were trying to manage their uncertainty about themselves and their environment, a time when new symbolic relationships must be forged to direct social change.

Conclusion

More than forty years ago, Margaret Woodward wrote:

During the period from 1868 to 1876 the Northwestern farmer was a "forgotten man"...He became lost in the burgeoning industrial-commercial economy—the victim of forces beyond his control which were rapidly undermining his traditional status and role. Because he failed to understand the nature, dimensions, and consequences of these forces, he also failed to make a satisfactory adjustment to them. Instead, his futile efforts to "find himself" resulted in a "split personality" as he wavered between the ideology of the past and the reality of the present.¹⁰⁰

While I agree with Woodward's claim that the farmers possessed a "split personality," her cynicism toward the farmers' ability to know themselves was too strong. No doubt the farmers were torn: Their constitutive choices were often contradictory and ambiguous. Yet, the farmers time and again found ways to overcome paralyzing inertia and individualism to a form collective personae strong enough to act with passion and power—even if those personae might have been confused amalgams of various mythic and metaphoric elements. The farmers' inability to see themselves "properly" as businessmen in the face of a more palatable yeoman symbol served as the basis for much

¹⁰⁰ Woodward, "Northwestern Farmer," 134.

of the scholarly criticism of the Granger movement and its effects. To Woodward, the yeoman image offered farmers an identity “considerably more palatable than the notion that his failures were due to his lack of book-keeping, planning, and intelligence.”¹⁰¹ From this perspective, the agrarian myth allowed farmers to shift blame from their own shortcomings onto powers larger than themselves and over which they had no control—reducing their culpability, but also reducing their ability to act as rational agents. Thus, this logic would hold, they could not solve their problems because they never truly understood the nature of the problems themselves.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, the farmers’ fundamental need was not bookkeeping, business planning, or education, it was organization under a shared vision. While farmers in the late nineteenth century faced many of the same agricultural and economic problems they faced before the Civil War, these problems confronted them on a much larger scale. Farmers still had to deal with a myriad of moneylenders, middlemen, and monopolies, but these groups were more organized and much larger than they ever had been in history. Of greatest concern to the farmers were the great monopolies and America’s first large-scale corporations, the railroads. Before the Grange, the Illinois State Farmers’ Association, and other comparable organizations arrived on the scene, the farmers had no comparable organizing strategy to combat these opponents. Even sharp business acumen would have failed to protect farmers from organizations so rich and powerful. Contrary to Woodward’s argument, the farmers needed exactly what only a

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 142.

myth, rather than material or economic “reality,” could give them: A common identity, a shared world, and a mutual purpose.

The conflicting identities and identifications of American farmers in the late nineteenth century raises important questions concerning the farmers’ motivation to act collectively for political, economic, and moral agency. Underlying the Granger movement, as with most farmers’ movements, was the loss of status—the contradictions of material conditions and myths in explaining their role in society. Farmers were motivated to act because they ultimately could not abide their diminished political, economic, and social status in American society. Farmers’ discontent rose as they saw the growing disparity between their quality of life and that of other classes. Increasingly, the once-prevalent praise for farmers as virtuous caretakers of the land and providers of nature’s bounty for civilization gave way to disparaging images of farmers as socially, intellectually, and morally inferior “hayseeds” who labored endlessly and who were too unskilled for other work. The farmers’ need to act was rooted deeply in a sense of inequality. Their attempts to “find themselves” within the Granger movement were never futile, only left unfinished.

Chapter Three: “The Revolution of 1873”: The Farmers’ Declaration of Independence as Constitutive Act

We, therefore, the producers of this state in our several counties assembled, on this the anniversary of that day that gave birth to a nation of freemen and to a government of which, despite the corruption of its officers, we are still so justly proud, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do solemnly declare that we will use all lawful and peaceable means to free ourselves from the tyranny of monopoly, and that we will never cease our efforts for reform until every department of our government gives token that the reign of licentious extravagance is over, and something of the purity, honesty and frugality with which our fathers inaugurated it has taken its place.

—The Farmers’ Declaration of Independence of 1873¹

July 4, 1873, was a defining moment for the Granger movement. It arrived as the movement steered the momentum of recent political victories toward organization, encouraging Illinois farmers to join independent farmers’ clubs and subordinate Granges. Through these organizations, the movement poised farmers to challenge the forces of organized capital on a much larger scale than in the past. The moment was ripe to indelibly shape the direction and meaning of the entire movement—to give its members a sense of identity, to define its purpose, and to develop its strategies.

The Fourth of July also offered a golden opportunity to invoke the rhetorical power of the Declaration of Independence to support the movement. As one of nation’s founding documents, the Declaration had constituted the American people and established a fundamental hierarchy of American principles. Because the Declaration stressed equality and liberty, it provided a powerful argument against oppression and

¹ See the appendix for the critical edition of the Farmers’ Declaration of Independence in which I mark differences in the Farmers’ Declaration’s form and content from the original Declaration and number the paragraphs for reference. This is the text to which I refer when I cite the Farmers’ Declaration. From this point forward, I will cite the Farmers’ Declaration in text by paragraph number in parentheses.

offered a potent warrant for political reform. As such, it became an important rhetorical resource for the movement to move the farmers toward action.

The leaders of the Illinois State Farmers' Association (ISFA) recognized this opportunity and drafted a new Declaration of Independence as the symbolic centerpiece of the farmers' Fourth of July celebrations.² This "Farmers' Declaration of Independence" addressed the political and economic issues American farmers faced after the Civil War. In the weeks before the Fourth, the ISFA distributed the new Declaration to farmers' clubs, Granges, and newspapers throughout the Midwest.³ In an accompanying note entitled "Farmers' Fourth of July," the ISFA's executive committee called for farmers to meet not only to celebrate the birth of the nation, but to discuss "the dangers that now threaten the safety of the nation and the liberty of the citizen in the shape of chartered monopolies and corrupt conspiracies against the public interest." By calling for farmers to organize and to debate current issues on this most sacred of American political holidays, the ISFA sought to reframe the day's significance for the farmers' present and future: "Let us give this time honored day a new lease of life, by a demonstration that may be hereafter commemorated as the dawning of a new era of independence, not only for us as a class, but for the whole people of the State and

² I have not found any specific claims of authorship of the Farmers' Declaration in the movement discourse, although it appears likely that it was written by one or more members of the ISFA executive committee composed of president W. C. Flagg, secretary S. M. Smith, and treasurer Duncan Mackay. Carl C. Taylor claimed that Smith "prepared" the Farmers' Declaration, but Taylor did not cite the source of this information. See *Farmers' Movement*, 163.

³ The full text of the Farmers' Declaration was published in the *Chicago Tribune*, June 17, 1873; *Prairie Farmer*, July 12, 1873; and the *American Agriculturalist*, August 1873, 288.

nation.” The note further urged farmers to forego the political hackery of past years by replacing “the stereotyped oration upon the glorious past by some aspirant of political honors” with “the earnest, practical common sense talk of the farmers themselves upon the duties of the present, and the reading of the accompanying new Declaration of Independence.”⁴

Despite downpours responsible for the “dreariest Fourth of July on record,” the day was a huge success.⁵ The *Prairie Farmer* claimed that 200,000 farmers flocked to Farmers’ Fourth of July gatherings across the Northwest. In the weeks following, the *Prairie Farmer* and the *Chicago Tribune* published dozens of celebration reports, many noting that readings of the Farmers’ Declaration received enthusiastic responses. One correspondent reported that “the prolonged cheering that was heard at the close of the reading...attested that the sentiments expressed found favor with the multitude present.”⁶ To commemorate the day’s importance, the editors of the *Prairie Farmer* suggested to the ISFA, the Grange, and other farmers’ organizations that the “best addresses and resolutions be made and published together and circulated for the good of the cause, and as a means of preserving a history of one of the most memorable days yet known to the farmers of several of the states, as well as one of the most important epochs in the

⁴ Flagg, “Farmers’ Fourth of July.” This note was also published in the *Prairie Farmer*, June 14, 1873. The full text of this note appears in Appendix A, pp. 253-54.

⁵ *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1873.

⁶ “The Farmers’ Celebrations,” *Prairie Farmer*, July 12, 1873. The celebrations were reported in the July 12 and July 19 issues of the *Prairie Farmer* and in the *Chicago Tribune* throughout July and August.

struggle for a great national reform.”⁷ No other Fourth of July during the movement—even the centennial celebrations of 1876—received as much attention from the Western agricultural press, and no other movement document better framed the motivation for independent political action as did the Farmers’ Declaration of Independence of 1873.

Although several Granger movement scholars have commented upon the Farmers’ Declaration, none have recognized its full rhetorical significance. Historian Fred A. Shannon simply argued that the Farmers’ Declaration was an example that “the embattled farmers of 1870-1900 had a strong sense of historical precedent” because “they sometimes couched their complaints or set forth their programs in the form of paraphrases of revered documents of the past, and held their conclaves on holidays celebrating the nation’s glory.” Historian Solon J. Buck noted the Farmers’ Declaration’s “curious” appeal as a “skilful parody” of the original Declaration and briefly examined its phrasing, its role in the Farmers’ Fourth of July celebrations, and its impact on the farmers’ turnout in the fall elections. Rural sociologist Carl C. Taylor claimed that the Farmers’ Declaration “constituted the firing of the first gun in a third-party movement in the Middle West” and, like Buck, linked it to the fall elections. Both Buck and Taylor saw the Farmers’ Declaration as an instrument that helped spur independent third-party action, but neither gave the document further attention.⁸

⁷ *Prairie Farmer*, July 19, 1873. To my knowledge, no such publication was ever put together.

⁸ Shannon, *American Farmer’s Movements*, 136-37; Buck, *Granger Movement*, 86-88; Taylor, *Farmers’ Movement*, 164-65.

In contrast, rhetorical critic Paul Crawford claimed rhetorical significance for the Farmers' Declaration beyond its immediate persuasive effect. In his 1980 essay on the Granger movement, Crawford argued that the Farmers' Declaration offered "a clue to the basic ideology of the Agrarian protest from the Granger period to...the formation of a National People's (Populist) Party." This basic ideology was grounded in "the doctrine of natural rights expressed by Thomas Jefferson" and it condemned corporations, bankers, and plutocrats for "violating the rights of man." Crawford closed his essay with the claim that "underlying the Granger and Greenback rhetoric was the view that the agrarians were merely asking for the restoration of rights set forth in the Declaration of Independence, that the violators of those rights were the giant corporations and the money power." This was a tantalizing claim that justified a closer critical look at the Farmers' Declaration. However, despite his implication that the Farmers' Declaration offered significant insight into agrarian ideology, Crawford did not perform an extended analysis of the text.⁹

The Farmers' Declaration of Independence, however, did more than simply provide a "clue" to Granger movement ideology or merely reflect the farmers' desire to regain their natural rights. Rather, the Farmers' Declaration shaped the identity of Illinois farmers as the "producing classes," a collective agent of change empowered to enact political reform. To craft that collective identity and build motivation for action, the Farmers' Declaration, like other "alternative" Declarations of Independence, drew upon

⁹ Crawford, "Farmer Assesses His Role," 110-11, 127. As for Crawford's comments on the Farmers' Declaration, it is unclear whether he read the original document in its entirety. His excerpts of the Farmers' Declaration came directly from Buck's *Granger Movement and Agrarian Crusade* rather than from any published full text version of the document itself. See "Farmer Assesses His Role," 110-11, 129.

the motivational power of the original Declaration to warrant political reform. By adapting the Declaration of Independence to address the Illinois farmers' circumstances, the Farmers' Declaration motivated reform by positioning the railroad monopoly's oppressive acts in opposition to American principles; constructing a protagonist empowered and motivated to challenge the railroad monopoly's power; and prescribing what the protagonist must do to end the railroad monopoly's oppression.

Warranting Reform: The Rhetorical Function of Alternative Declarations of Independence

The Declaration of Independence has long been recognized for its rhetorical artistry, its eloquent statement of American values and basic human rights, and its prominent place in the history of the United States.¹⁰ It has also become a potent instrument for change because of its rhetorical power as America's original constitutive act. As I have noted in earlier chapters, constitutive acts enact what rhetorical theorist Robert Wess has called the "paradox of rhetorical realism": They react to the very situations that they "bring into being for the very first time."¹¹ Declarations are constitutive acts because they "are made to fit the world at the same time as the world is made to fit [them]...[They] create the conditions to which they refer."¹² The Declaration

¹⁰ In addition to the classical historical treatments of the Declaration of Independence, rhetorical and literary critics have examined the text for its motivational power. The studies that have been most useful are: Gittleman, "Jefferson's 'Slave Narrative'"; Klumpp, "Declaration of Independence"; Lucas, "Rhetorical Ancestry" and "Justifying America"; Lynd, *American Radicalism*; Watson, "Dynamics of Intertextuality"; and Wills, *Inventing America*.

¹¹ Wess, *Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, 154.

¹² Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?*, 215.

of Independence transformed the citizens of thirteen British colonies into the American people, thereby warranting separation from British rule and motivating revolution.

For later generations of reformers, the Declaration's comprehensive indictment of oppression has also made it an attractive rhetorical instrument for political reform. Reformers have generally invoked the Declaration's power in one of two ways, either by simply invoking the Declaration and its core principles when confronting oppression, or by drafting an "alternative" Declaration of Independence that strategically revised the language of the original to depict current conditions as oppression and to warrant and motivate specific reforms. As an alternative Declaration of Independence, the Farmers' Declaration drew upon the constitutive power of the original Declaration to warrant political reform and motivate action.¹³

The eve of the American Revolution was a transformative moment that called for a new hierarchy of principles for the creation of a new people. The Declaration of Independence was the constitutive act that provided this new hierarchy. The Declaration's second paragraph proclaimed this hierarchy in an account of civilization's origin:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the

¹³ See Foner, *We, the Other People*, and Watson, "Dynamics of Intertextuality." Foner collected a variety of alternative Declarations of Independence from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Watson examined how the abolitionist and woman's suffrage movements used alternative Declarations to "fix the meaning" of the original Declaration in alignment with their causes.

People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government...(DOI 2)¹⁴

This passage followed what Kenneth Burke described as the logic of temporal priority, which asserts that in an “origin” narrative composed of a chain of creative acts, the act which begins the chronological sequence carries the greatest significance.¹⁵ In this tableau, primary acts of creation are the most significant acts; the creator is greater than what it creates; the worth of what is created depends upon its place in the chronological sequence of creative acts; and creators are more important than non-creators. The Declaration’s new hierarchy of principles promoted the rights of the individual (equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness) and the rights of the people (popular sovereignty and the right to revolt against oppressive government) over the powers of government. It constituted the foundation for a new nation and implicitly warranted the colonists’ transformation into the “American people,” a collective identity not only opposed to the king’s oppression but to oppression in general.¹⁶

The Declaration juxtaposed this new hierarchy with the “old” hierarchy of principles that privileged oppression under monarchical rule. The fundamental principles

¹⁴ I will cite the Declaration of Independence in text with the notation “DOI” followed by paragraph number in parentheses.

¹⁵ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 13-15. Burke called the process of building a narrative around a hierarchy of principles the “temporizing of essence.” See also *Grammar of Motives*, 430-40, and Wess’ discussion of this process in terms of the rhetoric of the subject in *Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, chap. 7, “A Rhetoric of Motives: Ideological and Utopian Rhetoric.”

¹⁶ Kenneth Burke noted this collective opposition to oppression: The Declaration’s “dialectic function as a rejoinder to the Crown [made] it a representative act for diverse groups unified by the sharing of a single opponent.” *Grammar of Motives*, 372.

of this hierarchy, implicit in the Declaration's account of the king's character and his acts, emerge from extrapolating the ultimate consequences of those acts into the future: "The history of the present King of Great Britain," the Declaration proclaimed, "is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States" (DOI 2). The scope and depth of such tyranny was evident in the Declaration's twenty-eight charges of villainy against the king, which I briefly summarize here: The king controlled all branches of government absolutely; he denied the colonists' basic rights and denied their voice in government; he rejected laws that would help the colonists; he destroyed the colonists' homes, took their property, and wrongfully imprisoned and/or killed them; and he conducted war against the colonies to "complete the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation" (DOI 3-29). The Declaration concluded: "A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people" (DOI 30).

The king, then, represented a "Form of Government" that did not rule with the consent of the governed. Instead, it subordinated or denied the existence of the individual and collective rights of the governed—in this case, the American colonists—altogether. The principles derived from the king's rule, thus depicted, elevated the king above all others. His power was absolute and its execution was subject to his will alone. The Declaration did not offer a divine or natural source for the king's power as it did for the rights of individuals; rather, his power came from the king's sheer strength to impose his

will upon others. The king *was* the government, and the powers of government were superior to the individual and the people. The colonists, in fact, were not “a people” at all. Refused the rights of British citizenship, the colonists were less than royal subjects, they were slaves. And, while the present situation was dire, the future was even bleaker: If allowed to continue, a world constructed upon these principles would evolve into a “barbarous” and uncivilized society, ruled by tyranny and despotism, marked by arbitrary oppression, and offering little hope for the “governed.”

The motivational and constitutive power of the Declaration of Independence emerged from the tension between these two hierarchies. As the Declaration’s indictments against the king unfolded, pitting the individual rights granted by natural law against the king’s oppression, the choice between the two was narrowed until there really was no choice at all. The colonists had meticulously exhausted all avenues of reform and appeal; the king and the British people were unreceptive to the colonists’ pleas. To be free of tyranny, an “American people” could only choose separation and independence, or they were not an American people at all, only slaves. Thus, the Declaration constituted the American people by juxtaposing two competing hierarchies of principles and forcing a choice between freedom and oppression. Those who were of the “American people” chose freedom and were thus committed to the hierarchy of principles outlined in the opening paragraphs of the Declaration. The American people were constrained to choose the only “true” path available to them: They had to separate from Great Britain to gain their rights. Thus, the tension between the two hierarchies framed the historical

circumstances as oppression, motivated action by constituting the colonists as the “American people,” and justified armed revolution to gain independence.

Over time, the recurring need of various groups to characterize their situations as oppression drew the rhetorical influence of the Declaration of Independence beyond its own historical moment. Because the Declaration’s preamble was “so general it could be used as the introduction to a declaration by any ‘oppressed’ people,”¹⁷ its form and language enabled reformers to frame their disputes within the broader context of American history, just as the Declaration itself elevated the American Revolution to a great moment in the drama of human history.¹⁸ As historian Staughton Lynd noted:

For all its ambiguities, the preamble to the Declaration of Independence is the single most concentrated expression of the revolutionary intellectual tradition. Without significant exception, subsequent variants of American radicalism have taken the Declaration of Independence as their point of departure and claimed to be the true heirs of the spirit of ’76.¹⁹

Thus, the Declaration gave reformers a means to use core American principles to justify their causes.

Reformers also tapped into this radical reform tradition by creating alternative Declarations of Independence, timely revisions of Jefferson’s rhetorical touchstone. “The Declaration of Independence has served for 200 years as a model whenever changes in American society were deemed necessary,” argued historian Philip Foner. Alternative

¹⁷ Lucas, “Justifying America,” 75.

¹⁸ Lucas argued that the Declaration’s introduction “elevate[d] the quarrel with England from a petty political dispute to a major event in the grand sweep of history. It dignifie[d] the Revolution as a contest of principle and implie[d] that the American cause has a special claim to moral legitimacy.” “Justifying America,” 75.

¹⁹ Lynd, *American Radicalism*, 4.

Declarations of Independence embodied the “ideology of a wide variety of movements” that attempted to bring the work of the founding fathers to a satisfactory conclusion.²⁰ By invoking the Declaration, reformers essentially proclaimed that they accepted the heavy mantle of the founding fathers’ mission. It allowed reformers to frame their cause as a duty every bit as momentous and significant as the work of the revolutionary generation because they were setting out to complete the work left undone by the founding fathers—to fulfill the promises of the Declaration.

Part of the Declaration’s power in American public discourse is its ability to compellingly “name” recurring struggles for freedom against oppression using the principles that grounded the identity of the American people. When the Declaration of Independence was invoked to describe the oppression of one group by another, the full power of the Declaration to constitute that situation was brought to bear. Invoking the Declaration in this way was “the strategic naming of a situation. It single[d] out a pattern of experience that [was] sufficiently representative of our social structure, that recur[red] sufficiently often *mutandis mutatis*, for people to ‘need a word for it’ and to adopt an attitude towards it.”²¹ In its second paragraph, the Declaration itself implied that the oppression that brought it into existence was a recurring situation. That is, “*whenever* any Form of Government becomes destructive” of the individual’s “unalienable rights” and “*when* a long train of abuses and usurpations...reduce [the people] under absolute Despotism,” revolutionaries and reformers could apply its hierarchy of fundamental

²⁰ Foner, *We, the Other People*, 32.

²¹ Burke, *Philosophy of Literary Form*, 300.

principles to contemporary struggles. Through alternative Declarations, they could use the original's form and language to frame contemporary situations as oppression, to constitute collective identities with the power to challenge oppression, and to warrant acts to remove oppression.

The Declaration's genius as a "recyclable" text for reform emerged from the rhetorical tension between its competing hierarchies of principles, expressed most powerfully in the contrast between the ideal and the concrete. It pitted the hierarchy of abstract natural law principles against the hierarchy of principles derived from the oppressor's concrete, specific acts. The high-level abstraction of natural law principles enabled reformers to idealize their cause and to justify change by contrasting the world as it "is" (and what it is in danger of becoming) with the world as it "ought to be":

In time it became psychically important for men to keep the Declaration vague. When the Constitution or some part of the actual government had to be criticized, this reality could be contrasted with the ideal. One could oppose the American government without becoming un-American. . . . One could repudiate the mere *letter* of the law, the Constitution, in the name of a higher law, containing the *spirit* of America.²²

The Declaration's form—the preamble of principles followed by the inventory of specific violations of those principles—gave reformers a structure that dramatically juxtaposed their idealized cause with their enemies' oppression.

Invoking the Declaration to transform or to reaffirm America's hierarchy of principles is a rhetorical strategy because transformation or reaffirmation occurs by altering or reinforcing, respectively, the relationships between American ideographs. As I noted in the first chapter, the meanings of ideographs come from the dynamic interplay of

²² Wills, *Inventing America*, 358.

their diachronic and synchronic relationships in discourse. Diachronically, an ideograph gathers meaning from the history of its use in a culture's discourse. This history establishes general categories that constrain the possibilities for an ideograph's meaning, but these categories do not predetermine what that ideograph will mean in a specific discourse at a particular historical moment. Drawing from these possibilities of meaning, an ideograph derives its particular, contingent, synchronic meaning from its network of relationships with other ideographs in a culture's discourse at any particular historical moment. The durability of the Declaration of Independence as an important expression of core American principles emerges from this rich ideographic character.²³ As a significant constitutive act of American political culture, the Declaration's web of ideographic relationships established the general categories of meaning for key American ideographs such as <equality>, <life>, <liberty>, <pursuit of happiness>, <natural law>, <the individual>, <the people>, <government>, and <rights>. These categories both enabled and constrained the power of alternative Declarations to define their crises as oppression, establish the villainy of their antagonists, determine the appropriate calls for action, and constitute their protagonists as agents of change. At stake was nothing less than the power to define the nature of American society and the character of its people.

Motivating Reform: The Constitutive Power of the Farmers' Declaration of Independence

The Farmers' Declaration of Independence adapted the Declaration of Independence to address the Illinois farmers' material conditions. By doing so, the Farmers' Declaration motivated reform by positioning the railroad monopoly's

²³ Klumpp, "Declaration of Independence."

oppressive acts in opposition to American principles; constructing a protagonist empowered and motivated to challenge the railroad monopoly's power; and prescribing what the protagonist must do to end the railroad monopoly's oppression.

Justifying Reform by Wielding the Form and Language of the Declaration of Independence

Adopting the original Declaration's form, the Farmers' Declaration juxtaposed the "Jeffersonian" hierarchy of principles with a "monopolistic" hierarchy drawn analogically from the "monarchical" hierarchy in the Declaration of Independence. These hierarchies presented starkly antithetical visions of what American society was and what it ought to be. By positioning the principles underlying the railroad monopoly's acts in opposition to core American principles, the Farmers' Declaration characterized material conditions as oppression, aligned its protagonist in opposition to the railroad monopoly, and provided justification for reform.

The bright past of the "Jeffersonian" hierarchy. In re-presenting the Jeffersonian hierarchy of principles, the Farmers' Declaration reaffirmed the relationships of three key actors in the original Declaration—the individual, the people, and the government. And, like the original Declaration, the Farmers' Declaration introduced the principles that shaped the basic relationships between these actors in a brief account of society's origin. Kenneth Burke posited that the essence of a worldview could be derived from the beginnings or the endings of the narratives that established that worldview. Accounts of "ultimate origin" identify the first principles of a coherent worldview and order their hierarchical relationships chronologically. That is, the closer a principle appears to the ultimate beginning or creative source of the account, the higher station that principle

assumes in the hierarchy.²⁴ Because accounts of origin both reveal and invoke the hierarchy of principles, they serve as the ground by which subjects are constituted within the account's worldview and as a warrant to motivate action.²⁵

As did the original Declaration, the Farmers' Declaration located its account of origin in a universe that operated according to God's "natural laws." In the opening paragraph, these natural laws emphasized the principle of equality in the form of "equal station" and "equal rights," in this instance for a particular class of people:

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a class of people...to assume among their fellow citizens, that equal station, and demand from the government they support, those equal rights, to which the laws of nature, and of nature's God entitles them. (1)

Within that divine/natural context, the great chain of societal development was introduced in the second paragraph, beginning with the creation of "men":

We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by the creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever the powers of a government become destructive of these, either through the injustice or inefficiency of its laws, or through the corruption of its administrators, it is the right of the people to abolish such laws, and institute such reforms as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness...But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a desire to reduce a people under the absolute despotism of combinations, that, under the fostering care of government, and with wealth wrung from the people, have grown to such gigantic proportions as to overshadow all the land, and wield an almost irresist[i]ble influence for their own selfish purposes, in all its halls of legislation, it is their right—it is their duty to throw off such tyranny, and provide new guards for their future security. (2)

²⁴ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 13-15.

²⁵ Burke, "Ideology and Myth," 198-200.

According to Burke's temporal ordering principle, equality was the primary tenet of society because it was the essential principle, a principle inherent in "men" at the very moment of creation. Then, the creator endowed "men" with the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, among unnamed others. Thus, these fundamental principles of human existence—equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—constituted the basic properties of the human being as an individual. Taken further, one could argue that without these qualities, "men" could not be fully constituted as individuals.

Next in logical and temporal order came "the governed," those individuals who consented to institute government and to grant it powers to guard their individual rights. To form government, individuals had to bind themselves together by this covenant of consent, a *collective* agreement to be governed. Through the societal bonds created by this collective consent and by instituting government as an instrument of authority, "the governed" were no longer discreet individuals but a new collective entity possessed of new rights and duties: "the governed" became "the people."

By joining this covenant, individuals *as individuals* surrendered much of their power as political actors. Once "the people" came into being, the individual was transformed from an *actor* into a *motivation for action*.²⁶ The most important function of government was to protect the individual's rights. When the individual's rights were threatened, the duty of government was to protect them. The people's duty was to ensure that government performed this function. When the laws and the administrators of

²⁶ Klumpp, "Declaration of Independence."

government threatened the individual's rights, it was the right and duty of the people to overturn such laws, reform government, and overthrow tyranny in order to effect justice, safety, security, and happiness. Thus, the most powerful right in either Declaration was the right to reform oppressive government (and, in the original Declaration, to abolish it altogether), but neither Declaration gave that right to the individual. That right, that duty, that *power* belonged to the people. Thus, the powers of the people transcended the powers of the individual.

This account of origin in the Farmers' Declaration established the ranking of actors and of principles within the Jeffersonian hierarchy. The account identified and ordered the ideographs that warranted action. At the apex of this hierarchy was <nature> and <God>, followed by <the individual>, <the people>, and <government>. The account's ultimate source was <nature> or <God>. Whether interpreted as divine (nature's *God*) or natural (*nature's* God), as ideographs, <nature> and <God> grounded arguments in forces *beyond* human control. Because <God> created <the individual> with the essence of <equality> and endowed <the individual> with the inalienable rights of <life>, <liberty>, and <the pursuit of happiness>, <God> warranted the primacy of these basic human qualities. Because <the individual> possessed these essential qualities, <the individual> warranted the legitimate acts of <government>. In addition, <government> was required to ensure <justice> and <security> for the general welfare. Should <government> fail to protect these essential principles, <the people> served to safeguard them and protect the general welfare. These qualities, as ideographs, warranted

the basic rules of social interaction and shaped the rights and duties of *all* social actors.

The various ideographs and their rankings are presented here:

Entities	Principles
<nature> <God>	<natural law>
<the individual>	<equality> <life> <liberty> <the pursuit of happiness> <rights>
<the people>	<justice> <security>
<government>	<law>

The dark present and bleak future of the monopolistic hierarchy. In contrast to the Jeffersonian hierarchy, the Farmers’ Declaration depicted an antithetical “monopolistic” hierarchy through an account of the railroad monopoly’s current acts and their ultimate consequences. In the opening paragraph, an unnamed antagonist, revealed as the railroad monopoly later in the text, subjected “a class of people” to “long continued systems of oppression and abuse” (1). In the following paragraph, the railroad monopoly then subjected the American people to

a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinc[ing] a desire to reduce a people under the absolute despotism of combinations that, under the fostering care of government, and with wealth wrung from the people, have grown to such gigantic proportions as to overshadow all the land, and wield an almost irresistible influence for their [the monopoly’s] own selfish purposes. (2)

This “long train” (no pun intended) was further detailed in the bill of particulars (5-20). The railroad monopoly had corrupted government officials, behaved as if it were above the law, grown obscenely wealthy at the people’s expense, slowed the settlement of the West by obtaining huge tracts of public land, intimidated customers, and harmed the nation’s commercial and industrial interests by obstructing trade. The railroad monopoly had acted against the general welfare of the American people, against the general principles of American society as laid down by the Declaration of Independence, and against just laws. Through its actions, it had gained and wielded near absolute power for its own benefit.

To enhance the dire nature of this situation, the Farmers’ Declaration used historical analogies to compare the railroad monopoly’s acts to past tyrannies. The Farmers’ Declaration compared the railroad monopoly’s acts to the British “tea and stamp tax which precipitated the war of the revolution,” which “seems utterly insignificant” compared to the railroad monopoly’s increase of “the already intolerable burden of taxation, which the people have to endure” (20). Thus, not even the oppressive acts that sparked the American Revolution rivaled the railroad monopoly’s evils. The Farmers’ Declaration reached into Europe’s feudal past to find a more comparable villainy:

The history of the present railway monopoly is a history of repeated injuries and oppressions, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over the people of these states unequalled in any monarchy of the Old World, and having its only parallel in the history of the Medieval ages, when the strong hand was the only law, and the highways of commerce were taxed by the Feudal Barons, who from their strongholds, surrounded by their armies of vassals, could levy such tribute upon the traveler as their own wills alone should dictate. (4)

Like feudal barons, the railroad monopoly had no check on its power to charge customers what it wished; this power was limited only by its “will.” If allowed to continue, the railroad monopoly’s encroachments on the people’s rights

would inevitably end in the utter destruction of those liberties for which our fathers gave their lives, and the reinstatement of privileged classes and an aristocracy of wealth, worse than that from which the war of the revolution freed us. (22)

From these brief analogies, the Farmers’ Declaration presented a future America far different than a nation formed from the principles of the Jeffersonian hierarchy.

This account, built from the monopoly’s acts and from historical analogies, established a dark future that extended from America’s bleak present. As the essence of a worldview can be derived from accounts of ultimate origin, so too can a worldview’s essence be drawn from accounts of ultimate fulfillment or fruition. The apex of the monopolistic hierarchy was established by the final development of its account, from the fundamental principles invoked from the “perfection” of a world shaped by the railroad monopoly’s acts.²⁷ Taken to its ultimate end, this account depicted a future American society shaped by the political, economic, and social relationships based upon the superiority of one class, an aristocracy built not on distinctions of heredity, title, or merit, but on wealth. Accumulating and securing a massively disproportionate amount of property—money, land, goods, services, the fruits of others’ labor, and so on—would be the source of power and the primary motive for this “aristocracy of wealth.”

The Farmers’ Declaration claimed that the railroad monopoly’s power came from controlling the nation’s highways of commerce. The exercise of power built upon huge

²⁷ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 13-15.

accumulations of property would be limited only by the wills and desires of this aristocracy and warranted by the principle that “the strong hand was the only law.” In such a society, government would be a mere instrument of the aristocracy’s will, not a servant of the people. The purpose of government would be to protect the interests of the wealthy, not the natural rights of the individual. Ultimately, the people would be the slaves of this monopolistic master.

This account established the ranking of actors and of principles within the monopolistic hierarchy by identifying and ordering the ideographs that warranted action. Within this account, <property> appeared as the primary ideograph to justify the railroad monopoly’s acts. The ideographs of <equality>, <life>, <liberty>, <the pursuit of happiness>, and <justice> did not serve as significant warrants for monopolistic action. <Security>, however, was important in defining the relationship between <government> and monopoly: The corrupted “duty” of <government> was to promote the monopoly’s continued acquisition of wealth and protect its continued possession of <property>. All <rights> were reserved for the “aristocracy of wealth,” as <the individual> possessed few, if any, inherent rights and carried little power to warrant action. Any individual not of the “aristocracy of wealth” was a slave, vassal, or victim. As an ideograph, <the people>—if it carried any ideographic weight at all—simply served as a resource from which the railroad monopoly could “plunder” wealth in all its varied forms. The basic ideographic hierarchy is as follows:

Entities	Principles
railroad monopoly “aristocracy of wealth”	<property> <rights>
<government>	<security>
<the individual>	
<the people>	

The juxtaposition of the Jeffersonian and monopolistic hierarchies motivated the collective protagonist of the Farmers’ Declaration to oppose the railroad monopoly. This motivation was built upon three rhetorical strategies performed by the Farmers’ Declaration. First, the Farmers’ Declaration positioned the railroad monopoly as “the other,” an identity with characteristics that placed it outside of, and in opposition to, American society. Second, the Farmers’ Declaration re-constituted its collective protagonist as Americans. Third, the Farmers’ Declaration framed the worlds depicted within the two hierarchies as the alternatives for an important constitutive decision.

By juxtaposing the hierarchies to underscore the contrasts between them, the Farmers’ Declaration positioned the railroad monopoly as “the other,” an identity outside of, and in opposition to, the American people. The world that would result from the railroad monopoly’s oppression and abuse of the people would represent a break from the bright past of the Jeffersonian hierarchy, a bleak future of economic misery for the people. An entity so antithetical to the basic principles of American society could not exist *within* the people. In this sense, to fight the railroad monopoly would not be an

internal struggle, faction against faction, but a war between the people and a “foreign” enemy.

Re-constituting the collective protagonist as Americans was the simplest of the Farmers’ Declaration’s constitutive strategies. Much of the constitutive power of the Farmers’ Declaration came from confirming the significance of the Declaration of Independence during Fourth of July celebrations. The purpose of Independence Day, after all, was to remind Americans that they *were* Americans by evoking the principles of the Declaration of Independence that made them so. The managerial discourse of the Farmers’ Fourth of July—its celebrations, banners, epideictic oratory, and readings of the Declaration of Independence and the Farmers’ Declaration—performed this “reminding” function. Furthermore, the pages of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Prairie Farmer* in the weeks that followed were filled with accounts of the celebrations from correspondents across the Midwest.²⁸

The contrast between the two hierarchies culminated in a crisis of identity, a moment of choice for those who would become the protagonist. This stark contrast demanded that they choose between two worlds: to embrace a free world shaped by the principles of the Declaration of Independence, or to live in a world that, in its perfection, would reduce them to economic misery under the despotism of a new aristocracy of wealth. For the protagonist, this decision was a vital step in the constitutive act. It was to *Americans* that the Farmers’ Declaration presented the choice between freedom and slavery, and for Americans the choice was really no choice at all: Americans, *as*

²⁸ See issues of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Prairie Farmer* from July through September, 1873.

Americans, could choose only freedom. To choose slavery would deny the very foundation of what it meant to be American, an identity built upon the Declaration's principles of equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. This choice fixed the general purpose, commitment, and direction of the collective protagonist and justify the need for reform. As Americans, they were positioned to oppose the railroad monopoly and the world it sought to create.

Empowering Reform by Creating a Strong Protagonist

By positioning its protagonist against the railroad monopoly, the Farmers' Declaration fixed the direction of the protagonist's attitude, but this positioning did not necessarily *empower* the protagonist to act as an effective agent. To transform those addressed by constitutive discourse into agents of change, the logic of constitutive rhetoric demands that they first identify with a *strong* protagonist, one with the power to create change. Potential candidates for the protagonist in the Farmers' Declaration included the three main actors of the Jeffersonian hierarchy—the individual, the people, and the government—and a fourth entity, the “producing classes.” Of the four, the Farmers' Declaration positioned the “producing classes” as its protagonist by demonstrating that the “producing classes” was the only viable candidate both empowered and motivated to challenge the railroad monopoly's power.

The weakness of the individual. In the Farmers' Declaration, the weakest actor of the four presented was the individual, an entity fully at the mercy of the railroad monopoly. As I noted earlier in the chapter, in the Jeffersonian hierarchy, the individual as an ideal was the most important motivation for action, as all fundamental rights were inherent in the individual. However, the logic of the Jeffersonian hierarchy also reduced

the individual's potency as an actor, as the reasoning that required individuals to form a covenant to secure their rights *collectively* as "the people" implied that individuals *as individuals* might not, or could not, do so.

Furthermore, framed within the monopolistic hierarchy, the individual had no power at all with regard to the railroad monopoly. The bill of particulars—the specific charges of oppression and abuse against the railroad monopoly—offered dramatic examples of this impotence (5-20). Many of the railroad monopoly's outrages were committed against individuals. For example, the railroad monopoly's wealth overcame corrupt and honest men alike. The railroad monopoly offered temptations too great for greedy government officials to resist, as it bribed and "influenced" officials "to betray the true interests of their constituents" (7). It also used its immense wealth to repeatedly prevent "the re-election of representatives, for opposing with manly firmness, their [the monopoly's] invasion of the people's rights" (8). Individual farmers were also victims. The railroad monopoly had "dispossessed hundreds of farmers of [their] homes," "induced others to mortgage their farms for roads never intended to be built," and "left their victims at the mercy of courts over which they [the monopoly] have held absolute sway" (11). Individual passengers, too, were at the railroad monopoly's mercy. It "protected [its employees] from punishment for an[y] injury they might inflict upon peaceful citizens, while ejecting them from their conveyances for refusing to pay more than the [legal] rate" (14) and "arrested and summoned from their homes for trial, at distant points, other citizens for the same offense" (15). Taken in total, these examples illustrated that the power of the individual paled in comparison to the political and

economic might of the railroad monopoly. Thus, the power of the individual as motivation for action did not translate into agency. Such weakness eliminated the individual as a viable “candidate” for the protagonist of the Farmers’ Declaration.

The constraints upon the people. Should government no longer protect the individual or serve the people, the Jeffersonian hierarchy of principles granted the people the right, duty, and power to reform government or abolish it altogether and replace it with a better one. Given this, the people would be the ideal protagonist to institute reform because the Farmers’ Declaration, like the original Declaration, depicted the people as sovereign. However, neither Declaration depicted the people as the central protagonist of its narrative. Instead, both Declarations constrained the people’s power to fight oppression and removed the people as an actor in their narratives.

The constraints upon the people’s power to combat oppression came from the difficult standards necessary to warrant acts of reform and revolution. The original Declaration established the people’s right to change or to dissolve their government if it did not perform its proper function:

That to secure these [unalienable] rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,—That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. (DOI 2)

The Farmers’ Declaration, too, established the people’s right to change their government if it did not perform its proper function. However, the Farmers’ Declaration constrained the types of government offenses that would justify reform *and* constrained the ways the people could implement reform:

That to secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever the powers of a government become destructive of these [ends], either through the injustice or inefficiency of its laws, or through the corruption of its administrators, it is the right of the people to abolish such laws, and to institute such reforms as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. (2)

Here, should government fail to secure the rights of the individual—that is, to perform its proper function—the Farmers’ Declaration clearly acknowledged the people’s right to reform it by changing laws and instituting reforms, implying that such reforms included removing corrupt government administrators. These limits fell short of abolishing the *form* of government altogether.

Furthermore, standards of rationality and prudence also limited the circumstances in which the people could invoke their right to reform government.

Prudence indeed will dictate that laws long established shall not be changed for light and trifling causes, and accordingly, all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the laws to which they are accustomed. (2)

Here, the Farmers’ Declaration, mirroring the original Declaration’s phrasing, placed a heavy burden of proof on the people. Government could not be reformed for frivolous reasons, nor could custom be overturned on a whim. This standard of cautious reason was based on prudence, or practical wisdom, that prevented the people from overturning long-established laws without first engaging in rational deliberation, even if such deliberation prolonged their suffering.

Finally, in the last line of the second paragraph, the Farmers’ Declaration laid out the people’s heaviest burden of proof to warrant change:

When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object, evinces a desire to reduce a people under the absolute despotism of combinations, that, under the fostering care of government, and with wealth wrung from the people, have grown to such gigantic proportions as to overshadow all the land, and wield an almost irresistible influence for their own selfish purposes, in all its halls of legislation, it is their right—it is their duty to throw off such tyranny, and provide new guards for their future security. (2)

Reform was justified only when the situation bordered on *absolute* necessity. Extreme action, whether reform or revolution, required extreme circumstances. In the Farmers' Declaration, the criteria for justifying reform were so dire that they only could be met when the nation was pushed to the brink of ruin by the railroad monopoly's tyranny. Thus, before the people could act, they had to detect the monopoly's *intent* to dominate ("when a long train of abuses and usurpations...*evinces a desire* to reduce a people...") and to prove that the railroad monopoly had largely attained its goal of "absolute despotism" (2) and "absolute tyranny" (3) through behavior that suggested it was "absolutely above the control of legal enactments" (10) and held "absolute sway" over the courts (11). Only when the railroad monopoly was on the verge of achieving absolute control—the point when the warrant of absolute necessity was met—could the people overcome their "prudent" and rational inertia, justify the need to act, and fully become a collective agent of change. *Absolute* necessity set a heavy burden of proof that required a crisis to warrant action. Once the criterion of absolute necessity was met, then the people were obligated to act, motivated by their "duty to throw off such tyranny."

It appears counterintuitive to induce people to undertake a necessary act by presenting warrants so difficult to achieve that they discouraged performing the act altogether. Yet, to justify acts of significant change such as reform or revolution, such a

warrant is often necessary: Only exceptional circumstances can warrant calls for great change. (In turn, the very call for the extremes of reform or revolution could also be used as a strategy to define a situation as a crisis.) To justify significant reform, the second paragraph of the Farmers' Declaration presented the general criteria necessary to constitute a situation as a "crisis"; the bill of particulars (5-20) provided specific evidence that such a crisis existed; and the Farmers' Declaration presented warrantable responses to that crisis (paragraphs 1, 3, 23, and 24). The difficult criteria for warranting the people to act, then, was a rhetorical strategy to invoke the "paradox of rhetorical realism," to present the performance of "warrantable" acts of reform themselves as *prima facie* evidence that the reform was, indeed, warranted. The acts of reform demanded by the Farmers' Declaration were the correct responses to the crisis situation created by the Farmers' Declaration itself. Performing these acts verified that the situation was serious.

It also appears counterintuitive for the Farmers' Declaration to present the people as the most potent and legitimate agent of change and then to completely dismiss that agent as the protagonist. Yet, the Farmers' Declaration did just that. From the second paragraph to the end of the text, the Farmers' Declaration transformed the people from a powerful agent of change into yet another victim of the railroad monopoly. The Farmers' Declaration presented several examples of the railroad monopoly's direct oppression of the people. "The history of the present railway monopoly, is a history of repeated injuries and oppression, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over the people of these states" (4). In the bill of particulars, the railroad monopoly removed government representatives who opposed its "invasions of the people's rights" (8).

Through “false representation and subterfuge,” the railroad monopoly “induced the people to subscribe funds to build roads, whose rates, when built, are so exorbitant, that in many instances transportation by private conveyance is less burdensome” (9). The railroad monopoly used its resources “to make it too terrible for the people to dare engage in any legal conflict with them” (15). And, finally, the railroad monopoly “increased the already intolerable burden of taxation, which the people have to endure” (20).

Although the Farmers’ Declaration provided warrants and the evidence to move the people to action, *at no point in the narrative do the people act or even commit to action*. In the Farmers’ Declaration, none of the examples showing the direct relationship between the people and the railroad monopoly presented the people as an agent of change. In his rhetorical analysis of the Declaration of Independence, Klumpp argued that

The people appear in the Declaration only as victims of the King[,] not as actors in history. In its one reference, the Declaration gives us Locke’s sense of the people as a protector of Rights, and then takes that power away through the instrumentality of government. Numerous places in the document Jefferson could have chosen “the people” as his term for the locus of action but chooses “these colonies” or “these states” instead. The result is a rather suspicious view of “people” in the document where they are distanced from motivation as a grounding for, rather than a central participant in[,] action.²⁹

The Declaration did not empower the people for action, either. The people *possessed* power, but the people did not *wield* power. Instead, as Klumpp observed, “these colonies” or “these states” were the locus of action, the revolutionary protagonists. Both Declarations altered the role of the people from participant in the conflict into motivation for the protagonist’s acts of reform or revolution.

²⁹ Klumpp, “Declaration of Independence.”

Given this insight, one might wonder why the people were “demoted” in both Declarations, eliminated as a “contender” to become the agent of change. Whether the authors of the Farmers’ Declaration *intended* to diminish the people’s role because of a “suspicious view” of the people or of popular sovereignty, or if they did so simply by default as they adopted the form and language of the original Declaration, is beside the point. The authors’ intent was not as significant as the implications of the strategy itself. Granting the people both the agency and legitimacy to act during a crisis, yet demoting them to actionless victims when that moment of crisis arrived, implied serious doubts about the people’s suitability to rule. More importantly, it gave rise to a new inquiry: If the people did not or could not act, then who would protect the people from oppression?

The corruption of government. One potential protagonist with the power to protect the people was government, the people’s instrument to protect the rights of the individual from the encroachments of greater powers. However, government also proved ineffective against the railroad monopoly. The agents who administered government were highly susceptible to the railroad monopoly’s corruptive influence and were likely to be wielded as agents of oppression *against* the people. When government was run by instruments of monopoly, the powers of government no longer secured individual rights or served the true will of the people. Greed, rather than duty to serve the people, became the motive that guided the use of government power.

The Farmers’ Declaration provided several examples of a government squarely under the thumb of the railroad monopoly. The railroad monopoly and its agents “influenced... executive officers” (5) and “influenced legislation to suit themselves” (7);

they “procured the passage of . . . laws, for their own benefit alone” (6), “procured charters” with which they condemned and appropriated land (10), “procured a law of congress by which they have dispossessed hundreds of farmers of [their] homes” (11), and “procured [judges’] appointment for the express purpose of reversing a decision of the highest court of the nation” (13); they used free passes³⁰ and other forms of bribery to convince “venal legislators to betray the true interests of their constituents” (7); they illegitimately “prevented the re-election of representatives” who opposed them (8); they “obstructed the administration of justice by injunctions procured from venal judges” (12); they “fraudulently obtained [bonds] from the government” and used the proceeds “to bribe and control legislatures, and subvert every branch of government” (19).

Government officials refused the needs of their constituents even when their constituents appealed to them directly. Petitions “have been answered by silence, or by attempts to frame [ineffective] laws” (21) in the case of state legislatures; nationally, Congress was “deaf to the voice of justice and of duty” (22). Thus, the Farmers’ Declaration provided a clear indictment of government officials who had denied their responsibilities to individual citizens and to the people.

If government administrators could not be trusted to perform their proper duties, then government itself could not challenge the railroad monopoly’s power. This was ironic, as state and national governments were the only institutions with sufficient power and resources to rein in the railroad monopoly and regulate it for the public good. Yet,

³⁰ The railroads often let government officers travel at no charge. However, those who opposed the railroads quickly discovered that such “free passes” were only available to those who served the railroads’ interests.

until these corrupt agents were replaced, government would continue to serve as an instrument, rather than as an opponent, of the railroad monopoly.

Thus, the Farmers' Declaration eliminated the individual, the people, and the government as potential protagonists. By focusing on the inherent weaknesses of the individual and the government as opponents of the railroad monopoly, the Farmers' Declaration eliminated them as strong protagonists. The individual had too little power and government was too susceptible to corruption. And, while the Farmers' Declaration reaffirmed the original Declaration's grant to the people of the right, duty, and power to protect individual rights, promote the general welfare, and reform bad government, it also mirrored the original Declaration's "demotion" of the people from an active to a passive role. Within this "vacuum" of power, the Farmers' Declaration placed the producing classes in the role of protagonist.

The unfolding agency of the producing classes. The Farmers' Declaration transformed the "producing classes" into a protagonist with the agency to challenge the railroad monopoly. As the text unfolded, the producing classes grew in power, transformed from victims of oppression into agents of change. In the opening paragraph, the producing classes were a dormant "class of people, suffering from long continued systems of oppression and abuse." Two paragraphs later, this "class of people" became the patient "producing classes of these states" compelled by extraordinary circumstances to end the railroad monopoly's despotism (3). Finally, at the end of the Farmers' Declaration, "the producers of this state in our several counties assembled" possessed the

agency to declare that they would free themselves from the clutches of monopoly to reform government (23-24).³¹

In the opening paragraph, the Farmers' Declaration introduced the protagonist as "a class of people" cowed into submission by an as yet unidentified antagonist:

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for a class of people, suffering from long continued systems of oppression and abuse, to rouse themselves from an apathetic indifference to their own interests, which has become habitual; to assume among their fellow citizens, that equal station, and demand from the government they support, those equal rights to which the laws of nature, and of nature's God entitles them; a decent respect for the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the cause[s] that impel them to a course so necessary to their own protection. (1)

This class of people had suffered for a long time and had grown accustomed to their suffering. Indifferent to their own well-being, any awareness of threats to their interests failed to inspire concern or action. They were inferior in status to other citizens and other classes, and they appeared to support—actively or passively—a government that had either failed to protect their equal access to their natural rights or refused them that access altogether. This was a class shaped by an oppressive environment.

The situation demanded that this class awaken to its interests and change the nature of its relationships with "fellow citizens" and government by elevating its status.

³¹ Like the original Declaration, the Farmers' Declaration opened with an "impersonal, even philosophical voice" that grew increasingly personal as the text unfolded. Lucas argued that the original Declaration's increasing use of personal pronouns transformed the conflict "from a complex struggle of multifarious origins and diverse motives to a simple moral drama in which a patiently suffering people courageously defend[ed] their liberty against a cruel and vicious tyrant." By making the conflict personal, "the reader is increasingly solicited to identify with [the protagonists], to share their sense of victimage, to participate vicariously in their struggle, and ultimately to act with them in their heroic quest for freedom." "Justifying America," 117-18.

Natural law warranted this “class of people” to act: They were both justified and required “to assume among their fellow citizens, that equal station, and demand from the government they support, those equal rights” to which natural law entitled them. “Apathetic indifference” was no longer a proper attitude toward oppression. The necessity that instigated action—the crisis that resulted from their “suffering from long continued systems of oppression and abuse”—demanded that this class shift hierarchies and identify itself with the Jeffersonian hierarchy of principles. In this fashion, the Farmers’ Declaration put the protagonist’s transformation from victim to actor into motion.

By the third paragraph, this “class of people” had accepted the mantle of responsibility to reform government that was granted to the people in the second paragraph. By the third paragraph, the protagonist’s agency became more vigorous:

Such has been the patient sufferance of the producing classes of these states, and such is now the necessity which compels them to declare that they will use every means save a resort to arms to overthrow this despotism of monopoly, and to reduce all men claiming the protection of American laws to an equality before those laws, making the owner of a railroad as amenable thereto as the “veriest beggar that walks the streets, the sun and air his sole inheritance.”³² (3)

The Farmers’ Declaration did not offer an explicit justification why the legitimacy and agency of the people were transferred to the producing classes. The Farmers’ Declaration made clear, however, that the producing classes had boldly accepted the responsibility not only to protect themselves, but to protect the people, from oppression. It was not the cautious prudence of the people that had been pushed to the point of breaking; rather, it

³² This line was adapted from John Greenleaf Whittier’s prelude to *Among the Hills*: “The veriest straggler limping on his rounds, The sun and air his sole inheritance.”

was the patience of the producing classes that had given way. While the justification and the process of the transfer were not made clear here, this passage boldly presented the transfer as a standing fact and that the producing classes were ready to act.

In contrast to the first paragraph, in which the protagonist sought to establish equality by *raising* its own status, here the protagonist sought to establish equality by *reducing* the status of those whose status was unjustly elevated, implying that the producing classes were prepared to act against the railroad monopoly *directly*. The protagonist-as-victim in the opening paragraph responded to necessity by turning *inward* to practice a little consciousness-raising and self-constitution, awakening to the severity of its condition. In the third paragraph, the protagonist-as-actor responded to necessity by turning *outward* to confront its oppressor and reduce the power of the railroad monopoly.

Thus empowered and motivated, “the producers of this state in our several counties assembled” did “solemnly declare” in the second-to-last paragraph to

free ourselves from the tyranny of monopoly, and...never cease our efforts for reform until every department of our government gives token that the reign of licentious extravagance is over, and something of the purity, honesty and frugality with which our fathers inaugurated it has taken its place. (23)

Here, the producing classes looked to the glorious past to bring about a brighter future.

By replacing the present corruption with the inaugural virtue of the founding fathers, the producing classes sought to fulfill the promise of the Declaration’s timeless ideals.

Imbued with the sense of agency of such a mission, the producing classes transcended the here-and-now struggle against the railroad monopoly and became powerful agents in a larger drama, one rooted in the legacy of the American Revolution. The producing

classes thus emerged as the Farmers' Declaration's strong protagonist, empowered to battle the railroad monopoly and free the people from their bondage.

Enacting Reform by Liberating the Protagonist from a Corrupt Political System

In the Farmers' Declaration, the producing classes had positioned themselves as the protagonist, opposed to the railroad monopoly and possessing the power to act effectively. Now, as protagonist, the producing classes had to *act*. In the final paragraphs of the Farmers' Declaration, the producing classes could topple the despotism of the railroad monopoly by restoring government to its proper role and function, as designated by the founding fathers. To do so, however, they had to declare their independence from the corrupt political system.

In the Farmers' Declaration, the character of American government as an institution was distinguished from the character of the agents who ran it. The Farmers' Declaration focused blame for government injustice and corruption on bad laws and bad administrators, arguing that the problem lay not with the *form* of American government, but with its *use*. By juxtaposing the "monopolistic" hierarchy with the "Jeffersonian" hierarchy, the Farmers' Declaration contrasted the character of a government under the control of corrupt men with the character of government run according to the virtues of the founding fathers. The most direct example of this juxtaposition appeared in the penultimate paragraph:

We...the producers of this state in our several counties assembled, on this, the anniversary of that day that gave birth to a nation of freemen and to a government of which, despite the corruption of its officers, we are still so justly proud...do solemnly declare that...we will never cease our efforts for reform until every department of our government gives token that the reign of licentious extravagance is over, and something of the purity,

honesty and frugality with which our fathers inaugurated it has taken its place. (23)

The instrument itself was pure, as was anything connected to the idealized legacy of the founding fathers; it was only in how that government was used could one judge its character. Thus, this passage proclaimed that government could once again fulfill its proper purpose if corrupt officials were replaced with agents dedicated to protecting individual rights and serving the true interests of the people.

Furthermore, the Farmers' Declaration linked the railroad monopoly to the corruption of government officers in a reciprocal relationship. "They [the railroad monopoly] have converted the bonds fraudulently obtained from the government, into a great corruption fund, with which they are enabled to bribe and control legislatures, and subvert every branch of government to their own base and sordid purpose" (19). The source of the monopoly's power and wealth was accumulated through the acts of government agents, and the railroad monopoly used that wealth to control those agents. Only by removing these corrupt agents from office could the railroad monopoly's wealth be curtailed and the cycle of influence be broken.

By declaring their political independence, the producing classes could free themselves to remove corrupt agents from office.

That to this end [government reform] we hereby declare ourselves absolutely free and independent of all past political connections, and that we will give our suffrage only to such men for office, from the lowest officer in the state to the president of the United States, as we have good reason to believe will use their best endeavors to the promotion of these ends. (24)

Political independence was necessary for reform. The producing classes' break with "past political connections" in conjunction with the proclamation that they would use their own

“good reason” to choose candidates implied that these political connections had limited their political agency. Although the Farmers’ Declaration did not refer to the two major political parties, these were the “past political connections” that were severed, as the movement rhetoric in the next chapter will clearly show.

By breaking with past political connections and voting for candidates who would reform government and break the tyranny of the railroad monopoly, the producing classes, as protagonist, had come full circle. They were empowered to enact the calls to action of the opening paragraph of the Farmers’ Declaration, to rouse themselves from their “apathetic indifference to their own interests” and to “assume among their fellow citizens, that equal station, and demand from the government they support, those equal rights” to which they were entitled.

The Farmers’ Declaration as Representative Anecdote

The analysis of the Farmers’ Declaration in this chapter supports Paul Crawford’s claim that the Farmers’ Declaration offered “a clue to the basic ideology” of the Granger movement grounded in “the doctrine of natural rights expressed by Thomas Jefferson” which condemned the forces of organized capital for “violating the rights of man.”³³ However, I have argued that the Farmers’ Declaration played a much more significant rhetorical role in the movement than as a simple reflection of the movement’s ideology. It represented the movement’s constitutive power, providing in “concentrated” form the motivational structure of Granger movement rhetoric. As an alternative Declaration of Independence, the Farmers’ Declaration drew upon the power of the original Declaration

³³ Crawford, “Farmer Assesses His Role,” 110-11, 127.

to frame the Illinois farmers' material conditions as a system of oppression. Most significantly, the Farmers' Declaration shaped the identity of Illinois farmers as collective agents of change, as members of a "producing class" empowered to enact political reform in response to their oppression.

It is in this sense that the Farmers' Declaration was the representative anecdote of the Granger movement. As I outlined in the method section of the first chapter, for a representative anecdote to appropriately represent a larger set of discourse, it must meet three basic criteria. First, it must have a strong linguistic bias and reflect symbolic action. Second, it must possess adequate scope to properly encompass the larger range of discourse it represents. Third, it must be a synecdoche of the larger set of discourse it represents—that is, it must represent the larger set of discourse "in its entirety" and "reveal the essential nature or substance" of the larger set. Thus, as the representative anecdote of Granger movement rhetoric, the Farmers' Declaration must share the essence of the broader circumference of movement rhetoric. This essence must include, among other things, the movement's fundamental principles, its dramatic conflict, and its resolution of that conflict.³⁴

Given this, the Farmers' Declaration, like any representative anecdote, simplifies and condenses the full scope of the larger set of discourse it represents. In this sense, then, *any* representative anecdote provides an incomplete picture of the motivational structure of the larger universe of discourse it stands in for—in this case, the Granger movement as a whole. This recognition of the limits of the Farmers' Declaration as

³⁴ Madsen, "Representative Anecdote," 213-14.

representative anecdote is not the same as claiming that it was not appropriately representative of Granger movement rhetoric. Instead, this claim simply recognizes the trade-offs of distilling a larger set of movement discourse into a more compact representative form. In doing so, one must inevitably lose the details of texture in favor of gaining a greater sense of the discourse's general quality.

The details that the representative anecdote obscures in its condensation, however, are often significant elements of the motivational power of the larger set of discourse. By its very nature as the representative anecdote of Granger movement rhetoric, as I argue in the next chapter, the Farmers' Declaration did not explicitly incorporate or invoke significant strands of rhetorical context that gave the movement much of its constitutive power. This shortcoming, perhaps, indicts the Farmers' Declaration as the movement's representative anecdote, or even reveals a fatal weakness in relying on the concept of representative anecdote as a critical tool of constitutive rhetoric. We shall see. With this chapter's analysis of the Farmers' Declaration as a touchstone, I turn to the larger universe of Granger movement rhetoric itself in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Crisis of Identity: Two Visions of the Farmers' World

Such has been the patient sufferance of the producing classes of these states, and such is now the necessity which compels them to declare that they will use every means save a resort to arms to overthrow this despotism of monopoly, and to reduce all men claiming the protection of American laws to an equality before those laws, making the owner of a railroad as amenable thereto as the “veriest beggar that walks the streets, the sun and air his sole inheritance.”

—The Farmers' Declaration of Independence of 1873

This passage of the Farmers' Declaration drew its motivational power from weaving together three powerful strands of American public discourse. First, by claiming equal status of all before the law and by proclaiming the compelling necessity to “overthrow this despotism,” the Farmers' Declaration drew motivational power from the legacy of the American Revolution. Second, by boldly accepting responsibility to protect the people from oppression of monopoly, the Farmers' Declaration drew power from the yeoman farmer's role as defender of liberty in the Jeffersonian vision of the agrarian myth. Third, the very presence of “the producing classes” as protagonist was evidence of another powerful strand of American discourse, the rhetoric of class. This rhetoric was characterized by the class struggle between rich and poor, labor and capital. The agrarian myth and the rhetoric of class were elements of American public discourse that were not present in the original Declaration of Independence. Thus, the notion of agrarian stewardship and class were elements introduced into the Farmers' Declaration by its contemporary authors rather than borrowed directly from Declaration itself. Combined with the legacy of the American Revolution explicitly derived from the original Declaration, these three contextual strands of American public discourse gave the movement much of its motivational and constitutive power.

At the end of the last chapter, I claimed that the Farmers' Declaration was the representative anecdote of Granger movement rhetoric, containing within it the motivational complex of the entire movement. As the representative anecdote, the Farmers' Declaration provided a concentrated picture of the motivational structure of the Granger movement as a whole, obscuring or abstracting some important details as any representative condensation symbol must. Perhaps most important of these obscured details were the essential contextual discursive strands of the agrarian myth and the rhetoric of class. The Farmers' Declaration left these strands deeply implicit and unexamined. One purpose of this chapter is to draw out a fuller explanation of how these strands shaped Granger movement rhetoric.

In this chapter, I argue that movement rhetoric enabled Illinois farmers to see their material conditions as oppression, to understand the dire consequences of their agrarian individualism, and to constitute themselves as the "agricultural class," a collective identity that not only could respond effectively to their oppression but could re-constitute the United States as an idealized vision of the American Revolution's promise. Granger movement rhetoric accomplished this by juxtaposing two antithetical visions of the farmers' situation. These antithetical visions were shaped by the interweaving of the legacy of the American Revolution, the agrarian myth, and the rhetoric of class. The first portrayed the world "as it is," a world in which the farmers not only saw their material conditions as a pervasive system of oppression, but as a system that they helped to create. The second depicted the world "as it ought to be," a world in which the farmers envisioned their role in bringing about a bright future that fulfilled the promise of

America's core revolutionary principles—equality, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The juxtaposition of these visions culminated in a crisis of identity, drawing the farmers into a strategic moment of choice in which they had to choose between slavery and independence.

In this chapter, I first examine the rhetoric of class as an important contextual strand of American public discourse in the late nineteenth century. Second, I examine the rhetorical strategies by which movement rhetoric constructed a “dark” vision of the farmers’ oppression. Third, I examine the rhetorical strategies by which movement rhetoric constructed a “bright” vision of the farmers’ future and, through the juxtaposition of the “dark” and “bright” visions, transformed Illinois farmers into the agricultural class. I conclude the chapter by discussing the implications of the representative anecdote as a method for examining Granger movement rhetoric.

The Motivational Power of the Rhetoric of Class

To craft a constitutive narrative that would transform Illinois farmers into a powerful agricultural class, movement rhetoric drew upon the motivational potential of three strands of American public discourse: the legacy of the American Revolution, the agrarian myth, and the rhetoric of class. In the second and third chapters of this study, I examined the constitutive power of the agrarian myth and the legacy of the American Revolution respectively. In this section, I examine class as a rhetorical concept and the role of class in late nineteenth century American public discourse.

Class as Rhetorical Form

The concept of “class” is entwined with the consciousness of social status. As a *social* concept, class represents the variety of ways to explain and/or justify

differentiation and inequality between groups in society. Thus, the concept of class has been used to categorize and/or rank groups according to particular principles of differentiation such as power, wealth, societal function, or role in the process of production. Thus, “at its most basic, research on social class encompasses the study of how societies manifest hierarchies of prestige and power, and how these hierarchies in turn shape a social stratification system and the reception of goods according to the status assigned to positions in the system.”¹

As a rhetorical concept, however, class goes much deeper. Rhetorical scholars, argued Cordova, have expanded on the notion of social class by offering insight as to “how social structures [such as class] are socially constructed phenomena, sustained and reproduced by ideological discursive practices.”² This dimension of class as a rhetorical form—constructed, maintained, and reproduced through discourse—lies at the heart of the rhetoric of class.

The rhetoric of class draws upon the principle of hierarchy, an inherent characteristic of language. Kenneth Burke saw hierarchy as integral to his basic definition of what it was to be human, arguing that human beings, as symbol-using creatures, are “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order).”³ The principle of hierarchy is central to class as a rhetorical concept. The very act of classifying—of differentiating between groups or things or ideas or people—is shaped by the principle of

¹ Córdova, “Rhetoric and Class,” 4221.

² *Ibid.*, 4221.

³ Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 16.

hierarchy. Classifying draws upon division. By separating items by categories, such divisions inevitably lead to some sort of ordering principle by which to establish relationships between those categories.

Because language is the context for social interaction, the principle of hierarchy is always present in the construction, negotiation, and performance of our social relationships. Social class hierarchies are specific, historically and rhetorically contingent manifestations of the hierarchical motive inherent in language. However, while the principle of hierarchy itself is inevitable in these relationships, this does not mean that any *particular* form of hierarchy is inevitable. Because hierarchy is a feature of language, any rhetorical manifestation of hierarchy can be transformed. In this sense, then, because social class hierarchies are contingent and shaped by their context, they are mutable.

The rhetoric of class centers on the strategies used in forming, sustaining, and transforming social class hierarchies as well as on how class hierarchies shape social action. The rhetoric of class can be invoked to express the principle of hierarchy in social relationships in different ways. Through the rhetoric of class, the principle of hierarchy is often invoked to draw the lines of class struggle. Because the rhetoric of class often emphasizes division and difference, antithesis between class categories is often the result. Burke argued that antithesis is a powerful rhetorical instrument, and the tendency to set up social relations as dialectical opposites is so strong that the extremes of a class hierarchy—that is, those classes at the top and the bottom—are often presented as antithetical to one another. Such uses of antithesis polarize the relationships between those classes, reducing even complex class hierarchies into Manichean conflicts between

diametrically opposed classes.⁴ Such reductions create dichotomies such as those between rich and poor, powerful and powerless, non-producers and producers, exploiters and exploited, masters and slaves, lords and serfs, capital and labor, and so on.

Much of the power of the rhetoric of class to shape identity and motivate action comes from the power of antithesis:

There are socio-historical circumstances which, no matter what the objective situation may be, make a dichotomous view of society agreeable to certain classes insofar as it can help promote their interests or contribute to the development of a strong sense of identity and historical mission. The particular antagonists with whom they are locked in combat seem to them to dominate society generally. For the serf, society is composed above all of serfs and lords; for the industrial worker, it is composed of workers and capitalists.⁵

This stress on the fundamental conflict of interests between classes is at the heart of the Marxist view of class relationships, which interprets social history as the history of class struggle.

The rhetoric of class has powerful constitutive implications. By emphasizing class differences, the rhetoric of class not only stresses division between classes, it motivates mutual identification between the members of each particular class. Individuals with shared class interests become self-consciously a class “only if they become aware of the similarity of their interests....[and] only if its members, through a series of conflicts with opposing classes, have acquired an awareness of the communality of their interests.”⁶

That is, although class consciousness arises in part from a separateness from, and even

⁴ Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, 189.

⁵ Coser, “Class,” 443.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 447.

hostility toward, other classes, it also emerges from individuals mutually identifying with one another according to their common class interests.

Because particular manifestations of the hierarchic principle of language are rhetorically constructed and maintained, the rhetoric of class can be wielded to create social change. One way the rhetoric of class can create change is through the dialectical tension of antithesis.

Speeches which we identify as exemplars for social change trade on the rhetorical creation of dramatic contrast. The contrast may be between despair and hope, or problem and solution, or simply today or tomorrow, but the rhetorical form which places moments of choice as the pivot for change depend on contrast opening the room for choice.⁷

Such contrasts, drawing their power from the intensity of the difference between antithetical terms, serve as the motivation for change by invoking the desire to move toward what is positive or good while, simultaneously, invoking the need to move away from its opposite, the negative or bad.

Through the principle of hierarchy, the rhetoric of class can also invoke the motivational power to create change through ironic tension. Because hierarchy is a characteristic of language, the dissolution and reformation of social hierarchies are inherent in their very character as rhetorical forms. In principle, no matter how rigid or immutable they may appear to those who live within them, social class hierarchies are reversible because they contain internal ironies—that is, they “contain both the seeds of

⁷ Klumpp, “Burkean Social Hierarchy,” 224.

their power and the seeds of their destruction.”⁸ Any system of values can be turned against the social structures it was originally invoked to support.

In calls for change, however, such irony can work at cross purposes because “social movements which seek to alter everyday social status confront the irony most starkly: the most rhetorically potent motives they may invoke trade in the very power they would destroy.”⁹ That is, those who seek to challenge the dominant class hierarchy often must couch their calls to alter, thwart, or overthrow that hierarchy *within* the value system of that hierarchy—the same value system invoked by those who wish to maintain the status quo. To do otherwise, movement advocates may fail to identify with those they attempt to enlist in their cause. Thus, through the inherent characteristics of hierarchy and antithesis in language, the rhetoric of class enables those who wield it to reinforce their particular social hierarchies or to subvert and challenge them.

Mystery, or mystification, is another barrier to creating social change through the rhetoric of class. Mystery “translates the reality of the necessity of hierarchy in general into the illusion of the necessity of *a* specific hierarchy.”¹⁰ That is, the principle of hierarchy can be used to keep a particular hierarchy in place, shaping a rhetoric in which all who are involved in the hierarchy praise the hierarchy itself:

Hierarchies empower authorities to wield language to dominate others....
But the interior of a social hierarchy is more complicated than simple domination. Burke observes that humans caught on the bottom end of hierarchy do not always act as we would expect them to act—to resist

⁸ Ibid., 222.

⁹ Ibid., 223.

¹⁰ Wess, *Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, 204.

their low station...[In this] “mystification” of the hierarchy of the motive...Burke argues that those at the lower range of the social hierarchy develop valuing which lead to acceptance of their condition.¹¹

Through mystification, the “oppressed” within a particular social class hierarchy not only passively accept that hierarchy, but actively value their position within it.

In summary, then, the power of the rhetoric of class emerges from the principle of hierarchy, and, in constitutive rhetoric, is invoked to constitute identity and guide action. Because social class hierarchies are rhetorical constructions, no specific class hierarchy is inevitable or unchangeable. The resources of rhetoric can be brought to bear to reform or overthrow any particular instantiation of class hierarchy in social relations.

The Rhetoric of Class in Late Nineteenth Century America

Although the stratification of social groups in society was a well-recognized phenomenon since antiquity, “the word ‘class’ in the social sense is relatively new,” appearing “in the English and other Western European languages at the time of the Industrial Revolution.” In Europe, the terms “working class” and “laboring class” arose in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries when “function in the economic process replace[d] the earlier implicit focus on social rank and hierarchy of possessions.”¹² American workers began to speak and think in working class terms—that is, they began to develop a working class “consciousness”—by the 1830s.¹³ Thus, in the decades before the Civil War, the terminology of class rhetoric was employed by labor

¹¹ Klumpp, “Burkean Social Hierarchy,” 221.

¹² Coser, “Class,” 441.

¹³ Voss, *American Exceptionalism*, 5.

advocates to emphasize the clash of interests between producing and non-producing classes and between capital and labor,¹⁴ although not with the full-throated energy that defined the socialist and anarchist class rhetoric of late nineteenth century labor movements in Europe and, to a lesser extent, the United States.

After the Civil War, the nation's great social, economic, and industrial changes created increasing disparities of wealth, power, and resources between rich and poor that "severely tested the American dream of a classless society."¹⁵ Corporations wielded great power in their relationships with workers, and those workers who sought to form unions and protest their conditions risked losing their jobs and, in some cases, their lives. Thus, workers wielded rhetoric to transform the disparities of wealth and power into motivation for action.

The threads of the American labor movement's rhetoric of class came in two basic strands. One was a "nativist" strand that focused on the worker-industrialist distinction in terms of American principles of equality, liberty, and property. The nativist brand of class rhetoric in the labor movement was grounded in an American republicanism characterized by civic virtue, popular sovereignty, and economic independence. The other was derived from the socialist and anarchist ideologies of European immigrants. These differences resulted in different kinds of labor

¹⁴ The evidence of this comes from a variety of alternate Declarations of Independence. Early alternate Declarations from the 1820s and 1830s were regularly drawing upon the rhetoric of class to energize mechanics and other laborers to challenge the "monied aristocracy," monopolies, and the oppressive non-producing classes. See Foner, *We, the Other People*.

¹⁵ Gunderson, "Protest and Reform," 2.

organizations, pitting class-based socialist movements against “bourgeois” reform crusades. In general, the “nativist” groups advocated reform, rather than overthrow, of the American economic system. Socialist and anarchist groups, however, often openly advocated revolution.¹⁶

As those who attempted to spread socialist doctrine as the basis for labor solidarity discovered, the discursive strands of individualism and economic independence were strong in American public discourse. While a socialist rhetoric of class found an audience mainly with European immigrants who were familiar with such rhetoric and less bound to individualism, it seldom took hold with many native-born Americans. The socialist rhetoric of class had to compete with other powerful strands of American public discourse such as the myth of the self-made man (with its “rhetoric of quick success”), the “theology of wealth,” social Darwinism, the rhetoric of progress, and the agrarian myth.¹⁷ It was not until the 1890s that socialist ideas began to catch on with any force in the United States.¹⁸ Opponents of the labor movement often used the movement’s rhetoric of class to challenge the movement’s “foreignness” because its straightforward emphasis on class and the inevitability of class struggle challenged the American ideal of equality and of a classless society. In the 1870s, these tensions were reflected in Illinois labor movements, especially in Chicago. German workers conducted the “most class-

¹⁶ Moore, *American Left*, 1-2.

¹⁷ Gunderson, “Protest and Reform,” 1-10.

¹⁸ Moore, *American Left*, 4.

conscious, revolutionary labor politics in Chicago” and were more likely than other ethnic groups to be members of socialist and anarchist labor organizations.¹⁹

The tensions of class rhetoric in the Midwestern labor movement likely had some influence on the rhetoric of the Granger movement, as well.²⁰ The rhetoric of class served as a contextual thread employed within Granger movement rhetoric. Particularly, I am interested in how the movement’s use of class as a rhetorical strategy played a role in constituting the farmers as a powerful collective; how the movement drew upon class struggle to frame the farmers’ material conditions; and how the movement drew upon the rhetoric of class and its underlying principle of hierarchy to transform the farmers’ situation from the oppression of the dark vision to the idealized freedom of the bright vision.

A Dark Vision: The Farmer in a System of Oppression

By drawing on the legacy of the American Revolution, the agrarian myth, and the rhetoric of class, movement rhetoric created a “dark vision” of the farmers’ material conditions that depicted them as victims of a pervasive system of oppression under organized capital, a system in which the farmers themselves were complicit. This vision culminated in a crisis of identity for Illinois farmers, drawing them into a strategic moment of choice in which they had to choose either oppression or resistance.

In this section, I first examine how movement rhetoric enabled farmers to see their material conditions as systemic oppression and their role in that system as powerless

¹⁹ Hirsch, *Urban Revolt*, 144.

²⁰ A. C. Cameron, a labor advocate and editor of the *Workingman’s Advocate* in Chicago, worked with leaders of the ISFA and attended some of their meetings and conventions.

victims. Second, I examine how movement rhetoric enabled farmers to implicate themselves as agents in their own oppression, as actors who worked against their own interests.

The Farmer as Victim

The dark vision empowered farmers to see their material conditions as systemic oppression and their place in that system as powerless victims. By drawing on the principle of wealth as the motivational “essence” of the dark vision, movement rhetoric shaped the nature of the relationship between farmers and organized capital. The principle of wealth grounded a system of oppression shaped by organized capital’s need to acquire more and more property in all of its forms—money, land, goods, services, stock, and the fruits of others’ labor. “Wealth appears to be the great aim of human life,” A. M. York declared, because it served as the “the standard by which all are to be measured.”²¹ For organized capital, the desire for wealth was so strong that it was driven to seize whatever it could from the weaker classes by any means necessary.

This system that is gathering within its grasp all the nations of the world...invests itself with special privileges and immunities, and absorbs the earnings of the people. It cares nothing for the welfare of the masses, only so far as it contributes to its own interest. It has no sympathy with the wants and sufferings of humanity. The only value it places on man is measured by his ability to labor. It professes no great moral principle; it aims at the accomplishment of no great good to the world. WEALTH, and WEALTH only, is its object, and that which alone is it[s] vitality and power.²²

²¹ York, “Wealth as a Political Power,” *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers’ Association*, Decatur, Ill., December 16-18, 1873, 122.

²² *Ibid.*, 120-21.

Organized capital's unceasing drive to accumulate wealth created an ever-growing system of oppression, as the system offered no motive for organized capital to *stop* plundering other classes; rather, organized capital was always driven to plunder *more*. Such a system was unconstrained by concern for those it harmed, and dehumanized all within it, oppressed and oppressors alike. In this construction, the farmers and the people were merely resources to fuel the engine growing wealth for the stronger class.

In the dark vision, organized capital used its vast wealth to usurp control of America's major institutions from the people. To secure its power to gather wealth, organized capital sought to "control the action of political parties," "shape public opinion through its influence upon the public press," "secur[e] the appointment of its agents to Federal positions and the chairmanship of certain Congressional committees," and obtain "political power by corrupting the representatives of the people," York declared at the ISFA's December 1873 meeting. Because "one of the most important functions of Government is to protect its subjects in the possession and enjoyment of their property," York proclaimed, "it follows that those having the greater wealth take a more active interest in directing the action of the Government... Thus, by a gradual transition, the government falls into the hands of the wealthy, and the masses sink into a state of comparative or absolute dependence."²³

In the dark vision, movement rhetoric depicted the farmers' material conditions as a part this system of oppression. Through the dark vision, farmers could see the many

²³ Ibid., 119, 126-27.

small acts of plunder they experienced every day as part of the larger, more pervasive system of oppression and abuse.

The consequences of this system are, that the farmer is hard-pressed; farming does not pay expenses, and leave any thing to support the farmer's family; debts accumulate against him; mortgages are piled upon his land; with his meagre income his taxes prove a heavy burden; he is not able to spare the time and means to educate his children; has no leisure for the enjoyment or self-culture; and is deprived of all the luxuries and many of the comforts of life.²⁴

Each new consequence was piled upon the last, crushing any sense of value or benefit from the work of farming. Instead, the weight of the system transformed what was ennobling work in the agrarian myth into sheer drudgery.

This system left little for the farmer to live upon. "In most cases there is no restraint to their charges, save only the ability of their victim to exist under the load," L. D. Whiting declared of the railroads. "Like hostile invading armies, they levy contributions limited only by the ability of their victims to pay,"²⁵ depriving farmers of the opportunity to enjoy the profits of their work. Such charges reduced farmers to barely subsist on what they grew in a season. "[We] have seen the wealth we have created by unceasing toil abstracted from us by charges that have been limited only by our ability to

²⁴ Creighton, "Co-operation in Buying and Selling," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Decatur, Ill., December 16-18, 1873, 69.

²⁵ Whiting, address, *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, Bloomington, Ill., January 15-16, 1873, 8.

pay them,” S. M. Smith declared. These charges “leave us just enough to subsist on while we produced another crop, to be again pillaged as before.”²⁶

Drawn to its ultimate fulfillment, then, the current system of oppression would lead to a future in which class relationships were dominated by an “aristocracy of wealth” motivated to take more and more property from the weaker classes. Such relationships would create a virtual master-slave relationship between organized capital and the weaker farmers.

To express the intensity of their oppression, the farmers framed the relationship through historical imagery by drawing on the dark vision’s analogies to slavery and feudalism that compared the Illinois farmers’ situation to those of Southern slaves and European serfs. “If you fix the price of my labor, you circumscribe my actions, and fix me to one plan for my lifetime, without opportunity for rest or recreation.” Such a life was little different than that of “the slave of the South, in the days of his worst estate.”²⁷ Such accounts left little doubt where the path of corporate oppression would ultimately lead: An absolute despotism, in which organized capital, as S. M. Smith warned his fellow farmers, “will in the end *sell us* literally as well as figuratively.”²⁸ Slavery analogies contrasted the image of the yeoman farmer and that of the Southern slave, with the essential difference being agency. Unlike the Southern slave, the yeoman farmer

²⁶ S. M. Smith, “Address of S. M. Smith to the Farmers of Woodford Co., Illinois, at Roanoke, July 4, 1874,” *Industrial Age*, July 11, 1874, 2.

²⁷ S. M. Smith, “Address,” *Industrial Age*, Sept. 20, 1873, 1.

²⁸ S. M. Smith, “Address of S. M. Smith to the Farmers of Woodford Co., Illinois, at Roanoke, July 4, 1874,” *Industrial Age*, July 11, 1874, 2.

actively resisted oppression, indeed, he had a duty to do so. The yeomanry of the revolutionary generation took up arms against the tyranny that threatened their rights and liberties, winning their freedom through combat. In this analogy, in 1861, the Western yeoman rose once again to fight oppression, this time to grant rights and liberties to the Southern slave. The very essence of the American yeomen was embedded in liberty, and they were motivated to resist oppression at every turn.

The image of the European serf was also the antithesis of the yeoman farmer, and analogies comparing farmers to serfs were common in Granger movement rhetoric.

The danger to the liberties of this people from the power and encroachments of these overshadowing monopolies is imminent, and... a servitude awaits our common people, not so cruel and bloody, perhaps, but really more grinding and hopeless than that endured by the serfs of Europe under the feudal system.²⁹

The feudal analogy contrasted the image of the landowning American yeoman farmer and the landless European serf. As with Southern slavery, an essential distinction between the image of yeoman farmer and that of the serf was agency. In the agrarian myth, the yeoman farmer was free, self-reliant, and possessed political and economic power. Serfs, however, were victims, not protagonists. In the dark vision, serfs had not freed themselves of their bondage to their feudal lords. References to European farmers in movement rhetoric implied that they were still in a state of servitude to a landed aristocracy. For example, the *Prairie Farmer* reported to its Illinois farmer readership that contemporary English farmers' rights to land ownership were constrained under "the

²⁹ Bryant, "State Supervision and Control of Railways," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Springfield, Ill., January 19-21, 1875, 27.

old feudal system, which apportioned out the lands of an empire among a few privileged persons, [and] whose heirs enjoy them to this day.”³⁰

By drawing on analogies of slavery and serfdom, movement rhetoric depicted the “perfection” of organized capital’s system of oppression as the virtual economic and political enslavement of the farmers and the people. Movement rhetoric created a powerful vision with which they could understand their harsh material conditions. The power of the dark vision came from its simplicity, from its dramatic conflict between two diametric forces—organized capital as the powerful oppressor, the farmers as the oppressed. On its face, this simple polemic enabled farmers to put a face to their powerful oppressors, thus relieving the farmers themselves of any responsibility for their situation. In the next section, I argue that this simplicity proved deceptive.

The Farmer as Accomplice

The outward Manichean dualism of the farmers’ oppressive situation hid a more complex motivational structure of the dark vision. By interweaving the legacy of the American Revolution with the agrarian myth to shape the motivational power of the dark vision, movement rhetoric enabled farmers to understand the nature of their oppression as a consequence of their “unenlightened” agrarian individualism. In the dark vision’s system of oppression, the yeoman farmer’s traits of individualism, self-sufficiency, and independence were depicted as weaknesses rather than strengths.

Thus, by projecting the image of the yeoman farmer into the dark vision, movement rhetoric portrayed a system of oppression in which the farmers’ adherence to

³⁰ “Strike of Farm Laborers,” *Prairie Farmer*, May 14, 1872, 137.

individualism, dictated by the agrarian myth, made them increasingly vulnerable to the power of organized capital. “You are scattered all over these broad prairies, and do not see anything beyond the little patch of real estate you call your own, and beyond which you never cast a thought,” S. M. Smith admonished his fellow farmers in a full-throated depiction of the agrarian myth’s geography. “There you are tugging away for very life, year after year, to see how much more you can produce, in order to fatten the cormorants who are wriggling the very life out of you, and taking three quarters of the profits of [y]our labor. And you keep tugging on in that way without a thought as to whether there is any possibility of bettering your condition.”³¹ The farmers had imprisoned themselves within the motivation of the agrarian myth, relying on individual effort to improve their material condition. Within the agrarian myth, not only was this appropriate action, it was *effective* action.

In the dark vision, however, individual effort was not empowering. The more the farmers produced, the more their labor profited the brokers and dealers and shippers. The very acts that, within the universe of the agrarian myth, liberated the farmers from outside constraints submitted them to greater oppression. As producers, they worked hard, only to find the fruits of their labor ending up in someone else’s pockets:

We’ve bearded the wood’s grim solitudes,
We’ve buried the waste in flowers,
Woo’d the wild earth into fruitful birth,
and couched her in fairy bowers...
But all our dreams were mirage-gleams—
Bright phantoms of the sun!
We plowed and sowed, we reaped and mowed,
But when our work was done,

³¹ S. M. Smith, “S. M. Smith’s Address,” *Industrial Age*, Sept. 20, 1873, 2.

The Spoiler came, in freedom's name,
And swept us of all but land.³²

In the dark vision, the farmer's yeoman work to cultivate the wilderness and transform it into a garden lost its mythic motivation. The agrarian myth held little power when organized capital's system of oppression took the bulk of the farmer's crops and transformed the yeoman into a drudge.

Through the dark vision, the farmers understood the significance of their responsibility in giving organized capital control over the branches of government, converting what was once the instrument of the people into an institution that protected the interests of organized capital through legislation, jurisprudence, and enforcement. The farmers' chief act of political complicity was manifested in their poor judgment in using their power to vote:

Through the departure from the primary principles of our government, as promulgated by its founders, and through the imprudent exercise of that highest prerogative of the freeman, the right of suffrage, we, the farmers of Illinois, in common with the wealth and food producers of these United States, have, through our past action, acquiesced in a system of class legislation, which makes the great majority slavishly subservient to a small minority.³³

Here, the farmers recognized their complicity and accepted their guilt. Through their indifference toward the legacy of the founding fathers, they allowed organized capital and corrupt government to betray the spirit of the Revolution and the values of the agrarian myth. The farmers had neglected their proper civic duty to choose government

³² Scanlan, "The Plow and Pen: A Chant of the Grangers," *Industrial Age*, August 30, 1873, 2.

³³ "Report of the Committee on Platform," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Springfield, Ill., January 19-21, 1875, 56.

officers who would run the government according to the people's will. The farmers, through their negligence, had betrayed the legacy of the founding fathers and the American Revolution. "Alas," J. H. Bryant announced before the delegates of the ISFA's third annual meeting in 1875, "we have only to open our eyes and look about us to realize that we have made a wide departure from the path marked out by the Fathers."³⁴

In the dark vision, movement rhetoric provided a narrative of oppression in which the farmers saw themselves heading inexorably toward a state of economic misery, but the totality of that misery was enhanced by their complicity. Through the jarring juxtaposition of the farmers' actions as isolated yeomen with a nation shaped by monopolistic values and ruled by the powerful capital classes, the farmers had arrived at a grim understanding: As independent yeomen, they were responding to their material conditions in ways that transformed them into "slaves" and "serfs," the very antitheses of the yeoman image. Unlike slaves and serfs, however, the farmers' oppression was an *indictment* of their identity as free and independent men. The dark vision hit home with the farmers because it *explained* their inability to solve their problems through hard work and thrift. The vision's narrative fidelity—that is, how well the vision "rang true" with the stories the farmers knew to be "true in their lives"—enabled farmers to understand that the agrarian myth no longer offered adequate explanations and accurate predictions of their world.³⁵ The vision empowered the farmers to bear the guilt of their condition,

³⁴ Bryant, "State Supervision and Control of Railways," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Springfield, Ill., January 19-21, 1875, 23.

³⁵ Fisher, "Public Moral Argument," 8.

and that guilt led to the farmers' crisis of identity, the need to adapt their yeoman identity in ways in which they could address their material conditions in the late nineteenth century.

Thus, movement rhetoric, by drawing upon the legacy of the American Revolution, the agrarian myth, and the rhetoric of class, created a dark vision in which the farmers understood that their actions—based on the individualism, self-sufficiency, and independence of the yeoman farmer—were not only ineffective against the encroachments of organized capital, but made them more vulnerable to oppression. By drawing on the rhetoric of class in the dark vision, movement rhetoric empowered farmers to see their material conditions in terms of dramatic conflict, a class struggle characterized by the antithesis between capital and labor. This struggle pitted the non-producing capital classes against the laborers of the producing classes. In the dark vision, this antithesis was shaped by establishing *wealth* as the principle of American class hierarchy. The wealthy classes—especially the various classes of organized capital—occupied the apex of this hierarchy; the poorer classes, such as farmers and urban workers, were at the bottom. Thus, in the dark vision, the capital classes were diametrically opposed to the working or laboring classes, and their superiority was derived from their far greater wealth. The conflict between these classes focused on status, power, and, most importantly, the profits derived from the processes of production.

Through the rhetoric of class, the dark vision punctuated the relationship between farmers and other classes differently than did the agrarian myth. As I noted in the second

chapter, the agrarian myth placed farmers at the top of the occupational hierarchy, privileging the farmers' status in American society. The agrarian myth also emphasized that individualism, independence, and land ownership were the sources of the Midwestern farmers' political and economic power. Through their self-sufficiency, Midwestern farmers was free of the constraining entanglements and corruption of the urban East and the feudal aristocracies of Europe.

However, in the dark vision, movement rhetoric deployed the rhetoric of class to enable farmers to see that the agrarian myth "mystified" the oppressive nature of the American class hierarchy. Farmers, thus focused on the dichotomies between capital and labor and between the non-producing and producing classes, saw that the individual and independent action that served them well within the motivational imagery of the agrarian myth, instead perpetuated a class hierarchy that empowered organized capital over the needs and desires of Midwestern farmers. Thus, through the rhetoric of class, farmers understood their material conditions as a system of oppression that would perpetuate their economic misery.

The resulting crisis of identity provided a moment of potential transformation, but without an alternative identity for the farmers to turn to, the constitutive power of their crisis was limited to rejecting their yeoman identity and the oppression it supported. Kenneth Burke called such perspectives "frames of rejection," which take their shape from their negative emphasis by stressing the "no" more strongly than the "yes," focusing on what one is *against* but offering no answer for what one is *for*. That is, such frames

stress “the partiality of rejection rather than the completeness of acceptance,” and thus cannot be complete constitutive acts.³⁶

Thus, the dark vision derived its limited constitutive power from its admonitory quality—its warning that farmers were in danger of becoming slaves and that they were playing an active role in their enslavement. Kenneth Burke claimed that admonitions were “designed not so much for stating what mankind *substantially is* as for emphatically pointing out what mankind is in *danger of becoming*.” A constitutive act built solely upon admonition was weak because “an anecdote about *what one may become* is hardly the most direct way of discussing *what one is*.” Burke doubted “whether a purely admonitory idiom can serve even the deterrent role for which it is designed; for it creates nothing but the image of the enemy, and if men are to make themselves over in the image of the imagery, what other call but that of the enemy is there for them to answer?”³⁷ Again, such partial frames made poor foundations for constitutive acts.

The rhetorical strength of the dark vision, then, came from how it empowered farmers to define their material conditions as oppression, to shape their attitude toward that oppression, and to identify both external and internal sources of their oppression. However, the vision was far less useful as a tool with which farmers could act upon their understanding because it offered a limited sense of agency to respond to their circumstances appropriately.

³⁶ Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 26-27.

³⁷ Burke, *Grammar*, 330-31.

The power of the dark vision also arose in how the farmers used it to build an intensity of feeling toward their material conditions. The emotion that welled up in their discourse in response to their oppression—anger, fear, frustration, confusion—served to set their attitude toward their oppression. By drawing on the dark vision as an incomplete constitutive act, the farmers sought its “fulfillment” to resolve the tension, an antithetical but complementary vision to complete the constitutive act and give them control over their lives. The seeds of fulfillment were sown within the American Revolution’s call to resist oppression, the very heart of the Declaration’s warrant for revolution.

A Bright Vision: The Stewardship of the Agricultural Class

To constitute the farmers as agents of change, movement rhetoric created a vision antithetical to the dark vision’s oppression, a bright vision of the future grounded in the legacy of the American Revolution and the agrarian myth. In this section, I first examine how movement rhetoric empowered Illinois farmers by giving their fight against organized capital a transcendent meaning, thus investing them with the power and responsibility to fulfill the promise of the American Revolution and the agrarian myth. Second, I examine how movement rhetoric drew upon the motivational power of the legacy of the American Revolution and the agrarian myth to empower farmers to constitute themselves as a “yeoman class” invested with the prestige and power to transform their material conditions into the future of the bright vision. Third, I examine how movement rhetoric, by drawing on the legacy of the American Revolution, the agrarian myth, and the rhetoric of class, juxtaposed the bright and dark visions to empower the farmers to constitute themselves as the agricultural class, an organized

collective identity with the political and economic power to overthrow organized capital's system of oppression.

Utopian Dreams: Empowerment through Transcendence

By drawing upon the legacy of the American Revolution and the power of the agrarian myth, movement rhetoric empowered Illinois farmers by giving their fight against organized capital a transcendent meaning. This move invested the farmers with the power and responsibility to fulfill the promise of both the American Revolution and the agrarian myth because the bright vision of an idealized future would come closer to fruition only when the farmers defeated organized capital and overturned its system of oppression. By shaping the bright vision of the future as the fulfillment of America's revolutionary and agrarian past, movement rhetoric created a narrative in which the farmers' struggle with organized capital transcended its own historical moment to become part of the "grand sweep" of human history. The flow of this transcendent history was shaped by the recurring struggle between the forces of freedom and oppression moving toward a utopian future. The essence of this future in the bright vision was its idealism, its "perfection" of human civilization according to the basic ideals of American republicanism as framed in the Declaration of Independence and reinforced through the agrarian myth. These principles, which included equality, liberty, justice, popular sovereignty, a strong faith in the individual and in individualism, civic virtue, and traditional rural values, among others, shaped the relationships between the key actors in the utopian vision (and the very same key actors in the Declaration of Independence): the individual, the people, and the government.

This grand sweep of history was a theme repeated in movement rhetoric, its spirit invoked when speakers and writers characterized the hopeful final outcome of the farmers' confrontation with organized capital. However, the utopian character of the vision and its progressive development received its most complete expression in the movement speeches of ISFA president W. C. Flagg, to which I turn to examine its full motivational character. As in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence, the key principle of hierarchy in the bright vision was equality, the principle inherent in all individuals at the moment of their creation. In an 1873 speech, Flagg declared that society steadily and inexorably progressed

towards [the] democratic republicanism that De Tocqueville, more than a generation ago, observed, and which the history of the last thirty years has abundantly verified. This tendency, as inevitable as Fate, equalizes and makes all mankind kin, giving equal personal, social and political rights to the individual.³⁸

The state of equality in the bright vision marked the highest attainment of civilization, marking humanity's ultimate destination in an egalitarian society in which individuals, as "personal, social and political" equals, share a mutual identification as the people. C. C. Buell echoed this claim in 1875, pronouncing that civilization "has received its chief impulse, so far as progress is manifested in improved societary relations, by recognizing the equal rights of man."³⁹

³⁸ Flagg, "Aim and Scope of the Farmers' Movement," pamphlet, Chicago: *Prairie Farmer*, 1873, 1.

³⁹ Buell, "Address," *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Springfield, Ill., January 19-21, 1875, 15.

In the bright vision, further echoing the second paragraph of the Declaration, the people were sovereign. The best form of government to perpetuate that sovereignty and protect the rights of the individual was republican democracy. Flagg defined republican democracy as “a democracy limited by a constitution and qualified by a representative government. It is the rule of the people, directly or indirectly exercised, under the limitations of an organic law.” Republican democracy “furnishes the best means of expressing the moral sentiments of the people,” insuring that the people’s representatives fully represented the public interest:

In a democracy where all vote, the chances are that, in the long run, and over the whole country, we will get the most honest, straightforward, and, for that State, the wisest expression of opinion upon the direction of its affairs. The prejudices, passions and selfish interests of individuals are, to a great extent, neutralized, and the result will, as a rule, be a public policy that will reflect the character of the people as a whole.⁴⁰

Republican democracy negotiated the tension between individual prejudices and the “moral sentiments” of the people. In the bright vision, the equality and the rights of the individual were preserved while simultaneously the public policy that resulted served the best interests of the people.

While the democratic process in republican democracy meliorated the individual interests of the individual to achieve the will of the people, republican democracy also relied on the ideal individual citizen as shaped by their civic virtue. Movement rhetoric, drawing on the ideals of republicanism and the mythic image of the yeoman farmer, depicted the bright vision as one in which the qualities of civic virtue defined the role of the individual in society. In the bright vision, the ideals of civic virtue, such as an active

⁴⁰ Flagg, “Mr. Flagg’s Address at Madison,” *Industrial Age*, February 28, 1874, 2.

concern for the general welfare and an understanding that civic involvement was an element of becoming a rounded human being, were important in this idealized future. “The saying, *vox populi, vox dei*,” Flagg declared to farmers in Madison, has “real significance when the persons comprising a democracy are intelligent and virtuous.”⁴¹ Many movement rhetors exalted these civic qualities and stressed that all farmers should possess and practice them. For example, L. D. Whiting called for his fellow ISFA members act according to key civic virtues: “I trust you will act with energy, wisdom and prudence; and that your deliberations here will do something to promote the public interest, and advance the cause of human happiness and civilization.”⁴² These qualities were especially important as character traits of the people’s representatives, as in the Farmers’ Declaration’s call for government to return to the principles of “purity, honesty and frugality.”⁴³

These ideals of civic virtue were also at the heart of Jefferson’s image of the yeoman farmer in his dual role as society’s chief provider and as the defender of American democracy. In a letter to John Jay in 1785, Jefferson wrote that the “cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, & they are tied to their country & wedded to [its] liberty & interests by the most lasting bonds.”⁴⁴ Flagg echoed Jefferson’s praise of the yeoman’s

⁴¹ Flagg, “Mr. Flagg’s Address at Madison,” *Industrial Age*, February 28, 1874, 2.

⁴² Whiting, “Address to the Delegates of the Convention,” *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers’ State Convention*, Bloomington, Ill., January 15-16, 1873, 11.

⁴³ “Farmers’ Declaration,” para. 23.

⁴⁴ Jefferson, “Letter to John Jay,” *Writings*, 818.

agrarian values and civic virtues, declaring that they were the “glue” that kept the ideal republic together:

And herein lies the vital importance of an intelligent and prosperous agricultural class. The farmers of the land must furnish not only food, but they must supply the vigor, the intellect and the virtue that cities can not reproduce. And while the rural homes of America remain the conservators of private, and, so far as may be, of public virtue, and the pioneers in pushing on the columns of social and political progress and reform, I have hope and confidence in the perpetuity of the republic.⁴⁵

From Flagg’s perspective, the image of the yeoman not only looked back to perpetuate tradition, it also moved forward to align the nation with its core principles. The yeoman, through his unique role in American society as the “conservator” of the glorious past and the “pioneer” of “progress and reform,” brought the nation closer to fulfilling the future of the bright vision by linking the future to the past. Within this context, the American farmers were “the most valuable citizens.”

By drawing out the hierarchy of principles of the bright vision into narrative form, movement rhetoric elevated the farmers’ struggle with organized capital to transcend its historical moment to become part of the grand sweep of history.

[Such] developmental metaphors are an asset within social movements because they provide the dynamism by taking the contrast of antithesis... and array the contrast into human time and space to create progress. They entail rhetorical hierarchy because their dynamism comes from casting the envisioned future as a completion of past and present.⁴⁶

The antithesis between the farmers and organized capital became part of the greater struggle between freedom and oppression and the movement was drawn into the grand

⁴⁵ Flagg, “Mr. Flagg’s Address at Madison,” *Industrial Age*, February 28, 1874, 2.

⁴⁶ Klumpp, “Burkean Social Hierarchy,” 227.

sweep of history in which each struggle brought society closer to the bright vision's promise.

The motivation of American exceptionalism was also an important aspect of this progressive march toward a bright future. Of all nations in human history, the United States was at the highest point of development in civilization's progress toward the bright vision. A nation conceived from ideas could arise free of the ideological baggage of the past. Such a nation could be founded on principles rather than simply emerge from history. America's birth occurred in the realm of pure principle, a concept that was a foundation of American exceptionalism. As Flagg declared, the principles that became America was born in "the compact signed in the cabin of the Mayflower, in 1620," and developed through "the body of liberties of the Massachusetts colony in New England, enacted by the general court in 1641." Their "causes and consequences," Flagg continued, "bore their proper fruit more than a century later, in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. Never was a nation more favored in the conditions of political and material progress. Using the vantage ground of colonists from old and civilized nations, we entered at once upon the [next] stage of development as a constitutional republic."⁴⁷ Thus, conceived in principle and built for progress, the genesis of the United States brought humanity closer than any other nation to the ideals of the bright vision's republican utopia.

⁴⁷ Flagg, "Mr. Flagg's Address at Madison," *Industrial Age*, February 28, 1874, 2.

Within this context, the Granger movement was imbued with great significance. As the latest battle against oppression, the movement was the next step toward the ideal future of the bright vision.

“All men are created equal. Government derives its just power from the consent of the governed,” said the Declaration. Before declarations like these, which have been a constant force in the succeeding years of the republic, the privileges that make one person the superior to another before the law must, of course, be abolished. They could not be explained away. Slavery must fall, or the Declaration be denied; and you know the result. The question of suffrage came next, and the distinction of race was abolished. There remains the abolition of the distinction of franchise for the man and none for the woman; and I can see but one result.⁴⁸

Here, the great issues of American history transcended their particular historical moments to become part of the all-encompassing progressive flow of history. Each conflict repeated the pattern:

We must expect the old foe under new faces. It was African slavery ten years ago—it is corporate wealth and monopoly to-day—it will be something else when the war with our Shylock aristocracy has placed them where our former slave aristocracy is now—in the position to *earn* what they consume by honest work. But, recurring to the self-evident truths of the Declaration, and to the manifest drift of civilizations, no man can be doubtful of ultimate good results; Provided that you and I do our duty as citizens, and that when the cry of the “Philistines be upon thee,” arouses this young giant of nations, it shall not be found shorn of its strength in the harlot lap of luxury and corruption. Let us never despair of the republic; never give up, because of its abuses, the government of the people “over all, by all, and for the sake of all.”⁴⁹

The power of the bright vision’s telos was two-fold: First, it gave the Granger movement greater significance than a single struggle between oppressed and oppressor. Second, it presented the outcome of the struggle as inevitable—*if* the farmers performed their duty,

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

if they followed through on their obligations as American citizens and in their role as the Jeffersonian yeomanry.

Thus, in the bright vision, the Granger movement was elevated into the grand sweep of history and became the next step toward realizing the bright vision of the future. The farmers entered the great struggle between freedom and oppression as civic-minded yeoman citizens, transformed from victims of organized capital into agents of change, carrying forward the legacy of American Revolution toward the promise of that legacy in the utopian future of the bright vision. Through this transcendence, the telos of the grand sweep of history—the constant striving toward the ideal of the bright vision—became the motivation for the farmers' actions.

By creating a vision in which the struggle between the farmers and organized capital was made transcendent within the grand sweep of history, Granger movement rhetoric positioned the conflict between freedom and oppression as a recurring drama in American society. As one oppressor was defeated in a particular confrontation, another oppressor would rise to take its place. As the dark vision made clear, the powerful few would always try to encroach upon the rights of the people. As the bright vision countered, the people would always find the motivation to act through the legacy of the American Revolution by turning to the Declaration of Independence. The great cycle of freedom and oppression would continue until the conditions of oppression were overcome and struggle no longer necessary. This was a powerful rhetorical move, as the movement invested the full weight of the progression of history behind the righteousness of the farmers' cause. They were not only battling the railroads and the banks and the

brokers, they were locked in a universal struggle in which the stakes were the future of the human race. Heady stuff, to be sure. Thus, by invoking the legacy of the American Revolution, movement rhetoric drew upon a grand narrative in which the oppressed, invested with great purpose, became potent actors within the recurring cycle of struggle in history.

Farmers as Stewards: Transforming the Agrarian Myth

Within the grand sweep of history, then, farmers saw the full significance of the movement and understood their important role to bring society closer to the bright vision's future. By drawing on the motivational power of the legacy of the American Revolution and the agrarian myth, farmers drew upon the bright vision to constitute themselves as a "yeoman class" with the prestige and power to transform their material conditions into the future of the bright vision. This yeoman class took shape in two complementary personae, the farmers as revolutionaries and the farmers as stewards of the people. These personae shifted the essence of the yeoman farmer image from an archetype of the isolated, proud, independent, self-sufficient hero of the "middle landscape" into a collective image of a socially, economically, and politically engaged class with strong ties to society. The farmers drew upon this image of the yeoman class as a basis for mutual identification and agrarian solidarity.

Through the legacy of the American Revolution, the farmers were revolutionaries who fought organized capital to free the people from oppression. As revolutionaries, the farmers could act with the power and legitimacy of the founding fathers to battle organized capital to defend the people. The Farmers' Declaration drew upon the spirit of the American Revolution to constitute the producing classes as revolutionaries who

would free the people from the oppression of the railroad monopoly by restoring corrupt government to its proper role. Farmers also drew upon special anniversaries and celebrations to constitute themselves within the tradition of the Revolution. During the December 1873 ISFA convention, S. M. Smith marked the anniversary of the Boston Tea Party, identifying Illinois farmers with the patriots who struggled to free America from British tyranny: “One hundred years ago, to-day, that first act in the great drama which made us an independent people, was enacted,” Smith proclaimed to the convention delegates. “Though we are not called upon to assert our independence by any unlawful act or deed of violence, we could not celebrate this anniversary more fittingly, in my opinion, than by here pledging ourselves together to persevere as did those sturdy patriots, until we have freed ourselves from an oppression, compared to which theirs sinks into utter insignificance.”⁵⁰ As revolutionaries, farmers approached their material conditions as the outcome of a tyrant’s oppressive acts, acts that created the despotism of the current “Systems of Government” (DOI 2) to impose “long continued systems of oppression and abuse” (FDOI 1). The farmers took on the glorious mantle of the founding fathers as the new protagonists in the great struggle against tyranny and oppression.

Through the Jeffersonian vision of the agrarian myth, the farmers were stewards of the people. Although the yeoman persona strongly projected the archetype of the proud, independent, self-sufficient hero of the “middle landscape,” agrarian stewardship was the basis of the yeoman’s relationship with society. This stewardship was manifested

⁵⁰ S. M. Smith, “Secretary’s Report.” *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers’ Association*, Decatur, Ill., December 16, 1873, 11.

through two complementary motivations. First, the farmers' stewardship grew from the gift of their calling, their power to draw food from the soil to feed society. Second, the farmers' stewardship emanated from their civic engagement in politics, an engagement that maintained and upheld the principles of republican democracy for all, but was inspired by their own need to protect their rights to own land.

The farmers drew motivation for their stewardship from agricultural fundamentalism, one of the key tenets of the agrarian myth. Agricultural fundamentalism asserted that agriculture was society's most essential productive act, the foundation of the nation's economy, and the source of all wealth.⁵¹ As America's primary producers, the farmers kept the people strong by growing food and thus creating the wealth that fueled the entire economy. The National Grange invoked these basic principles of agricultural fundamentalism in the preamble to its constitution:

The prosperity of a nation is in proportion to the value of its productions.

The soil is the source from whence we derive all that constitutes wealth; without it we would have no agriculture, no manufacturers, no commerce. Of all the material gifts of the Creator, the various productions of the vegetable world are of the first importance. The art of agriculture is the parent and precursor of all arts, and its products the foundation of all wealth.

The productions of the earth are subject to the influences of natural laws, invariable and indisputable; the amount produced will consequently be in proportion to the intelligence of the producer, and success will

⁵¹ Johnstone defined "agricultural fundamentalism" as the idea that "agriculture is the fundamental employment of man upon which all other economic activities were vitally dependent." "Old Ideals," 117. Hofstadter also used the term in *Age of Reform*, 31. Mooney and Majka used the term "agrarian fundamentalism" for the same concept. *Farmers' and Farm Workers' Movements*, 220-21. Eisinger included aspects of agricultural fundamentalism under the umbrella term "agrarianism," which also included the natural right of everyone to own land. See "Natural Rights," 13-15.

depend upon his knowledge of the action of these laws, and the proper application of their principles.⁵²

Agriculture, as “the parent and precursor of all arts,” produced humanity’s most essential material gift, without which the endeavors of society would grind to a halt. Thus, the farmers’ productive labor marked the confluence of God’s benevolence, nature’s bounty, and civilization’s need, the last two as reflected in this poem published in the *Prairie*

Farmer:

Theirs is the alchemy of toil
By which a hungry world is fed—
Worth more than all the victors['] spoil
They change the riches of the soil
To life sustaining bread.⁵³

Thus, the National Grange preamble left little doubt where the Grange founders—and most farmers—ranked agriculture amongst society’s occupations. Agricultural fundamentalism posited that without the agricultural class, the nation’s most essential producers, no other class could function or survive. “Mankind cannot live without provisions,” declared S. M. Smith in 1873. “They must have bread and meat and other things so necessary to the happiness, welfare and life of the whole human family.”⁵⁴

The farmers drew the motivation for their political stewardship from the Jeffersonian image of the yeoman and his role in society. As yeoman stewards, the

⁵² “The Patrons of Husbandry: Constitution of the Order,” *Prairie Farmer* April 16, 1870, 117. The constitution was formally adopted on January 9, 1873, at the sixth annual meeting of the National Grange. Since then, the preamble has never been changed. *Digest of Laws of the National Grange*, 2006 ed., 1.

⁵³ Spencer, “The Toilers,” *Prairie Farmer*, August 9, 251.

⁵⁴ S. M. Smith, “Address,” *Industrial Age*, Sept. 20, 1873, 1.

farmers’ “enlightened self-interest” linked their individual concerns with the concerns of community, society, and government. The farmers protected the people from oppression as vigilant defenders of democracy in America. As one movement rhetor proclaimed, the farmer was the “chief pillar that sustain[ed] the fabric of government.”⁵⁵ As yeoman stewards, farmers identified their individual self-interests—defined in large part by their need to protect their land and other property rights—with the greater good, to protect individual rights and see to the welfare of the American people.

Through the legacy of the American Revolution and the agrarian myth, farmers found a basis for mutual identification and agrarian solidarity. The farmers re-focused the emphasis of the yeoman identity from the qualities of independence, self-sufficiency, and individualism to qualities that stressed the farmers’ engagement with society in their personae as revolutionaries and stewards. Thus, the yeomanry was not just an aggregate of isolated yeomen unentangled with each other or their fellow citizens; they were a collective bound together through their responsibilities to the people.

The farmers, by transferring many of the positive aspects of the yeoman identity to their class as a whole, retained the potency of the agrarian myth without having to commit to its attending isolation and individualism. As revolutionaries, the farmers drew upon the power and prestige of the founding fathers to fight the tyranny of organized capital. As stewards, the farmers drew upon the gift of their calling and the grave responsibility of their civic duty to defend the principles of republican democracy against oppression. Through the bright vision, the farmers were actors in the grand sweep of

⁵⁵ Slosson, “The Position Agriculture Should Occupy,” *Western Rural*, April 5, 105.

history, possessing both the power and the prestige with which they could wield control over their own lives and achieve the promises that past generations had left unfulfilled.

Juxtaposing the Visions: Constituting the Agricultural Class

By drawing on the legacy of the American Revolution, the agrarian myth, and the rhetoric of class, movement rhetoric juxtaposed the bright and dark visions to empower the farmers to constitute themselves as the agricultural class, an organized collective identity with the political and economic power to defeat organized capital and overthrow its system of oppression.

Frame of acceptance. By placing the movement into the great sweep of history, the farmers put themselves into a position to bring the bright vision closer to fruition. As revolutionaries, the farmers sought to overthrow their oppressors and destroy their political and economic systems of oppression. As stewards of the people, they sought to defend democracy by destroying the political system that corrupted government and oppressed the people.

Juxtaposing the visions was at the heart of the motivational power of Granger movement rhetoric. Through their mutual identification and agrarian solidarity as shaped by their revolutionary vigor and attentive stewardship, the farmers had found a collective identity that granted them enormous political and economic power. The amalgamated persona of the “revolutionary steward” drew the intensity and energy of the farmers’ rejection of the dark vision into the bright vision’s affirmation of the American farmers’ exceptionalism and power, created a rounded statement of the farmers’ motives through a frame of acceptance rather than a frame of rejection. Burke defined a frame of acceptance as “the more or less organized system of meanings by which a thinking man gauges the

historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it.”⁵⁶ A frame of acceptance is a fuller statement of motivation than a frame of rejection because it not only states what one is *against*, it also states what one is *for* and who one *is*—it is a declaration of identity, a constitutive act. The juxtaposition of the bright vision and the dark vision was a complete statement of motives, a declaration of who the farmers were, what their interests were, in addition to what they opposed.

In the dark vision, the essence of the farmers’ identity was their devotion to agrarian individualism, which left them open to oppression by organized capital. Paradoxically, it was the farmers’ allegiance to their yeoman-esque independence and self-sufficiency that brought them closest to becoming the yeoman’s antithesis. In the bright vision, the farmers became the agricultural class, a collective identity empowered to assert its political and economic independence from organized capital. Thus, the constitutive choice presented to farmers through the juxtaposition of visions was to retain their individual yeoman identity and suffer greater oppression, or to unite and fight. Movement leaders and members presented this choice again and again throughout the movement. S. M. Smith declared in 1874 that vassalage to corporations “becomes in the end too terrible to bear, yet being too firmly established to be peacefully overcome, [and] must end either in revolution or continued slavery.”⁵⁷ Echoed one *Prairie Farmer* contributor in early 1873: “If we would not be reduced to serfs, or become tenants at will

⁵⁶ Burke, *Attitudes toward History*, 3-4.

⁵⁷ S. M. Smith, “Address of S. M. Smith to the Farmers of Woodford Co., Illinois, at Roanoke, July 4, 1874,” *Industrial Age*, July 11, 1874, 2.

upon our farms, let us avail ourselves of the opportunity and boldly step forward and declare that our rights shall be observed, and our interests protected.”⁵⁸

Thus, movement rhetoric empowered farmers to draw upon the stark contrast between the visions to frame their alternatives between the two worlds and the identities that each world offered. The shift of hierarchic principles between the visions grounded the farmers’ transformation from yeoman farmers as “slave” to the American agricultural class as collective actor. This class was diametrically opposed to “the other” of organized capital, aligned with the American people, and empowered to overthrow the current system of oppression in order to return the nation to its founding principles. Before an audience of Grange members, Flagg defined the struggle in these transcendent terms:

The question is whether you and I are to be freemen or the serfs of corporations; whether these States and this nation are to be governed by the capital or corporation, or by the unbought votes of the men who create wealth. It is an irrepressible conflict, and the higher law, the Declaration of Independence and the Granges are all on one side.⁵⁹

Thus, the constitutive power of Granger movement rhetoric came from the juxtaposition of the bright and dark visions. The nexus of this juxtaposition centered upon what farmers did in the *present*—how the farmers in the 1870s would respond to their oppression. Much of this depended on the form that their collective identity would take.

Class identity. Through the rhetoric of class, the farmers saw the late nineteenth century as the age of class struggle. By juxtaposing the visions, the farmers pitted the wealth and might of organized capital against the masses, consisting largely of farmers,

⁵⁸ Nelson, “Qualification,” *Prairie Farmer*, February 22, 1873, 59.

⁵⁹ Flagg, “Mr. Flagg’s Address at Madison,” *Industrial Age*, March 7, 1874, 2.

workers, artisans, and other members of the producing classes. In doing so, the farmers drew the lines of class struggle. Framed within the bright vision, organized capital's oppressive political and economic system not only was a violation of the ideals of the Revolution, but it created class tensions through "a tyranny worse than that from which our fathers emancipated themselves by the War of the Revolution; for it is to the corruption of our political system that we owe most, if not all, the evils of which we complain, a system that protects one class of people at the expense of others, and wrings millions from the sons of toil to enrich a few."⁶⁰ A sense of class identity enabled each class to assert its power to promote and protect its own interests. The self-proclaimed purpose of the ISFA, for example, was "the promotion of the moral, intellectual, social, and pecuniary welfare of the farmers of Illinois."⁶¹ Thus, the farmers saw the 1870s as a time of growing class consciousness in which individuals bound themselves to one another through mutual identification based on class interests. "Farmers as a class are being awakened generally in an interest in their rights and needs," one writer declared.⁶² A member of an independent farmers' club was optimistic that the movement would grow because "the farmers are waking up to their own interests."⁶³

⁶⁰ S. M. Smith, "Address of the Hon. S. M. Smith at Pontiac, Illinois," *Chicago Tribune*, July 5, 1873, 5.

⁶¹ ISFA, *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, Bloomington, Ill., January 15-16, 1873, 64.

⁶² Emerson, "Patrons and Clubs, and Clubbing at Home," *Western Rural*, April 27, 1872, 505.

⁶³ "Farmers' Club in Wethersfield, Illinois," *Western Rural*, April 6, 1872, 481.

Juxtaposing the visions also drew out the potential for hierarchical reversal. When seen through the frame of the bright vision, the dark vision's class hierarchy violated the key tenets of the bright vision. In the bright vision, the farmer "is the foundation of all prosperity in the state"; however, in the dark vision, the farmer "is, himself, the least prosperous of all."⁶⁴ As Flagg declared in late 1874: "In all this historical period, though agriculture in the abstract has been held in high repute, the peasant or farmer has been regarded as either the actual slave or serf, or the legitimate object of commercial spoliation."⁶⁵ In the bright vision, this class hierarchy would be reversed:

This is a free country, in theory—based on the doctrine of the equal rights of all men; and whenever we can base our legislation, and, as a consequence, our executive action and our judicial decisions squarely and unmistakably on that idea, the privileged classes that we have built up by anti-republicanism, and undemocratic politics will disappear.⁶⁶

By drawing on the rhetoric of class and upon the motivations of agricultural and political stewardship, farmers united the interests of the movement with the interests of the people. This further advanced the hierarchic reversal from the dark to the bright vision. The agricultural class was the representative class of the bright vision's present, the class that did not pit its class interests against the people but which identified its class interests with the people's interests as the stewards of the people. The well-being of the farmers was vital to the health and well-being society. In a letter read before the

⁶⁴ "Cincinnatus," "The Profits of Farming," *Prairie Farmer*, January 11, 1873, 9.

⁶⁵ Flagg, "The Political Economy of the Farmer," *Prairie Farmer*, October 3, 1874, 315.

⁶⁶ Flagg, "State Railway Legislation," *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Decatur, Ill., December 16-18, 1873, 33.

Minnesota State Grange, *Prairie Farmer* editor W. W. Corbett further linked the interests of the agricultural class and the people's welfare:

We, as PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY, have united for common good and for common protection. We are to protect our own interests, because we know that our interests are fundamental, that our prosperity means the prosperity of the nation. We know that justice to us as producers, means no injustice to others. We trample on no man's just rights, never have and never shall; let us resolve to have no man or corporation trample upon ours.⁶⁷

By “universalizing” the motives of the agricultural class to both encompass and represent the motives of the American people, movement rhetoric gave farmers the political and moral legitimacy to fight organized capital in the name of the people. Thus, the juxtaposition of the visions constituted the farmers as a class with all the attendant strengths and qualities of class identity and set up the lines of class struggle between the farmers and organized capital. As a class, then, the farmers needed a means to further their mutual identification and coordinate class action—they had to organize.

Organization. Movement rhetoric framed the 1870s as an “age of association” in which classes had to organize if they were to wield power and achieve success. “Association is the genius of this age and the distinguishing feature of these times. All enterprises, moral or mercenary, adopt this potent principle; without it success is impossible,” declared Charles E. Barney in early 1873.⁶⁸ “Organization is the watchword of every enterprise,” echoed a *Prairie Farmer* contributor. “Organized effort builds railroads, establishes steamship lines, controls Legislatures, moves Congress... Every

⁶⁷ Corbett, in Kelley, *Origin and Progress*, 258.

⁶⁸ Barney, “In Bureau County,” *Prairie Farmer*, February 1, 1873, 35.

class of men with whom intelligence is the moving force, have not been slow to avail themselves of a power which...when agitated, [is] well nigh irresist[i]ble.”⁶⁹ Or, as James Creed simply put it to fellow farmers in 1873: “Organization is power, its opposite is weakness.”⁷⁰ Through the framing of organization as the power to create change in the world—to build, to control, and to succeed—farmers had found a weapon with which they could effectively challenge the oppression of organized capital. “Let the power of the organized tillers of the soil, the very sinews of the country, be felt by the railroads, commercial centres, and legislative bodies of the country, until we have gained that high position of influence that God and Nature intended for us.”⁷¹

By framing the power of organization as the power to create change in the world—to build, to control, and to succeed—farmers turned to organizing as a way to respond to their material conditions according to the requirements of the “age of association.” Organized as the agricultural class, farmers could translate their unique class persona as revolutionaries and stewards into economic and political power. Otherwise, Wheeler asked of his fellow farmers in 1870, “What avails our strength if, like Polyphemus in the fable, we are unable to use it for want of eyesight; or, like a mighty army without discipline, every man fighting on his own hook; or, worse, reposing in fancied security while Delilahs of the enemy have well nigh shorn away the last lock

⁶⁹ “Husbandman,” “Plea for Organization Among Farmers,” *Prairie Farmer*, March 16, 1872, 81.

⁷⁰ Creed, *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers’ Association*, Decatur, Ill., December 17, 1873, 117.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

of strength?” Without organization, farmers could do little with the power and advantages they already possessed. Organized, however, Wheeler asked: “My friends, what can we *not* do? What power can withstand the combined and concentrated force of the producing interest of this Republic?”⁷²

The power of the agricultural producing class could be wielded to bring oppressive forces into line. Organized as a class, farmers could draw upon the motivations of the agrarian myth—agricultural fundamentalism and the image of the independent yeoman—to translate their agricultural stewardship into economic power. “Should the farmers of a country withhold for a single season the produce of their labors,” Periam declared, then “manufactures, trade, commerce, and every other industry would languish and lie prone in the dust. A wail would go up such as has not been heard since the seven lean seasons of Egypt.”⁷³ Organized, the farmers could wield the power of economic “life and death” as leverage against the oppression of organized capital. Other classes “cannot live without corn,” S. M. Smith declared. “They cannot eat dry goods and nails, while we can be self-supporting on a farm, and there is where we have got the advantage, for we can make our farms support us, as they did when I was a boy, when we spun linen and made or raised everything we used. They must have our products, and the power to fix a price upon them is in our hands the moment we get ready for it, and that within a year, if we are wise in this matter.”⁷⁴ Here, not only could

⁷² Wheeler, “The Transportation Question,” *Prairie Farmer*, March 26, 1870, 89. See also Periam, *Groundswell*, 225-27.

⁷³ Periam, *Groundswell*, 90.

⁷⁴ Smith, “Address,” *Industrial Age*, Sept. 20, 1873, 3.

organization transformed the farmers' producing ability into economic power, it also transformed individual self-sufficiency into a powerful strategy for wielding class power.

Organized as a class, farmers could translate their political stewardship into political power with which they could challenge organized capital. The numbers of the agricultural class far surpassed the membership of other classes; combined with the full membership of all producing classes, they outnumbered non-producers more than three to one. W. C. Flagg calculated that

of every 10 men in the United States, 5 will be engaged in farming, 2 in some kind of mechanical or mining industry, 1 in trade and transportation, and 2 in professional and personal service. 7 men out of every ten, or nearly so, are directly and actually producers, engaged in growing grain, fattening cattle, making chairs and plows, and digging iron ore and coal. Strictly speaking, some of those put down in the list of professional and personal service are, or may be, producers, and might run up the list of actual producers to 75 per cent. of the population.⁷⁵

The numerical superiority of the agricultural class alone could be wielded with great effect during elections; combined with other producing classes, that power could be enormous. Smith argued that once the farmers organized, "we shall be able to speak...with such authority of numbers, that our law-makers, both in the State and National Councils, will be very apt to hear and to heed the expression of our will."⁷⁶

Through organization, the numerical advantage could translate into the necessary political power for farmers to overthrow organized capital's oppression. "This nation was not formed to be run by moneyed corporations. My liberties and yours are not to be

⁷⁵ Flagg, "The Present Condition of the Producing Classes.—The Causes and the Remedy," *Industrial Age*, April 4, 1874, 2.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Proceedings of the Illinois Farmers' State Convention*, Bloomington, Ill., January 15-16, 1873, 6.

bartered and sold by careless or venal legislators; and the government of this state and nation must be in the interests of liberty and the people.”⁷⁷ When government did not serve the interests of their constituents or of the people at large, the farmers sought to remove the corrupt officers *en masse*: “The only remedy for the grievances of the farming community is a radical one—the substitution, in large degree, of farmers’ representatives in our legislatures, State and National, for the present cliques of lawyers and politicians.”⁷⁸ Thus, by invoking the rhetorical power of agricultural and political stewardship, producer superiority, numerical advantage, and democratic action—all as activated through class organization—movement rhetoric reversed the class hierarchy of the dark vision.

The farmers, then, organized as a class and drawing upon their overwhelming advantage in numbers, were in position to restore the government of the founding fathers. However, coordinating the electoral power of the agricultural class was not enough to challenge the entrenched power of organized capital operating through the political parties. The farmers had to address a major obstacle that stood in their path: the powerful influence of the political parties and the corrupt political system they reinforced and sustained. The ability to vote someone in or out of office was diminished if the only candidates to choose from are selected in nominating processes orchestrated by corrupt political party leadership. To restore government to its proper role as envisioned by the founding fathers, to obey the will of the people as that will was determined through

⁷⁷ Flagg, “Aim and Scope of the Farmers’ Movement,” Pamphlet. Chicago: *Prairie Farmer*, 1873, 7.

⁷⁸ Periam, *Groundswell*, 82.

democratic means, farmers had to break themselves and the people free from the corrupting influence of the political system. For the farmers to use their political stewardship to challenge organized capital, they first had to declare their independence from the corruption of political parties by forming their own political organizations and nominating their own candidates.

Answering the calls to action as the agricultural class. To restore government, the farmers had to declare their independence from past political connections and independently nominate and elect their own candidates. In January 1873, the Livingston County Farmers' Association declared

that we hereby pledge ourselves, *regardless of former party prejudices or predilection*, to vote for no man for office who is opposed to us on this [railroad] question, and to support and sustain those who are in our favor and opposed to the railroad monopolies [emphasis added].⁷⁹

In May 1873, the Livingston association took a further step toward political independence. "Believing that past experience has taught us that we can hope for no relief from either political party," the association decided that it was "both prudent and advisable that, for the purposes of future action, a more thorough and perfect organization be formed in this county to carry out the various questions of reform which are so intimately connected with our material and political existence." The association then called for a county convention, independent of the political parties, to nominate candidates for county offices in the November county elections.⁸⁰ Throughout the year, other local organizations followed suit. In the November 1873 county elections, the

⁷⁹ "Livingston Co. Farmers' Association," *Prairie Farmer*, January 18, 1873, 19.

⁸⁰ *Prairie Farmer*, June 14, 1873, 187.

tickets directly nominated by agricultural organizations won in 53 of the 66 counties in which they fielded candidates. In other counties, the farmers helped to elect Republican and Democratic candidates who proclaimed their sympathies with the interests of the agricultural class.⁸¹

Further, to restore government, the farmers had to declare their political independence by ultimately creating their own independent political party. During the ISFA's second convention in December 1873, the convention delegates passed a set of resolutions later known as the "Decatur Platform." The platform rejected the political parties outright: "The recent record of the old political parties of this country is such as to forfeit the confidence and respect of the people. We are therefore absolved from all allegiance to them, and should act no longer with them."⁸² Thus, by the close of 1873, the members of the ISFA had fully rejected the established political parties and announced their intentions to assert their political independence through new political associations.

The Decatur platform later became the ideological basis for a new political party in Illinois. The ISFA called for a convention in Springfield on June 10, 1874, to form an independent political party and nominate candidates. At that convention, Illinois farmers and their allies, led by the ISFA, formed the Independent Reform Party (IRP) and invited all who opposed organized capital to join. By this time, the farmers and their allies had clearly decided that the existing two-party system no longer—if it had ever—served their

⁸¹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 86; "Agricultural Organization," 13-14.

⁸² *Proceedings of the Second Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Decatur, Ill., December 16-18, 1873, 108.

interests. The IRP adopted a Declaration of Principles in which they rejected the old political system:

Our government is founded solely upon the consent of the people, and its powers are subject to their control. The evils we now live under have resulted from the acts of unfaithful representatives, who have set the interests of party above that of the people. These evils are chiefly displayed in our monetary system and the monopolies which it has engendered; this system being monarchical in its principles and subversive of Republican Government. And as experience demonstrates that we can have no hope of reform from existing political parties, it becomes our imperative duty to organize a new party, to the end that we may resist the encroachments of the money power upon the rights of the people, stay the tide of corruption and extravagance which overflows the land, and place the control of the resources and finances of the country in the hands of the people. We therefore establish the Independent party...⁸³

Ultimately, the IRP adopted the ISFA's "Decatur Platform" with minor changes. This platform sought a broader constituency than the agricultural class, claiming that the party spoke for "the farmers, mechanics, laboring men, and other citizens of Illinois" and would take independent political action on behalf of "the producing, industrial and other business classes, and in opposition to the corporate monopolies that are influencing and even controlling our Legislatures, Courts and Executives, and oppressing our citizens."⁸⁴

Granger Movement Rhetoric and the Farmers' Declaration as Representative Anecdote

In this chapter, I claimed that the movement constituted Illinois farmers as the agricultural class by using a framework that juxtaposed two antithetical visions of the of the farmers' material conditions. By drawing upon the rhetoric of class, the legacy of the American Revolution, and the agrarian myth, Granger movement rhetoric empowered

⁸³ "Declaration of Principles of the Independent Party," *Industrial Age*, July 24, 1875, 4.

⁸⁴ "The Illinois Independent Reform State Convention," *Industrial Age*, June 13, 1874, 5.

Illinois farmers as agents of change by adapting and reinvigorating the American farmers' mythic role in the nation's political and economic life.

Furthermore, the essence of the constitutive power of Granger movement rhetoric was revealed in the form and language of the Farmers' Declaration of Independence. The representative anecdote as critical method offered a powerful explanation of the relationship between the Farmers' Declaration and Granger movement rhetoric based on the comparison of the internal dynamics of the Farmers' Declaration. However, the representative anecdote as a critical method was insufficient, in and of itself, to fully understand the constitutive power of Granger movement rhetoric. Fuller insight in to the constitutive power of Granger movement rhetoric came from combining the representative anecdote with a broader examination of the contextual qualities of movement rhetoric. By comparing the findings from the third chapter on the Farmers' Declaration and this chapter, I will briefly underscore the insights that emerged from the critical examination of the Farmers' Declaration and the broader sample of Granger movement rhetoric.

Antithetical visions. The underlying motivational power of both the Farmers' Declaration and Granger movement rhetoric came from the power of juxtaposing antithetical visions—one dark, one bright—based on similar hierarchies of principles. In essence, the battle enjoined through the juxtaposition of these visions pitted equality against inequality and freedom against oppression. Both the Farmers' Declaration and Granger movement rhetoric valorized the form of government and society symbolized by the legacy of the American Revolution as embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

Both blamed the corruption of government on the corruption of its officers and the corruption of the processes of selecting those officers rather than on the form of government itself. Both advocated political independence as the call to action to free the farmers and the people from the oppression of organized capital. In essence, then, the constitutive act invoked in the Farmers' Declaration—to transform an oppressed class of people (in movement rhetoric, the farmers themselves) into collective agents of change empowered to assert their political independence—was the constitutive act invoked in movement rhetoric.

Role of the farmers. In the Farmers' Declaration, the role of the farmers was embodied in the document's protagonist, the "producing classes." The producing classes were the agent of change in the Farmers' Declaration; the agricultural class was the agent of change in Granger movement rhetoric. Both protagonists had accepted the mantle of responsibility in protecting the people from the oppression and abuses of monopolistic forces. However, the Farmers' Declaration did not offer explicit justifications for this move. Although the formal elements of the farmers' role was clearly expressed in the Farmers' Declaration, it took the fullness of Granger movement rhetoric to develop the richness of this move through the transformation of the agrarian myth to fit the contingencies of the late nineteenth century. For the Farmers' Declaration to fully serve as the representative constitutive act of the Granger movement, Granger movement rhetoric teased out the implications of the Farmers' Declaration and made them explicit through the examination of contextual elements. Thus, in a formal sense, the basic structure of Granger movement rhetoric was revealed in the close reading of the Farmers'

Declaration, but as a constitutive act, the Farmers' Declaration had to draw heavily on the discursive context created by Granger movement rhetoric.

Contextual strands of American public discourse. As I have argued throughout this chapter, Granger movement rhetoric drew upon three important contextual strands of American public discourse to constitute the farmers as agents of change: the American Revolution, the agrarian myth, and the rhetoric of class. In the Farmers' Declaration, only one of these strands was fully developed. As an alternative Declaration of Independence, the Farmers' Declaration expressed the power of the American Revolution's legacy through the language and form of the original Declaration of Independence. The influence of the agrarian myth and the rhetoric of class, however, were more tenuous.

Those influences, however, are present in the structure of the Farmers' Declaration in its tracing of the relationship between the protagonist and the people. As Granger movement rhetoric emphasized the farmers' stewardship as a motivation to challenge the actions of organized capital, the Farmers' Declaration motivated the producing classes to adopt the power and responsibility of the people to challenge the railroad monopoly. It was through this implicit stewardship that the Farmers' Declaration interweaved the agrarian myth into its motivational structure.

Through the use of the "producing classes" as its protagonist, the Farmers' Declaration drew upon the hierarchical and antithetical power of the rhetoric of class and the agrarian myth to give the producing classes a sense of formal power. As such, the Farmers' Declaration implicitly invoked the motivational power of those contextual strands, weaving the producer-capital distinction into the mix and implicitly drawing in

the agrarian myth through the concept of stewardship in the ideology of agricultural fundamentalism. Again, however, the full constitutive power of the Farmers' Declaration could not be invoked without the infusion of discursive context provided by the entirety of Granger movement rhetoric.

Thus, an examination of the Farmers' Declaration as representative anecdote alone could not fully draw out the motivational implications of contextual strands of American public discourse. Simply examining the Farmers' Declaration as the central constitutive act of the Granger movement without properly examining the larger context of movement discourse and the even larger context of American public discourse would offer only a partial explanation of the constitutive power of the Farmers' Declaration. While a close textual analysis of the form of the Farmers' Declaration granted important insights into the motivational power of the Granger movement, it is essential for the critic to oscillate between the anecdote itself, the contextual richness of movement discourse, and the larger rhetorical contexts of the culture to fully examine the power of social movement rhetoric as a constitutive act.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

We hereby declare ourselves absolutely free and independent of all past political connections, and that we will give our suffrage only to such men for office, from the lowest officer in the state to the president of the United States, as we have good reason to believe will use their best endeavors to the promotion of these ends; and for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

—The Farmers' Declaration of Independence of 1873

The Granger movement successfully, but briefly, organized farmers into the agricultural class, a collective political actor with the power to resist the forces of organized capital. Even as the movement lost momentum toward the end of the 1870s, its leaders still saw a bright future for the farmers and the people despite slumping membership. In January 1877, President W. C. Flagg of the Illinois State Farmers' Association (ISFA) declared to delegates at the fifth and final ISFA convention that the Association, even though dwindling in numbers, was still doing important work:

Upon this corner-stone [of equal rights] are to be raised the grand social and political structures of the future. They are now remote possibilities—gorgeous glimpses of a golden age, such as poets have dreamed of, but that practical workers have hardly hoped. But it is by practical every day effort that men individually and collectively are to be raised to a higher plane of equal, co-operative and fraternal life. This is the work in which this Association is engaged.¹

Flagg's vision of that bright future, to be made real by the hard and conscientious work of the Association, appeared undimmed. His faith in the inexorable advance toward an egalitarian society still held sway. Although he would not live long enough to see the movement fully transform into the broader Greenback and Alliance movements, Flagg had already served his fellow farmers in several capacities as state legislator, teacher,

¹ Flagg, "Address," *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Springfield, Ill., January 23-25, 1877, 5.

editor, movement leader, president of both the ISFA and the National Agricultural Congress, trustee of the Illinois Industrial University, and agriculturalist.²

Secretary S. M. Smith, perhaps a little more jaded and practical about the ISFA's status, also saw the Association's work—whether its best years had passed or remained to be realized—leading toward a grand vision of the future:

The great principles which brought our Association into being have been steadily growing in the minds of the people, and, while not as demonstrative in expression as when our so-called "farmers movement" originated, there is observable among all classes, an undercurrent of sentiment more decidedly in sympathy with our objects, and amongst our own people a stronger determination that the motto of our Association, "Equal and exact justice to all men," shall be made practical.³

Here, too, the purpose of the ISFA would be realized eventually, perhaps not in its present form, but through the dissemination of its grand message amongst the people.

Smith, although first and foremost a practical farmer, was at this time already an important figure in the Greenback movement and would continue the work he began in 1872 when he issued the call for the convention that, ultimately, led to the genesis of the ISFA.

In this concluding chapter, I summarize the findings of this study, briefly overview what happened to the Granger movement after 1875, and then discuss some general implications of this study on the Granger movement's broader influence on later movements.

² For more on Flagg's career, see Periam, *Groundswell*, chap. 33, "Biographical Sketch of Hon. W. C. Flagg." Flagg died March 30, 1878, in Moro, Ill.

³ Smith, in *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers' Association*, Springfield, Ill., January 23-25, 1877, 8.

Summary of the Study

At the outset of this study, I set out to explain how Granger movement rhetoric transformed relatively powerless Illinois farmers into powerful agents of change in a time of great social, political, and economic change. In this study, I argued that the answer to this question was that Granger movement rhetoric constituted Illinois farmers as powerful agents of change by transforming them from individual actors into the agricultural class, a powerful collective identity motivated for political and economic action. To support this claim, I drew upon the perspective of constitutive rhetoric to understand the identity-building power of Granger movement rhetoric.

In my review of the scholarly literature about the Granger movement and other nineteenth century American farmers' movements, I claimed that the implications of this literature warranted deeper study of the rhetorical construction of the American farmers' identity in the Granger movement. I identified three significant implications from that review. First, as a whole, the literature underestimated the Granger movement's influence in shaping later farmers' movements and on the relationships between government, corporations, and the people. Second, the bulk of the scholarship on late nineteenth century American farmers, taken as a whole, portrayed the farmers' identity as fragmented and paradoxical and their agency as often diffused and ineffectual. Finally, adopting a mythic perspective to examine the American farmers' identity and agency offered the most fruitful path to study the rhetorical strategies of American farmers' movements.

In the second chapter, I framed the Granger movement within its historical and mythical contexts. I claimed that competing American myths led the farmers to a crisis of

identity, a crisis that framed their material, social, political, and economic conditions in the 1870s and set up the context for the Granger movement. An important aspect of this context was the power of the agrarian myth in shaping the American farmers' identity.

In the third chapter, I examined the most important rhetorical document of the Granger movement in Illinois, the Farmers' Declaration of Independence of 1873. The Farmers' Declaration played an essential role in crafting the Illinois farmers' identity as collective agents of change, as members of the "producing classes" empowered to enact political reform. By adapting the form and the power of the Declaration of Independence to address the farmers' material conditions, the Farmers' Declaration motivated political reform by juxtaposing antithetical visions of the farmers' situation. Through this juxtaposition, the Farmers' Declaration positioned the railroad monopoly's oppressive acts in opposition to American principles; constructed a protagonist motivated to challenge the railroad monopoly's power; and prescribed what the protagonist must do to end the railroad monopoly's oppression. As an alternative Declaration of Independence, the Farmers' Declaration was representative of the motivational power of the movement itself, offering important insights into the constitutive power of Granger movement rhetoric.

In the fourth chapter, I examined the rhetoric of the Granger movement in light of my analysis of the Farmers' Declaration. By juxtaposing two antithetical visions of the farmers' material conditions, movement rhetoric created a narrative that empowered Illinois farmers to see the dire consequences of their agrarian individualism and to constitute themselves as a class that could adequately respond to their material

conditions. These antithetical visions drew upon the motivational power of three strands of American public discourse: the rhetoric of class, the agrarian myth, and the legacy of the American Revolution. The first vision portrayed the world “as it is” through a narrative that enabled Illinois farmers to see their material conditions as a pervasive system of oppression in which they were complicit. The second vision depicted the world “as it ought to be” through a narrative that enabled the farmers to transform their oppression into a brighter future grounded in America’s founding principles.

In both the Farmers’ Declaration and Granger movement rhetoric, the juxtaposition of the visions culminated in a crisis of identity, drawing the farmers into a strategic moment of choice in which they had to choose either slavery or independence, to continue as victims of oppression or embrace a class identity that would empower them to create a future in which the promise of America’s core principles would be fulfilled. Illinois farmers chose the latter, constituting themselves as the agricultural class and supporting the efforts of the ISFA and other movement leaders to declare political independence from the corrupt political system by creating their own independent political party to assert their class interests.

The Granger Movement, 1875 and Beyond

Nationwide, the Grange hit its peak in 1873 and 1874 and began to rapidly decline in membership in early 1875. In January 1875, the number of subordinate Granges in the United States was at its highest point, almost 22,000. By 1880, the Grange had dropped to around 4,000 subordinate Granges and approximately 150,000 members

nationwide.⁴ Membership in the Illinois State Grange also declined rapidly. By the State Grange's third annual meeting in January 1875, the secretary reported that Illinois had chartered around 1,500 subordinate Granges, although one quarter of that number had ceased to pay dues or submit regular reports.⁵ By December 1876, the secretary noted that of the 1,600 subordinate Grange charters issued since the founding of the State Grange in 1872, over half were dormant, no longer reporting or paying dues.⁶ By mid-1876, there were only 12,000 active Grange members in Illinois.⁷

After the 1870s, the Grange survived as a national organization, but with greatly reduced strength. It never again served as the vanguard of the American farmers' movement. However, the Order's social and educational purpose kept it strong, and the National Grange today is a vocal advocate for the interests of American farmers.

The ISFA did not fare so well. The formation of the Independent Reform Party (IRP) in June 1874 marked the apogee of the ISFA's political achievement and of the Granger movement itself as a political crusade in Illinois. The IRP culminated the work of the Association by marking the farmers' political independence from the major political parties. Of course, the leaders of the ISFA, along with many Illinois farmers, did not see the IRP as the final step along the path to a brighter future. However, changes in

⁴ Buck, *Granger Movement*, table between 58-59, 70.

⁵ Fanning, *Proceedings of the State Grange of Illinois at the Third Annual Session*, Springfield, Ill., January 12-15, 1875, 15-16.

⁶ Chambers, *Proceedings of the State Grange of Illinois at the Fifth Annual Session*, Decatur, Ill., December 12-15, 1876, 19-21.

⁷ Buck, *Granger Movement*, table between 58-59.

material conditions and the rise of the Greenback movement, which sought different solutions to the oppression of organized capital, moved the focus of American farmers' movements to the national stage. As the Greenback movement grew, the ISFA and the IRP became less central to the general movement and faded into the background.

At the June 1874 convention in Springfield, the Independent Reform Party nominated two candidates for the state's highest offices up for election that year: David Gore for state treasurer and S. M. Etter for superintendent of schools. Independent Reformers and other independents also nominated candidates for congressional races. In August, the Illinois Democrats also nominated Etter for superintendent of schools as a "fusion" candidate. In the November elections, Etter won the superintendent election by a wide margin with the support of both Independent Reformers and Democrats. In the state treasurer race, Gore, the IRP candidate, placed third with 80,000 votes. That number, the *Industrial Age* proclaimed, if added to the several thousand farmers who would have voted for Gore had they not been busy tending their farms, meant that the Independent Reform party could boast over 85,000 members. In the Illinois congressional elections, Republicans won in seven districts, Democrats in eight, Independent Reformers in three, and an independent Republican won one seat. In the Illinois General Assembly, the Republicans lost their long-standing majority and the Independent Reformers secured the balance of power between Republicans and Democrats with three senators and twenty-seven representatives.⁸

⁸ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 94-102; "The People and the Old Parties," *Industrial Age*, November 22, 1873, 4.

For a while, then, the Independent Reform party in Illinois managed to stay free of the old parties and secured a few victories in local elections. Ultimately, the IRP joined with its counterpart in Indiana to play an important role in forming the National Independent (Greenback) Party. In 1875, the ISFA sent delegates to the various “Greenback” conventions in Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Harrisburg, Pa. S. M. Smith, who had embraced the Greenback financial philosophy as early as 1873, attended many of the party meetings in 1874 and 1875. Another prominent ISFA figure, M. M. Hooton, was also an outspoken Greenbacker. In November 1875, Smith, who was then chairman of the joint committee of the party, actively participated in coordinating the May 1876 party convention in Indianapolis. Smith was “an energetic organizer,” pulling farmers, labor leaders, and prominent businessmen into the movement.⁹

The 1876 presidential election was disastrous for the Greenback movement.¹⁰ The Indianapolis convention nominated Peter Cooper as their candidate and various twists and turns doomed Cooper’s chances of winning almost from the start. The election led to an electoral college stalemate between the Republican and Democratic candidates. In Illinois, enough Independents and Greenbackers were elected to the Illinois General Assembly to hold the balance of power between the major parties. One consequence of this result was Judge David Davis’ election to the U. S. Senate as an Independent, which apparently had ramifications on the outcome of the 1876 presidential election. The

⁹ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 94-102; Unger, *Greenback Era*, 229-30, 233, 295-305.

¹⁰ See Unger, *Greenback Era*, chap. 9, “The Election of 1876.”

Greenback Party continued on, although it failed to gain much influence at the national level.¹¹

Although some of its members were active in the Greenback movement, the ISFA itself did not survive the decline of the Granger movement. After much of its energy was spent entering politics and forming independent state and national political parties, the Association lingered until 1877. The proceedings of its fifth annual meeting in January 1877 was likely the last official record of the ISFA as an active organization. The *Industrial Age*, for a time the “organ” of the ISFA, was already in trouble, publishing issues sporadically in 1876. The *Industrial Age*’s last issue was February 24, 1877, another victim of the presidential election of 1876.¹²

The stark disagreements over Greenback financial policies was one reason why many Illinois farmers who were active in the Granger movement did not make the transition into the Greenback Party. Prominent movement leaders such as W. C. Flagg and Dudley W. Adams, Master of the National Grange, refused to support “paper money” policies.¹³ Thus, the Independent Reform Party’s shift from anti-monopolism and reform to specific Greenback financial measures doomed its chances to form its own national party. “No political party can survive a presidential campaign without a national organization,” Buck argued. When the Greenback Party absorbed the Illinois IRP, it

¹¹ Davis’ political affiliation in the Tilden-Hayes controversy in 1876-77 indirectly resulted in Hayes winning the presidential election. See Buck, *Granger Movement*, n. 4, 98-99.

¹² See Unger, *Greenback Era*, chap. 9, “The Election of 1876.”

¹³ Unger, *Greenback Era*, 338.

prevented any chance for a national Reform party movement to spring up. Even if the IRP had succeeded in forming a national party apart from the Greenbackers, Buck argued, the issue of “reform” was not powerful enough to sustain the transition into national politics.¹⁴

Thus, the political energy of the Granger movement was either transferred to larger third party movements or to the major parties themselves. Many members of the Grange, the ISFA, and other farmers’ organizations helped to build these regionally strong, but nationally weak, independent political parties to advocate measures the Democratic and Republican Parties would not, at first, adopt. These third parties briefly wielded influence in local and state elections, but nationally, they failed to attract a substantial membership and eventually folded.¹⁵ Many Grange and ISFA members eventually returned to the Democratic or Republican parties.¹⁶

Scholars have provided a variety of explanations for the decline of the Granger movement. While these accounts are informative, they do not tell the whole story. After a brief summary of the explanations for the movement’s downfall in the scholarly literature, I will offer some conjecture of the movement’s dissipation from a constitutive rhetoric perspective.

¹⁴ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 101-102.

¹⁵ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 85-102; Haynes, *Third Party Movements*, part 1, “The Farmers’ Movement,” and part 2, “The Greenback Movement”; Unger, *Greenback Era*, chap. 6, “The Farmer.”

¹⁶ Pickering, “Agrarian Revolt.”

Historians have offered several reasons for the decline of the Grange, the ISFA, and the Granger movement in general. First, the economy briefly improved toward the end of the 1870s and Illinois farmers began to receive better prices for their produce, eliminating one reason why some farmers had joined the movement. Second, many farmers had joined the Grange to challenge the railroads and, with the passage of the Granger laws, they left because they felt that they had achieved their goal. Others, however, left when they perceived that the laws were ineffective and often poorly enforced. Third, many of the cooperative programs led some subordinate, county, and state Granges to form unwise buying cooperatives and manufacturing ventures. In the late 1870s and early 1880s, many of these cooperatives failed through bad management and lack of money. Thus, those farmers interested in the Grange's work in business cooperation left when the cooperatives died. "On the whole, in spite of occasional remarkable successes," wrote Buck, the "attempt of the American farmer to regain his economic independence by taking upon himself the business of the middleman, the capitalist, the manufacturer, and the banker, through cooperative organization, was a failure."¹⁷

Other key reasons why Midwestern farmers left the Grange emerged from their dissatisfaction with the National Grange itself, which had not lived up to its many expectations. True to their independent and individualistic natures, some farmers were hostile toward, and suspicious of, the National Grange's central authority and accused the

¹⁷ Buck, *Granger Movement*, 275.

officers of the State and National Granges of hoarding money and giving themselves extravagant salaries and perks.

Many Grangers were frustrated with the National Grange's reluctance to directly address their most immediate economic and political problems. The tension between the comparatively radical and conservative forces in the Grange kept the Order from fully addressing issues important to many Midwestern farmers. The "unauthorized" reshaping of the Grange's purposes by Kelley and other Midwestern Grangers contradicted many of the founders' ground rules and organizational strategies.¹⁸ The Grange founders intended that the Order remain nonpolitical and decreed that political issues were not to be discussed in Grange meetings. Thus, most of the activism attributed to the Grange came from the grassroots level—that is, from the subordinate Granges. These local Granges provided a place where members gathered to socialize and to learn about the business of farming. As the farmers' economic problems mounted and their discontent rose, subordinate Granges became places where farmers discussed their economic and political problems and planned protests. In keeping with Grange rules, most of these conversations occurred outside of the official Grange meetings. However, the ban on political discussion and the National Grange officers' reluctance to fully support demands for

¹⁸ According to Woods, the "standard" view of Kelley as a Grange conservative was inaccurate. Woods argued that Kelley had long been an advocate of economic cooperation between farmers and supported political activism if the need arose. This was especially true regarding monopolies and combinations, which Kelley felt put the farmers' independence and livelihood in jeopardy. However, Kelley also felt that the social and educational elements of the Grange were just as necessary. For Kelley, farmers needed to regain a sense of self-worth and to persuade society that farming deserved respect before they could achieve economic equality. See Woods, "Knights of the Plow," 32-42.

political action and economic cooperation showed how out of touch they were with the needs and desires of Midwestern, Western, and Southern farmers. Grangers in Minnesota and Illinois pushed for the National Grange to support economic cooperation, but the national officers maintained a wary conservatism and offered only lukewarm half-measures in response. This reluctance pushed many farmers to seek other outlets for their activism. Even Kelley, frustrated by his fellow founders' conservative approach, considered forming a radical political auxiliary to the Grange.¹⁹

Many of the tensions between Midwestern Grangers and the national officers were evident in the January 1875 meeting of the Illinois State Grange. The executive committee of the State Grange argued for changes in the National Grange constitution so that more power would be invested in the subordinate and state Granges. For instance, the executive committee wanted to change Article 8, Section 5 of the constitution, which proclaimed that “no plan of work shall be adopted by the State or Subordinate Grange, without first submitting it to, and receiving the sanction of, the National Grange.” The executive committee argued that if the National Grange

intended that no plan of work shall be adopted either for the moral, social, intellectual or pecuniary interests of the members of the Order without applying to, and receiving the permission of, the National Grange...it would render both State and Subordinate Granges entirely powerless to act for their own good...Hence, the committee very strongly urged the necessity of having that part of the section stricken out.²⁰

¹⁹ Woods, “Knights of the Plow,” 244-46.

²⁰ *Proceedings of the State Grange of Illinois at the Third Annual Session*, Springfield, Ill., January 12-15, 1875, 26.

The executive committee also noted the general sentiment of the Midwestern Patrons concerning the hierarchical relationship between the national officers and the local members. “The National Grange should be regarded as the servant or executive of the Subordinate, and should be governed in its action by the wishes of the latter expressed through the State Grange,” the executive committee argued. Further,

it is a commonly recognized principle that those who furnish the means of support for an enterprise of any kind, should have the right to control it in their own interest. . . . We believe the National Grange should look to the Subordinate for such light as will indicate what measures it will be best to adopt, and the true line of policy pursued, and not the Subordinate to the National, as has been too much the case in the past.²¹

Thus, the tensions that emerged from the Midwestern farmers’ mistrust of central authority in farmers’ organizations likely played a role in the Grange’s rapid loss of strength. The same motives that movement rhetoric attributed to public officials when they made “salary grabs” were also attributed to those who held paid offices in their organizations.

From a constitutive rhetoric perspective, the confluence of material, political, and economic circumstances exacerbated “fissures” in the farmers’ class identity, weakening the power of the Granger movement. Constituting Illinois farmers as the agricultural class empowered the farmers to act collectively, but the strands of American public discourse that movement rhetoric drew upon to weave that identity carried implicit ideological and rhetorical tensions. As material circumstances oscillated between good and bad times for

²¹ *Proceedings of the State Grange of Illinois at the Third Annual Session*, Springfield, Ill., January 12-15, 1875, 31.

the farmers, these tensions of identity proved too great to maintain the energy of the movement over a long period of time.

Key tensions within the farmers' class identity centered on the farmers' unique role in American society. By using the rhetoric of class to align the farmers with other producing classes, the Granger movement stripped farmers of their mythic exceptionalism. Farmers could not be a "special" class if their key characteristics were possessed by all producing classes. Movement discourse meliorated this loss of special status by drawing upon the agrarian myth to accent distinctions between the various producing classes, asserting the superiority of the agricultural class over other producing classes. Thus, the rhetoric of class sacrificed the American farmers' exceptionalism for a larger and more inclusive class identity, while the agrarian myth sacrificed a fuller identification with other producing classes to preserve the farmers' unique role in American society.

Other tensions came from the farmers' political identity itself. While the ISFA and many other movement leaders constituted independent political action as collective political action as a class, the Grange, in its 1874 Declaration of Principles, prohibited the subordinate Granges from engaging in politics directly at any level. Instead, Grange leaders encouraged Patrons to exert their political will as *individuals*. "The nature of our government lays upon every citizen the obligation of an intelligent and active participation in public affairs," State Master Alonzo Golder told Illinois Patrons in January 1875. Patrons, he added, should be *more* energetic and zealous than others when it came to politics. The responsibility for political action fell on the shoulders of the

individual Patron as a citizen rather than on the Order itself. However, in the same speech, Golder hit upon the paradox of the Grange's position:

A single individual is powerless to correct many of the abuses from which we, as a class, have suffered, and from some of which we are still suffering. All unjust burdens, we can, by uniting, throw off, and much of the positive good we hope for can be attained by a like combination of strength.²²

Many in the movement argued that this "combination of strength" had to be earned through coordinated and organized *political* action and that the function of the Grange was to give farmers that collective voice and the power of united action. Politically, however, the Grange leadership refused to allow the organization to become the official instrument through which its members could exert that political voice.

The Grange's political policy had a direct impact on the relationship between the Grange and the ISFA, as many of the ISFA's member organizations were subordinate Granges. Further, the Grange's call for individual political action undermined the political power of the farmers' collective identity because farmers, as individual political actors, found it much easier to align with the major political parties. As the Granger movement ended, many farmers resumed voting along old party lines. At the ISFA's last meeting, S. M. Smith argued that the farmers still needed better organization to "effectually counteract the influence of those old party ties and affiliations which, in the excitement of [the 1876] Presidential contest, led so many to vote for the very men and measures that are to fasten still more strongly upon them the chains of their degr[a]dation

²² Golder, "State Master's Address," *Proceedings of the State Grange of Illinois at the Third Annual Session*, Springfield, Ill., January 12-15, 1875, 7.

and slavery.”²³ The power of movement rhetoric to re-constitute the farmers’ political identity had been, in part, a failure because core to that identity was independence from partisan politics, the chains that bound the farmer to organized capital.

The divisions over politics, some leaders claimed, were exacerbated by political party “strategies” to foment those rivalries. Periam argued that intra-class dissension often came from external sources trying to disrupt the movement.

These little differences have been fomented by certain interests, speaking through organs which have spared no means of sowing dissensions between them; on the one hand, decrying the Grange as being a secret society, and, on the other, stigmatizing the open workings of the Club as foolish, or at least, ineffectual, from the facility with which politicians manipulate them.²⁴

Disagreement over the purposes, functions, and actions of these organizations may have also weakened the bonds of collective identity. Disagreement over the means and ends of farmers’ organizations was often a reason for their dissolution.

Influence of the Granger Movement

Although the Grange and the ISFA failed to achieve the full short- and long-term success for which its leaders and members might have hoped, farmers learned some important lessons and many carried on the struggle. The decline of the Grange and the disappearance of the ISFA did not mean the end of the farmers’ movement in the late nineteenth century. The energy of the movement flowed in other directions as new organizations replaced the Grange and the ISFA and the problems farmers had with

²³ Smith, “Secretary Smith’s Report,” *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Farmers’ Association*, Springfield, Ill., January 23-25, 1877, 9.

²⁴ Periam, *Groundswell*, 81.

railroads, monopolies, and wealthy interests remained.²⁵ The Granger movement set the tone for future farmers' movements and many of the rhetorical strategies and ideological issues prevalent in the Granger movement resurfaced in the larger Greenback, Alliance, and Populist movements that followed.²⁶ Ultimately, despite the potential constitutive tensions present in the farmers' identity as constituted by Granger movement rhetoric, the growing agitation by farmers throughout the late nineteenth century serves as anecdotal evidence that the farmers' class identity probably was not necessarily tied to the rise and fall of any particular episode of the farmers' movement. Instead, the farmers' identity "oscillated" between two ends of a continuum marked by individual and class identity.

In Illinois, strategies used by leaders of the Granger movement were adopted by leaders of later farmers' organizations. For example, the first order to appear in Illinois after the Granger movement was the National Farmers' Alliance, founded by *Western Rural* publisher Milton George. Themes of George's Alliance doctrine were similar to those of the Granger movement, although George differed from the ISFA in that he opposed the formation of an independent farmers' party. George declared that government should protect those unable to protect themselves and that it should be controlled by the people, not the plutocrats. George's ideology drew from the basic tenets of the agrarian myth, such as the belief in the wisdom and value of the farming class, that land was the source of all wealth, and that society's best leaders came from the agricultural class. Contrary to the farmers' importance, they were not receiving their just

²⁵ Buck, *Granger Movement*, chap. 9, "Conclusion"; Scott, *Agrarian Movement in Illinois*, chap. 1, "The Nature of Discontent in Illinois."

²⁶ Buck, *Granger Movement*, chap. 9, "Conclusion."

share of benefits of society, so they needed to protect themselves by exercising political power.

These themes shaped the ideology of the farmers' movement in Illinois after 1880, as the objectives of the early NFA became the goals of all farmers' associations in Illinois in the 1880s.²⁷ After the decline of the Grange and the demise of the ISFA, in Illinois, the 1880s Alliance movement was composed of five distinct farmers' organizations: the National Farmers' Alliance, the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, the Southern Alliance, the Grange, and the Patrons of Industry. They all called for farmers to organize for mutual protection and they created educational, social, economic, and political programs to protect farmers in an industrialized society. However, much like the jealousies between the Grange and the ISFA, the rivalries between these later organizations prevented full concerted action and weakened the movement.²⁸

Regionally and nationally, new farmers' organizations arose to take the prominent place once held by the Grange, including the Farmers' Mutual Benefit Association, the National Farmers' (Northern) Alliance, the National Farmers' Alliance and Industrial Union (South), the Agricultural Wheel, the Colored Farmers' Alliance, the Union Laborites, and the Greenbackers.²⁹ The ideologies, strategies, and tactics used by these and other organizations in the Alliance and Populist movements of the 1880s and 1890s

²⁷ Scott, *Agrarian Movement in Illinois*, chap. 2, "Milton George and the National Farmers' Alliance."

²⁸ Scott, *Agrarian Movement in Illinois*, chap. 3, "The Organizational Base of the Illinois Alliance Movement."

²⁹ Burkholder, "Mythic Conflict," 65.

were similar to those of the Granger movement. Chester M. Destler argued that key aspects of Populist economic thought—anti-monopolism, producers as the generators of wealth, and the labor theory of value—came from earlier movements like the Granger movement.³⁰ Also, instead of implementing individualist strategies, such as improving life on the farm or promoting better farming techniques, the farmers in these movements turned to more collective strategies. They sought to improve their economic condition and protect themselves from concentrated economic power by cooperative buying and selling, boycotting monopolized products, lobbying for favorable legislation, campaigning for friendly candidates, and organizing their own political parties.³¹

Solon J. Buck saw the 1870s as a period of great transition from “the passing of the old” to “the opening of the new period in American history.” Before the Civil War, the character of American history was “the history of a struggle between two incompatible social and economic systems established in the two great sections of the country”—that is, slavery and yeoman farming. One disappeared with the Civil War, the other with the closing of the frontier. The industrial needs of the war, the rise of corporations, and advances in practical science accompanied the closing of the frontier, forcing the oppressed and discontent to stay where they were and to fight their oppressors. Because the frontier no longer served as a “safety valve” to siphon off the malcontents, “the result was a tendency toward productive and cooperative organization

³⁰ Destler, “Western Radicalism,” 356-361. Burkholder defined the labor theory of value as the notion that all laborers are worthy of respect because they produce the nation’s wealth. See “Mythic Conflict,” chap. 3, “An Approach to the Analysis of Kansas Populist Speechmaking.”

³¹ Burkholder, “Mythic Conflict,” 65-66.

along class lines, of which the labor movement is one aspect, and the farmers' movement another."³² Thus, Buck saw the Granger movement not so much as a catalyst for change, but as a conduit for the energies of change, shaping the movements that followed. The results of this study bear that out, as many of the rhetorical themes and general rhetorical strategies used in the Granger movement were also used in the Alliance and Populist movements.

³² Buck, *Granger Movement*, 311-12.

Appendix A: The Critical Edition of the Farmers' Declaration of Independence

The critical edition text presented here is a transcript of the Farmers' Declaration of Independence from the original version I believe was distributed by the executive committee of the Illinois State Farmers' Association (ISFA) to farmers' clubs, Granges, and various newspapers in the summer of 1873.¹ This text was distributed with a note entitled "Farmers' Fourth of July," signed by the ISFA executive committee, which offered recommendations for planning Fourth of July celebrations. The text of that note is as follows:

In accordance with the advice and requests of persons in various parts of the State, the undersigned, Executive Committee of the Illinois State Farmers' Association, would respectfully recommend to the farmers of Illinois that they meet in County, or other local meetings on the approaching Fourth of July, for the purpose not only of duly celebrating the Anniversary of our National Independence, but also for the purpose of considering and acting upon the dangers that now threaten the safety of the nation and the liberty of the citizen in the shape of chartered monopolies and corrupt conspiracies against the public interest.

We further recommend the immediate action of County Associations, County Committees, Farmers' Clubs, Granges, and persons otherwise interested, so as to secure at such meetings a large attendance, a free discussion of the grievances, and a more complete and thorough organization of the farmers of the State.

Let us give this time honored day a new lease of life, by a demonstration that may be hereafter commemorated as the dawning of a new era of independence, not only for us as a class, but for the whole people of the State and nation.

Leaving to the various committees of arrangements to make out such programme for the celebration of the day as may best be suited to each locality, we would merely suggest instead of the stereotyped oration

¹ I received this version of the text from the Illinois State Historical Society. As I noted in the third chapter (p. 136, n. 2), I have not found any concrete evidence for the authorship of the Farmers' Declaration in my readings of Granger movement discourse. It appears likely, however, that it was written by one or more members of the ISFA executive committee composed of president W. C. Flagg, secretary S. M. Smith, and treasurer Duncan Mackay.

upon the glorious past by some aspirant for political honors, that we have the earnest, practical common sense talk of the farmers themselves upon the duties of the present, and the reading of the accompanying new Declaration of Independence, which may, however, be altered, amended, or left out, as shall seem best to those having the matter in charge.²

I selected the ISFA version of the text as the primary text for this critical edition for two reasons. First, it was the version the ISFA most likely distributed to farmers' organizations and newspapers prior to the Farmers' Fourth of July celebrations, although I have not found specific information to concretely verify this. Close reading of the three versions of the Farmers' Declaration presented in this critical edition, however, point strongly to the ISFA text being the source of the other versions. Second, this text was the version of the Farmers' Declaration most likely read before the many audiences present at Farmers' Fourth of July celebrations across the Midwest. Although the Farmers' Declaration reached thousands of readers through the pages of the *Prairie Farmer* and the *Chicago Tribune*, the full rhetorical power of the text came from its public readings on the Fourth of July, often in conjunction with readings of the original Declaration. Thus, the full power of the text as a constitutive act would be in the context of celebrating the original Declaration as the constitutive act of the United States of America.³

The *Chicago Tribune* published the full text on June 17, 1873. The *Prairie Farmer* excerpted the last two paragraphs on June 14, 1873 and published the full text on July 12, 1873. Differences between the ISFA version and the parchment copy of the

² This note was also published in the *Prairie Farmer*, June 14, 1873.

³ See pp. 137-38, 158.

Declaration of Independence are indicated in footnotes.⁴ Differences in capitalization between the ISFA version and the parchment copy of the original Declaration are indicated by letters in **bold** typeface. Differences in punctuation between the ISFA version and the parchment copy of the original Declaration are indicated by [brackets]. Differences in punctuation between the ISFA version and the *Prairie Farmer* and *Chicago Tribune* versions are noted by {brackets}. Other differences are noted with footnotes. The only addition I have made to the ISFA copy is to number the paragraphs. In the footnotes, “DOI” refers to the original Declaration of Independence, “ISFA” refers to the ISFA version of the Farmers’ Declaration, “PF” refers to the *Prairie Farmer* version, and “CT” refers to the *Chicago Tribune* version.

REVOLUTION OF 1873.

FARMERS’ DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.⁵

⁴ I have chosen this version of the Declaration because it seems to be the text most likely available to audiences of the Farmers’ Declaration. For this critical edition, I used the transcript of the parchment copy provided by the U. S. National Archives and Records Administration on its website at <http://www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/declaration_transcript.html>, accessed February 12, 2004. To verify this transcript, I also examined high-resolution images of the parchment copy (which were difficult to read) and the 1823 William J. Stone engraving of the parchment copy, both available on the NARA website at <http://www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/charters_downloads.html>, accessed February 12, 2004. Finally, I compared the NARA transcript to Carl Becker’s transcript of the parchment copy. I found some slight differences in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, but no changes in words used or in word order. The most significant difference in form between the NARA transcript, the Becker transcript, and the two images of the Declaration is that the NARA version uses paragraph breaks instead of dashes. See Becker, *Declaration*, 185-93.

⁵ The ISFA copy was entitled “Revolution of 1873. Farmers’ Declaration of Independence.”; the *Chicago Tribune* copy was entitled “The Farmers’ Declaration of Independence”; the *Prairie Farmer* introduced the text as the “New Declaration of Independence”.

1 When in the course of human events⁶ it becomes necessary for a class of people, suffering from long continued⁷ systems of oppression and abuse, to rouse themselves from an apathetic indifference to their own interests, which has become habitual;⁸ to assume among their fellow citizens⁹, that¹⁰ equal station[,]¹¹ and demand from the government they support¹² those equal rights¹³ to which the laws of nature[,]¹⁴ and of nature's God¹⁵ entitles¹⁶ them[;]¹⁷ a decent respect for¹⁸ the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that¹⁹ impel them to a course so necessary to their own protection.²⁰

⁶ CT: No comma follows “events”.

⁷ CT: “long-continued”

⁸ The DOI and ISFA diverge between “necessary for” and “to assume”. DOI: “one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and” rather than “a class of people, suffering from long continued systems of oppression and abuse, to rouse themselves from an apathetic indifference to their own interests, which has become habitual; and”

⁹ CT: “fellow-citizens”

¹⁰ DOI: “the powers of the earth, the separate and” rather than “their fellow citizens, that”

¹¹ DOI: No comma follows “station”.

¹² CT: No comma follows “support”.

¹³ PF: No comma follows “rights”; DOI: Does not contain “and demand from the government they support, those equal rights”.

¹⁴ DOI: No comma follows “Nature”.

¹⁵ CT: “Nature’s God”

¹⁶ DOI: “entitle” rather than “entitles”

¹⁷ DOI: A comma rather than a semicolon follows “them”.

¹⁸ DOI: “to” rather than “for”

¹⁹ DOI: “which” rather than “that”

²⁰ DOI: “to the separation.” rather than “to a course so necessary to their own protection.”

2 We hold these truths to be self-evident[,]²¹ that²² all men are created equal[;]²³ that they are endowed by their²⁴ Creator²⁵ with certain inalienable²⁶ rights[;]²⁷ that among these are life, liberty[,]²⁸ and the pursuit of happiness.²⁹ That to secure these rights[]³⁰ governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed[;]³¹ that whenever the powers of a³² government become³³ destructive of these³⁴, either through the injustice or inefficiency of its laws {,}³⁵ or through the corruption of its administrators,³⁶ it is the right of the people to abolish such laws³⁷, and institute³⁸ such reforms³⁹ as to

²¹ PF, DOI: A colon rather than a comma follows “self-evident”.

²² PF: “That” rather than “that”

²³ DOI: A comma rather than a semi-colon follows “equal”.

²⁴ PF: “the” rather than “their”

²⁵ PF: “creator” rather than “Creator”

²⁶ DOI: “unalienable” rather than “inalienable”

²⁷ DOI: A comma rather than a semi-colon follows “Rights”.

²⁸ DOI: No comma follows “Liberty”.

²⁹ DOI: A dash follows “Happiness.”

³⁰ CT, DOI: a comma follows “rights”.

³¹ DOI: A comma and a dash rather than a semi-colon follow “governed”.

³² DOI: “any Form of” rather than “the powers of a” follows “whenever”

³³ DOI: “becomes” rather than “become”

³⁴ CT: “ends” follows “these”; DOI: “ends” follows “these”.

³⁵ PF: No comma follows “laws”.

³⁶ DOI: Does not contain “either through the injustice or inefficiency of its laws or through the corruption of its administrators.”

³⁷ DOI: “to alter or to abolish it” rather than “to abolish such laws”

³⁸ CT: “to institute”

them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence[] {}⁴⁰ indeed[] {}⁴¹ will dictate that laws⁴² long established shall⁴³ not be changed for light and trifling⁴⁴ causes[,]⁴⁵ and {,}⁴⁶ accordingly[,]⁴⁷ all experience hath shown⁴⁸ []⁴⁹ that mankind are more disposed to suffer[]⁵⁰ while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the laws⁵¹ to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object[,]⁵² evinces a desire⁵³ to reduce a people⁵⁴ under the⁵⁵ absolute despotism of combinations, that, under the fostering care of government⁵⁶, and with wealth wrung from the people, have grown to such gigantic proportions as to

³⁹ DOI: “and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form,” rather than “and institute such reforms”

⁴⁰ CT: A comma follows “Prudence”; DOI: A comma follows “Prudence”.

⁴¹ CT: A comma follows “indeed”; DOI: A comma follows “indeed”.

⁴² DOI: “Governments” rather than “laws”

⁴³ DOI: “should” rather than “shall”

⁴⁴ DOI: “transient” rather than “trifling”

⁴⁵ DOI: A semi-colon rather than a comma follows “causes”.

⁴⁶ PF: No comma follows “and”.

⁴⁷ DOI: No comma follows “accordingly”.

⁴⁸ DOI: “shewn” rather than “shown”

⁴⁹ DOI: A comma follows “shewn”.

⁵⁰ DOI: A comma follows “suffer”.

⁵¹ DOI: “forms” rather than “laws”

⁵² DOI: No comma follows “Object”.

⁵³ DOI: “design” rather than “desire”

⁵⁴ DOI: “them” rather than “a people”

⁵⁵ DOI: Does not contain “the”.

⁵⁶ CT: “Government”

overshadow all the land, and wield an almost irresistible⁵⁷ [*sic*] [check DOI] influence for their own selfish purposes, in all its halls of legislation⁵⁸, it is their right[—]⁵⁹; it is their duty[] {}⁶⁰ to throw off such tyranny⁶¹, and provide new guards for their future security.

- 3 Such has been the patient sufferance of the producing classes of these states,⁶² and such is now the necessity which compels⁶³ them to declare that they will use every means {}⁶⁴ save a resort to arms {}⁶⁵ to overthrow this despotism of monopoly, and to reduce all men claiming the protection of American laws to an equality before those laws, making the owner of a railroad as amenable thereto as the “veriest beggar that walks the streets, the sun and air his sole inheritance.”⁶⁶

⁵⁷ PF: “irresistible” rather than “irresistable”

⁵⁸ DOI: Does not contain “of combinations, that, under the fostering care of government, and with wealth wrung from the people, have grown to such gigantic proportions as to overshadow all the land, and wield an almost irresistible influence for their own selfish purposes, in all its halls of legislation”.

⁵⁹ DOI: A comma rather than a dash follows “right”.

⁶⁰ CT: A dash follows “duty”; DOI: A comma follows “duty”.

⁶¹ DOI: “Government” rather than “tyranny”

⁶² CT: “States”; DOI: “these Colonies;” rather than “the producing classes of these states,”

⁶³ DOI: “constrains” rather than “compels”

⁶⁴ CT: A comma follows “means”.

⁶⁵ CT: A comma follows “arms”.

⁶⁶ The ISFA and DOI diverge between “them to” and “The history of”. DOI: “alter their former Systems of Government.” rather than “declare that they will use every means save a resort to arms to overthrow this despotism of monopoly, and to reduce all men claiming the protection of American laws to an equality before those laws, making the owner of a railroad as amenable thereto as the ‘veriest beggar that walks the streets, the sun and air his sole inheritance.’” The DOI also does not begin a new paragraph before “The history of”.

The quote “veriest beggar that walks the streets, the sun and air his sole inheritance” was adapted from from John Greenleaf Whittier’s prelude to the poem *Among the Hills*. The line in the poem reads: “The veriest straggler limping on his rounds, The sun and air his sole inheritance.”

4 The history of the present railway monopoly⁶⁷ {},⁶⁸ is a history of repeated injuries and oppression⁶⁹, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over the people of these states⁷⁰ unequalled in any monarchy of the Old World, and having its only parallel in the history of the Medieval ages, when the strong hand was the only law, and the highways of commerce were taxed by the Feudal Barons, who {}⁷¹ from their strongholds, surrounded by their armies of vassals, could levy such tribute upon the traveler as their own wills alone should dictate.⁷² To prove this[] {}⁷³ let facts be submitted to a candid world[:]⁷⁴

⁶⁷ DOI: “King of Great Britain” rather than “railway monopoly”

⁶⁸ PF, CT: No comma follows “monopoly”.

⁶⁹ DOI: “usurpations” rather than “oppressions”; PF, CT: “oppressions” rather than “oppression”

⁷⁰ CT: “States”

⁷¹ CT: A comma follows “who”.

⁷² The DOI and ISFA diverge between “tyranny over” and “To prove this”. DOI: “these States.” rather than “the people of these states unequalled in any monarchy of the Old World, and having its only parallel in the history, of the Medieval ages, when the strong hand was the only law, and the highways of commerce were taxed by the Feudal Barons, who from their strongholds, surrounded by their armies of vassals, could levy such tribute upon the traveler as their own wills alone should dictate.” This section of the ISFA appears to borrow to some degree language from the list of charges in the DOI. Compare this line of the ISFA to the 25th charge against the King in the DOI: “He is at this time transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to compleat the works of death, desolation and tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty & perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation” [underline added for aid in comparison]. The language of the ISFA borrows this idea and expands upon it to (1) stress that the evils the farmers suffer are greater than those of their Revolutionary forefathers (“unequalled in any monarchy of the Old World”), and (2) to extend the phrase “the most barbarous ages” to more concretely compare the railroad barons to the barbarity of the Feudal Barons who ruled only by the strength of “their armies of vassals”. This reference is given more concrete form later in the ISFA with the accusation that the railroads ordered “large bodies of hirelings to enforce their unlawful exactions”.

⁷³ CT: A comma follows “this”; DOI: A comma follows “this”.

⁷⁴ DOI: A period instead of a colon follows “world”.

- 5 They have influenced our executive officers {},⁷⁵ to refuse their assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good,⁷⁶ and when such laws have been passed they have utterly refused to obey them.⁷⁷
- 6 They have procured the passage of other laws, for their own benefit alone,⁷⁸ by which they have put untold millions into their own coffers, to the injury of the entire commercial and industrial interests of the country.
- 7 They have influenced legislation to suit themselves, by bribing venal legislators to betray the true interests of their constituents, while others have been kept quiet by the compliment of free passes.⁷⁹
- 8 They have repeatedly prevented the re-election of representatives {},⁸⁰ for opposing with manly firmness {},⁸¹ their invasions⁸² of the people's rights.⁸³

⁷⁵ CT: No comma follows "officers".

⁷⁶ This is the first item in the charges against the railroad monopoly. The ISFA lists 16 separate charges against the railroad monopoly; the DOI lists 27 separate charges against King George III. The ISFA directly adapts language from several of the original charges in the DOI. Hereafter, I refer to those charges in the DOI and the ISFA by the order they appear in their respective documents. As above, I quote from the DOI first, the ISFA second. The first part of this first charge against the monopolies is similar to the language in the DOI, charge 1: "He has refused his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good." rather than "They have influenced our executive officers, to refuse their assent to laws the most wholesome and necessary for the public good,".

⁷⁷ The second part of the first charge of the ISFA resembles the DOI, second part of charge 2: "and when so suspended, he has utterly neglected to attend to them." rather than "and when such laws have been passed they have utterly refused to obey them."

⁷⁸ This first part of the second charge of the ISFA bears a passing resemblance to the DOI, charge 3: "He has refused to pass other Laws for the accommodation of large districts of people," rather than "They have procured the passage of other laws, for their own benefit alone,".

⁷⁹ Although there is little similarity in form, this third charge of the ISFA resembles the fourth charge in the DOI in that both accuse their enemies of pressuring the legislature to their will by illegitimate means. DOI, charge 4: "He has called together legislative bodies at places unusual, uncomfortable, and distant from the depository of their public Records, for the sole purpose of fatiguing them into compliance with his measures."

⁸⁰ CT: No comma follows "representatives".

⁸¹ CT: No comma follows "firmness".

- 9 They have by false representations and subterfuge induced the people to subscribe funds to build roads, whose rates, when built, are so exorbitant⁸⁴ that in many instances transportation by private conveyance⁸⁵ is less burdensome.
- 10 They have procured charters by which they condemn and appropriate our lands without adequate compensation therefor, and arrogantly claim that by virtue of these charters they are absolutely above the control of legal enactments.
- 11 They have procured a law of congress⁸⁶ by which they have dispossessed hundreds of farmers of the homes that by years of toil they have built up; have induced others to mortgage their farms for roads never intended to be built, and after squandering the money thus obtained, have left⁸⁷ their victims to the mercy of courts over which they have held⁸⁸ absolute sway.⁸⁹

⁸² PF: “invasion” rather than “invasions”

⁸³ This fourth charge of the ISFA significantly resembles the form of the DOI, charge 5: “He has dissolved Representative Houses repeatedly, for opposing with manly firmness his invasions on the rights of the people.” The implication here is that the act of dissolution and the act of preventing re-election of representatives would appear, to the readers and hearers of the ISFA, to be similar acts. This implication is supported by allusions to the sixth and 24th charges in the DOI. DOI, charge 6: “He has refused for a long time, after such dissolutions, to cause others to be elected; whereby the Legislative powers, incapable of Annihilation, have returned to the People at large for their exercise; the State remaining in the mean time exposed to all the dangers of invasion from without, and convulsions within.” DOI, charge 24: “For suspending our own Legislatures, and declaring themselves invested with power to legislate for us in all cases whatsoever.”

⁸⁴ CT: No comma follows “exorbitant”.

⁸⁵ CT: “conveyances”

⁸⁶ CT: “Congress”

⁸⁷ CT: “they have left” rather than “have left”

⁸⁸ CT: “they held” rather than “they have held”

⁸⁹ The fifth, sixth, and seventh charges (paragraphs 9-11) bear some resemblance to the seventh charge in the DOI in that they deal with the circumstances under which land is appropriated. DOI, charge 7: “He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.” In total, the acts of the railroad monopoly constitute “raising

- 12 They have obstructed the administration of justice by injunctions⁹⁰ procured from venal judges⁹¹ by legal quibbles⁹² and appeals⁹³ from court to court, with intent to wear out or ruin the prosecutor, openly avowing their determination to make it so terrible for the public to prosecute them that they will not dare undertake⁹⁵ it.⁹⁶
- 13 They have virtually made judges⁹⁷ dependent on their will alone, and have procured their appointment for the express purpose of reversing a decision of the highest court of the nation, by which millions were gained to them, to the injury of the holders of their⁹⁸ bonds and the breaking down of this last safeguard of American freemen.⁹⁹

the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands” by making it more difficult for the farmers to keep their homesteads by condemnation through government charter (evidence of undue influence over the legislatures), fraudulent stock schemes, and the ability to control courts and judges. The Illinois farmers’ discourse during this time was filled with such accusations against the railroads.

⁹⁰ CT: A comma follows “injunctions”.

⁹¹ CT: “judges”

⁹² CT: No comma follows “judges”.

⁹³ CT: A comma follows “quibbles”.

⁹⁴ CT: A comma follows “appeals”.

⁹⁵ CT: “dare to undertake” rather than “dare undertake”.

⁹⁶ The opening of the eighth charge resembles the form of the DOI, charge 8: “He has obstructed the Administration of Justice, by refusing his Assent to Laws for establishing Judiciary powers.”

⁹⁷ CT: “Judges”

⁹⁸ PF: “the” rather than “their”

⁹⁹ The opening of the ninth charge of the ISFA resembles the form of the DOI, charge 9: “He has made Judges dependent on his Will alone, for the tenure of their offices, and the amount and payment of their salaries.”

- 14 They have affected to render themselves independent of and superior to the civil power¹⁰⁰, by ordering large bodies of hirelings to enforce their unlawful exactions¹⁰¹, and have protected them from punishment for any¹⁰² injury they might inflict upon peaceful citizens¹⁰³ {,} ¹⁰⁴ while ejecting them from their conveyances for refusing to pay more than the rate of fare prescribed by laws¹⁰⁵.
- 15 They have arrested and summoned from their homes for trial, at distant points, other citizens for the same offence¹⁰⁶ of refusing to pay more than the legal fare, putting them to as great inconvenience and expense¹⁰⁷ as possible, and still further

¹⁰⁰ The opening of the 10th [check Chicago style] charge of the ISFA resembles the form of the DOI, charge 12: “He has affected to render the Military independent of and superior to the Civil power.” rather than “They have affected to render themselves independent of and superior to the civil power”. The comparison of the railroad monopoly’s “large bodies of hirelings” to a military force is clear here. Without the protection of the legislatures and courts, the people are powerless to defend themselves from the railroads’ strong-arm tactics. Implicitly, this charge justifies the farmers’ (and the people’s) acts to defend themselves or to “enforce” their rights by similar means. In 1873, after the new Illinois railroad law came into effect, some farmers went to great lengths to exert their right to pay the legal fare, occasionally resulting in armed conflict. These actions were generally denounced in the popular and agricultural press.

¹⁰¹ The clause following the opening of the 10th charge of the ISFA bears some resemblance to the metaphorical ending of the DOI, charge 10: “He has erected a multitude of New Offices, and sent hither swarms of Officers to harrass our people, and eat out their substance.” rather than “by ordering large bodies of hirelings to enforce their unlawful exactions”.

¹⁰² PF: “an” rather than “any”

¹⁰³ This clause resembles the form of the DOI, charge 15: “For protecting them, by a mock Trial, from punishment for any Murders which they should commit on the Inhabitants of these States:” rather than “protected them from punishment for an injury they might inflict upon peaceful citizens”.

¹⁰⁴ CT: No comma follows “citizens”.

¹⁰⁵ CT: “law” rather than “laws”

¹⁰⁶ PF: “offense” rather than “offence”

¹⁰⁷ CT: Does not contain “and expense”.

evincing their determination to make it too terrible for the people to dare engage in any legal conflict with them.¹⁰⁸

- 16 They have combined together to destroy competition¹⁰⁹ and to practice an unjust discrimination,¹¹⁰ contrary to the expressed provisions of our constitution¹¹¹ and the spirit of our law¹¹².
- 17 They have virtually cut off our trade with distant parts of the world¹¹³ by their unjust discriminations¹¹⁴ and by their exorbitant¹¹⁵ [*sic*] rates of freight¹¹⁶, forcing upon us the alternative of accumulating upon our hands a worthless surplus¹¹⁷ or of giving three-fourths of the price our¹¹⁸ customers pay for our¹¹⁹ products¹²⁰ for their transportation.

¹⁰⁸ This 11th charge of the ISFA evokes the DOI, charge 19: “For transporting us beyond Seas to be tried for pretended offences”. The railroads often took the people from familiar surroundings for virtually “pretended offenses” because these citizens were obeying, not disobeying, the law by “refusing to pay more than the legal fare”. Also, the railroad companies often pursued charged against the offenders in courts far from the offenders’ communities.

¹⁰⁹ CT: A semi-colon follows “competition”

¹¹⁰ CT: Does not contain “and to practice an unjust discrimination,”.

¹¹¹ CT: “Constitution”

¹¹² CT: “laws” instead of “law”

¹¹³ This 13th charge of the ISFA resembles the form of the DOI, charge 16: “For cutting off our Trade with all parts of the world.”.

¹¹⁴ CT: A comma follows “discriminations”.

¹¹⁵ PF, CT: “exorbitant” rather than “exhorbitant”

¹¹⁶ PF: “freights” rather than “freight”

¹¹⁷ PF, CT: A comma follows “surplus”.

¹¹⁸ CT: Does not contain “our”.

¹¹⁹ PF: “their” rather than “our”

¹²⁰ PF: No comma follows “products”.

- 18 Under the false and specious pretence¹²¹ of developing the country, they have obtained enormous grants of public land¹²² from congress¹²³, and now retard rather than develop its settlement, by the high prices charged for such land.¹²⁴
- 19 They have converted the bonds fraudulently obtained from the government¹²⁵, into a great corruption fund, with which they are enabled to bribe and control legislatures¹²⁶, and subvert every branch of government¹²⁷ to their own base and sordid purposes¹²⁸.
- 20 They have increased the already intolerable burden of taxation^{,}¹²⁹ which the people have to endure^{,}¹³⁰ compared with which the tea and stamp tax which precipitated the war of the revolution, seems utterly insignificant¹³¹, by the appropriation of money from the public treasury¹³², while they have escaped

¹²¹ PF: “pretense” rather than “pretence”

¹²² PF: “lands” rather than “land”

¹²³ CT: “Congress” rather than “congress”

¹²⁴ This 14th charge of the ISFA refers to the DOI, charge 7: “He has endeavoured to prevent the population of these States; for that purpose obstructing the Laws for Naturalization of Foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migrations hither, and raising the conditions of new Appropriations of Lands.” This extends the earlier accusation about changing conditions for appropriating land and further extends the charge as given in the DOI that the King refused “to pass others to encourage their migrations hither” by comparing it to the railroads’ act to “retard rather than develop its settlement”.

¹²⁵ CT: “Government” rather than “government”

¹²⁶ CT: “Legislatures” rather than “legislatures”

¹²⁷ CT: “Government” rather than “government”

¹²⁸ PF: “purpose” rather than “purposes”

¹²⁹ CT: No comma follows “taxation”.

¹³⁰ CT: No comma follows “endure”.

¹³¹ CT: “(compared with which the tea and stamp-tax, which precipitated the war of the revolution, seem utterly insignificant)” rather than “compared with which the tea and stamp tax which precipitated the war of the revolution, seems utterly insignificant”

¹³² CT: “Treasury” rather than “treasury”

taxation themselves by evading and violating the expressed¹³³ provisions of their charters.

- 21 In every stage of these oppressions we have petitioned our legislatures¹³⁴ for redress{}¹³⁵ in the most humble terms[.]¹³⁶ Our repeated petitions have been answered only by silence¹³⁷, or by¹³⁸ attempts to frame laws that shall seem to meet our wants, but that are, in fact, only a legal snare for courts to disagree upon{}¹³⁹ and for corporations to disobey.
- 22 Nor have we been wanting in attempts to obtain redress through congress¹⁴⁰. We have warned them from time to time of these various and repeated encroachments upon our rights; we have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here; we have appealed to them as the administrators of a free and impartial government¹⁴¹, to protect us from these encroachments, which, if continued, would inevitably end in the utter destruction of those liberties for which our fathesr¹⁴² [*sic*] gave their lives, and the reinstatement of privileged¹⁴³

¹³³ CT: “express” rather than “expressed”

¹³⁴ CT: “Legislatures” rather than “legislatures”

¹³⁵ CT: A comma follows “redress”.

¹³⁶ DOI: A semi-colon follows “terms”.

¹³⁷ The opening of this paragraph resembles the DOI with some slight changes. DOI: “In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury.”

¹³⁸ CT: Does not contain “by”.

¹³⁹ CT: A comma follows “upon”.

¹⁴⁰ CT: “Congress” rather than “congress”

¹⁴¹ The opening of this paragraph strongly resembles the corresponding paragraph in the DOI: “Nor have We been wanting in attentions to our British brethren. We have warned them from time to time of attempts by their legislature to extend an unwarrantable jurisdiction over us. We have reminded them of the circumstances of our emigration and settlement here. We have appealed to their native justice and magnanimity”. Here, the farmers turn their attention to the U. S. Congress rather than to “British brethren”. The comparison of the emigration to the New World and the migration to the American West is strong here.

¹⁴² PF, CT: “fathers” rather than “fathesr”

[*sic*] classes and an aristocracy of wealth¹⁴⁴ worse than that from which the war of the revolution¹⁴⁵ freed us. They¹⁴⁶ too¹⁴⁷ have been deaf to the voice of justice and of duty. We must¹⁴⁸ therefore¹⁴⁹ acquiesce in the necessity¹⁵⁰ which compels us to denounce their criminal indifference to our wrongs, and hold them as we hold our legislature¹⁴⁸¹⁴⁹—enemies to the producer¹⁵⁰—to the monopolists, friends.¹⁵¹

23 We, therefore, the producers of this state¹⁵² in our several counties assembled, on this¹⁵³ the¹⁵⁴ anniversary of that day that gave birth to a nation of freemen¹⁵⁵ and to a government of which, despite the corruption¹⁵⁶ of its officers, we are still so justly proud, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do solemnly declare that¹⁵⁷ we will use all

¹⁴³ PF, CT: “privileged” rather than “privilged”

¹⁴⁴ CT: No comma follows “wealth”.

¹⁴⁵ CT: “War of the Revolution”

¹⁴⁶ CT: A comma follows “They”.

¹⁴⁷ CT: A comma follows “too”.

¹⁴⁸ PF: “legislators” rather than “legislature”; CT: “Legislatures” rather than “legislature”

¹⁴⁹ CT: A comma follows “legislatures”.

¹⁵⁰ CT: A comma follows “producer”.

¹⁵¹ The ending of this paragraph resembles the ending of the corresponding paragraph in the DOI: “They too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity. We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.”

¹⁵² CT: “State” followed by a comma

¹⁵³ PF, CT: No comma follows “on this”.

¹⁵⁴ CT: Does not contain “the”.

¹⁵⁵ CT: A comma follows “freemen”.

¹⁵⁶ CT: “corruptions” rather than “corruption”

¹⁵⁷ The opening of this paragraph resembles the opening of the corresponding paragraph in the DOI: “We, therefore, the Representatives of the united States of America, in

lawful and peaceable means to free ourselves from the tyranny of monopoly, and that we will never cease our efforts for reform until every department of our government¹⁵⁸ gives token that the reign of licentious extravagance is over, and something of the purity, honesty¹⁵⁹ and frugality with which our fathers inaugurated it has taken its place.

- 24 That to this end we hereby¹⁶⁰ declare ourselves absolutely free and independent¹⁶¹ of all past political connections, and that we will¹⁶² give our suffrage only to such men for office, from the lowest officer in the state¹⁶³ to the president¹⁶⁴ of the United States, as we have good reason to believe will use their best endeavors to the promotion of these ends; and for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on¹⁶⁵ Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.¹⁶⁶

General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, That”. The most significant change here is the new language that does not blame the *system* of government for the wrongs against the farmers, but against individual government officials. Indicting the *form* of government would have directly attacked the system of government instituted by the Founding Fathers and called into question the legitimacy of the process that gave farmers the greatest power over corrupt officials and monopolies, that is, nominating and electing candidates who would follow the will of the people and direct government to its proper ends.

¹⁵⁸ CT: “Government” rather than “government”

¹⁵⁹ CT: A comma follows “honesty”.

¹⁶⁰ CT: Does not contain “hereby”.

¹⁶¹ This phrase comes directly from the last paragraph of the DOI: “Free and Independent States”.

¹⁶² CT: “shall” rather than “will”

¹⁶³ CT: “State”

¹⁶⁴ CT: “President” rather than “president”

¹⁶⁵ CT: “in” rather than “on”

¹⁶⁶ DOI: “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.” The only difference, other than capitalization, between this line and the corresponding line in the DOI is the deletion of “the protection of” in the ISFA. CT: On

the following line appears “THE FARMERS” as a signature. In the DOI, the 56 signatures on the parchment copy of the Declaration appear below this line.

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