

THE WAGES OF EMPIRE:
LABOR AND AMERICAN COLONIALISM, 1895-1905

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Introduction – From Empathy to Empire

In late April 1898, with the United States seemingly days away from war with Spain, Pittsburgh labor editor A.R. Hamilton sought to explain why “the cry for intervention in Cuba comes the more strongly from the wage-earners of the country.” Hamilton insisted working-class Americans were “more profoundly stirred by the sufferings of the Cuban people” because they knew “more about hunger and privation from personal experience than people of wealth, and their hearts are more quickly moved by stories of distress.”¹ Such stirrings of empathy for their “fellow oppressed” emerged back in the fall of 1895 when, in the midst of the worst economic depression to date in U.S. history, union workers assumed a leading role in a national grassroots ‘movement’ to express Americans’ support for the Cuban revolution. Cuban sympathy meetings were saturated with allegory, and they allowed workers reeling from social discord to take part in celebrations of traditional American nationalism and make symbolic professions regarding the nation’s republican “duty” to aid the oppressed. But the grassroots movement also rooted “sympathy” for the Cuban revolutionaries as a genuine cry from *the American people*.

A couple of years later, after many twists and turns in the labor movement’s “story of Cuba,” workers now faced a foreign war – the nation’s first in fifty years and workers’ first as industrial proletarians. Despite persistent, and sometimes violent, conflict with capital, a long anti-war tradition and considerable unease from some of the labor movement’s top officials, union workers from across the country rallied to the flag and

¹ A.R. Hamilton, “Working People and War,” *National Labor Tribune*, April 21, 1898, 1.

championed what they believed would be an honorable war. They made public professions of working-class patriotism, hailed America's duty to protect the oppressed, and fantasized about the possibilities of social reconciliation through war. Some within the labor movement, such as Birmingham, Alabama's J.H.F. Mosley, imbued the War of 1898 with immense significance for the future of America and workers' broader class struggle. "For more than a quarter of a century the toilers of the United States have been contending for liberty and the abolition of industrial slavery," reflected Mosley. "Will they now understand that the avenue to their goal is via the down-trodden patriots on the island of Cuba?"²

Needless to say, the War of 1898 failed to satisfy workers' grandiose ambitions. Labor's quixotic vision for the war, however, revealed much about the turn-of-the-century workers' movement. By the middle of the 1890s, the harsh realities of Gilded Age industrialization, the proliferation of state-sponsored violence to crush strikes, and the devastating effects of cyclical economic depressions had forever shattered workers' illusions about returning to a somewhat-mythic "Artisan's Republic." The distinctive moral universality of workers' aspirations died alongside those illusions – and for years afterwards the nation's now-ideologically-adrift working class strove for stability, social acceptance, and a semblance of meaning and direction in a world that scarcely resembled that which they had envisioned for so long. The war they hoped would unify the nation, liberate Cuba, and save the 'soul' of the American Republic concluded with the nation still rife with social discord, scores of racist denunciations of Cubans and Filipinos' worthiness for self-government, and the seizure of an overseas American empire.

² J.H.F. Mosley, "Labor and the United States Will Profit by the War," *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, May 21, 1898.

Something had gone terribly awry. The McKinley administration created a coercive protectorate over Cuba and assumed colonial control of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines, and Hawaii. In 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt snatched the Panama Canal Zone and set the nation's global initiatives for the century to come. The elevation of an official government policy of military-industrial expansion forced American labor to confront the fateful implications of empire: Would they embrace it as the nation's destiny? Or reject it as antithetical to the 'spirit' of America? Take up the "White Man's Burden"? Or forge an international, racially inclusive, critique of 'capitalist empire'?

Between 1898 and roughly 1902, much of the American labor movement vehemently protested American imperialism. Empathy for their fellow oppressed, however, was not the driving force of their opposition to Empire. Labor united against imperialism in order to defend their racial and class privileges that they held were threatened by competition with, immigration of, or, *God forbid*, even citizenship for, the inhabitants of America's newfound colonies. A.R. Hamilton had praised workers' compassion for the struggling Cubans, but when he turned his gaze towards the victims of American imperialism in the Pacific his fellow-feeling was more narrowly confined: "In their work, their homes, food and clothing," Hamilton balked, they "endure conditions amid which no self-respecting white man could live."³ Hamilton later cautioned that competition with such workers would subject American labor to its greatest ever threat.⁴ Others within the labor movement were even more apoplectic. Jared Sater, an Indiana union worker, asked derisively: "Are we such great humanitarians

³ A.R. Hamilton, "Hawaii's Labor Problem," *National Labor Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1898, 5.

⁴ A.R. Hamilton, "The President's Message," *National Labor Tribune*, Dec. 8, 1898, 1.

as a nation that we must desolate the intelligent civilized people of the United States to attempt civilization of such a savage race as the Filipinos are – a mixture of ten distinct savage races?”⁵ Instead of focusing their ire on the political and material forces underlying American expansionism abroad, union workers turned inwards and hid behind a wall of whiteness – they denounced imperialism primarily because it was a menace to their class and racial privileges.

But there was more here. The last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the rise and fall of a dramatic challenge to America’s traditional ethic of acquisitive individualism – a persistent and unifying cry, in the words of labor luminary George E. McNeill, that “mutualism is preferable to individualism.”⁶ Its demise at the turn of the twentieth century severed the labor movement into two – the American Federation of Labor (AFL), with its booming growth driven by the successful organization of an “aristocracy” of skilled craft labor, and the rest of the working class, who increasingly found themselves outside the considerations of the mainstream labor movement. Fear of the racial “Other” in the colonies united white workers *at the same time* the American working class faced chaos, uncertainty, and division at home. The AFL’s success in the early twentieth century was determined, to a large part, by the Federation’s ability to draw upon the support of the wider working class whose interests they no longer represented. Race and racism united white workers at the expense of non-whites in the colonies as well as at home.

By 1902, white workers in America were no longer imperiled with the

⁵ Jared Sater, “Some Thoughts on the War,” *The Union* (Indianapolis), Feb. 18, 1899.

⁶ George E. McNeill, “The Philosophy of the Labor Movement.” A paper read before the International Labor Congress in Chicago, Illinois, Sept. 1893 (New York: American Federation of Labor, n.d.).

immigration or competition of colonial workers. The American Federation of Labor had played a major role in securing immigration restriction, bans on contract labor, and tariffs on colonial goods. The threat to union workers' class and racial identities had been averted. In response, labor largely dropped all semblances of an anti-imperialist discourse. Labor's acquiescence to empire was striking in its breadth and rapidity. Labor newspapers that consistently harangued imperialism between 1898 and 1902 suddenly dropped all references to the colonies once white labor had secured its protection from the "Asian hordes." AFL president Samuel Gompers, a leading spokesman for the national Anti-Imperialist League between 1898 and 1900, never spoke again on its behalf. Even the delegates to the founding convention of the International Workers of the World in 1905 – an organization dedicated to a worldwide labor movement – failed to utter a word regarding America's empire. When the United States commenced construction of the Panama Canal in 1905, much of the labor movement officially aligned with the nation's imperial ambitions. White union workers demanded, however, that they benefit from empire. They stipulated their support for imperial projects based on their proffered advantages to labor and they strove to gain assurances that skilled white labor would retain racial and class privileges – immigration restriction, a share in economic growth, racial segregation, and a sense of superiority at home; expansive job opportunities, preferential employment, racial segregation, and a sense of superiority in the colonies abroad. These were the material, cultural, and psychological "wages" of empire.

This dissertation traces the American labor movement's tortuous turn-of-the-century trek from empathy to empire. It is, for me at least, an agonizing tale. The years 1895 to 1905 spanned a profound transition for labor and America. In 1895, a broad

workers' movement could still be mobilized behind tangible, but elusive, visions for an "Artisan's Republic." In 1905, a narrowly-circumscribed "aristocracy of labor" had largely abandoned the wider working class and united skilled white workers behind the privileges and promises of pure-and-simple unionism.⁷ In 1895, much of America – with labor playing a leading role – forged a grassroots sympathy movement that cemented the nation's duty to support those nation's struggling against colonial oppression. In 1905, much of America – again, with labor playing a key role – endorsed the U.S. government's expansive foreign policy initiatives and the nation's oppressive control of an overseas empire. Such a rendering of the decade surrounding the turn of the twentieth century is, of course, far too simplistic and it leaves out much more than it answers. The narrative arc, however, still holds true. The reorientation of the American labor movement and workers' abandonment of their anti-colonial discourse certainly had an internal logic – the former tied to emerging divisions within the working class and the proliferation of state-sponsored industrial violence against broadly-defined workers' movements; the latter tied to white workers' racist tradition and the burgeoning relationship between skilled labor and the industrial-capitalists who pressed for expansion. This dissertation aims to penetrate the historical context, complexities, and contingent moments of how that happened.

Previous historical accounts of the U.S. labor movement and the Spanish-American War have misinterpreted – or neglected outright – union workers' engagement

⁷ Turn-of-the-century pure-and-simple unionism entailed the acceptance of the permanency of wage labor and the repudiation of broad social reform and partisan politics. Instead, pure-and-simple unionists aimed to achieve steady wage increases and shorter work days through conservative union practices and political lobbying efforts. Pure-and-simple unionism was predominantly restricted to skilled labor in narrowly-constructed craft unions – its advocates renounced previous labor practices of organizing unskilled labor and affiliating all industrial workers across class and craft lines.

with the Cuban revolution. In an unpublished, but oft-referenced, dissertation, John C. Appel has claimed that Samuel Gompers and the Cigar Makers' International Union were responsible for labor's involvement with the Cuban revolution since the "insurrection aimed at independence offered just the opportunity Gompers needed" to unionize Cuban cigar workers.⁸ Appel provides little evidence for such a plan (which certainly had nothing to do with the wider labor movement's sympathy for Cuba) and insinuates that Gompers was almost entirely responsible for labor's support of the Cuban revolution – a curious argument considering America's union workers began sympathizing with Cuba in 1895, the only year between 1886 and 1924 that Gompers was *not* the president of the AFL. Among published works, Philip Foner notes that union workers "correctly sympathized with the struggle of the Cuban people," but provides no other explanation for *why* workers supported the revolution.⁹ More recently, David Montgomery, too, acknowledges workers' professions of sympathy, but offers no discussion of why or how it progressed.¹⁰ Other scholars have dismissed the popularity of Cuban sympathy – and the role of working-class Americans in it – altogether. In one of the more problematic recent works on the Spanish-American War, Richard F. Hamilton argues that there was "little evidence" of "grassroots sentiment" regarding the Cuban revolution, explaining his analysis with an off-hand, if not outright egregious, remark that "most [American] citizens" would never have bothered with such a grassroots endeavor since they "would

⁸ John C. Appel, "The Relationship of American Labor to United States Imperialism, 1895-1905," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1950), 77. For Appel's full argument, see: 63-81.

⁹ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 2: 405.

¹⁰ David Montgomery, "Workers' Movements in the United States Confront Imperialism: The Progressive Era Experience," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 7:1 (January 2008), 9.

have been occupied by those omnipresent and pressing concerns, those of family sustenance and welfare.”¹¹ Such a reductionist argument denies the meaningfulness and impact of working-class activism. The labor movement, in contrast, helped shape the national discourse on Cuba, while at the same time labor’s engagement with the Cuban revolution helped shape the turn-of-the-century labor movement.

Labor scholars have had mixed success with their interpretations of the Spanish-American War and the advent of American imperialism. John C. Appel was on much more solid ground in regards to labor and the war, as he at least recognized that much of the labor movement was behind the war-effort in the spring of 1898.¹² In his *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, on the other hand, Philip Foner argues labor was opposed to war with Spain in the spring of 1898, only to “succumb” to the coercive force of “war fever” after war was declared.¹³ David Montgomery relied upon Foner’s work to mistakenly assert that most of the labor press “warned against a resort to arms” in 1898.¹⁴ My investigation into accounts of urban central labor union meetings, the pronouncements of individual union branches, letters to labor editors, and workers’ participation in patriotic ceremonies reveals, in fact, that the rank-and-file overwhelmingly declared their support for war against Spain during the spring of 1898. A detailed and wide-ranging analysis of the labor press, meanwhile, shows that the

¹¹ Richard F. Hamilton, *President McKinley, War and Empire* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2006), 163, 245.

¹² Appel, “Relationship of American Labor,” 61.

¹³ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 405-412. Foner later made an even more emphatic evaluation, declaring, “The predominant sentiment in labor circles was definitely anti-war.” Philip S. Foner, *U.S. Labor Movement and Latin America: A History of Workers’ Response to Intervention, vol. I 1846-1919* (South Hadley, Mass.: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1988), 18.

¹⁴ Montgomery, “Workers’ Movements in the United States,” 9.

majority of union leaders and labor editors had spoken in favor of war by the time it was declared on April 25, 1898. With respect to the U.S. labor movement and American imperialism, Appel, Foner, and Montgomery have all plotted the rise and fall of labor's anti-imperialism, although they assign divergent timelines and motivations to its course. Appel and Foner both see labor's "acquiescence" to Empire as nearly complete by 1905, while David Montgomery maintains that the AFL did not "abandon their opposition to the annexation of colonies" until the early 1920s.¹⁵ All of them fail to deal adequately with the issue of race.¹⁶ The shifting composition of the turn-of-the-century labor movement, the vicissitudes of working-class whiteness, and the cultural and material temptations of an aggressively-expansionist U.S. foreign policy, on the other hand, lay at the center of this dissertation.

Chapter I, "'They Are Just Like Us': The Origins of the Cuban Sympathy Movement," provides the first in-depth scholarly investigation into the Cuban Sympathy Movement of late 1895 and early 1896 that formed and articulated Americans' normative understanding of Cuba's revolution against Spain. The centrality of the Cuban sympathy movement to Americans' interpretation of the Cuban revolution has largely gone unnoticed by scholars. This dissertation, on the other hand, reveals that a broad coalition of Americans from across social, economic and political lines determined the nation had

¹⁵ Appel, "Relationship of American Labor," 301; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 437; Montgomery, "Workers' Movements in the United States," 41.

¹⁶ Appel notes labor's employment of racist language to criticize imperialism, but fails to offer any contextual analysis of labor and race. Problematically, he also legitimizes some of the imperialist discourse – such as the 'naval necessity' for annexing Hawaii. Appel, "Relationship of American Labor," 128. Foner only briefly mentions labor's racist anti-imperialist arguments, portraying them as mere "misconceptions" that diverted workers from the real issue at hand: capitalist expansion. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 428. Montgomery, too, largely dismisses the race issue. He acknowledges "white racism in the labor movement," but insists that "we must look elsewhere for an adequate explanation of AFL policies regarding empire." Montgomery, "Workers' Movements in the United States," 11.

an urgent responsibility to express moral sympathy for the island revolutionaries. The rhetoric and imagery of Cuban sympathy meetings, however, revealed the participants' agenda was exceedingly self-serving – the actual plight of Cubans frequently fell by the wayside, displaced from the center by a collective celebration of national unity and abstract American principles. The timing of the sympathy movement was crucial – the 1893-1897 economic depression, significant class conflict, and bitter political dissonance combined with a general *fin de siècle* uneasiness to foment a broad re-orientation of American culture during the final decade of the nineteenth century. Americans embraced the Cuban sympathy movement primarily because its paeans to traditional American nationalism provided a cogent means for bridging social discord.

Chapter II, “The American Labor Movement and the Metaphor of Cuba,” asserts that organized labor played an essential part in the formation and spread of the 1895-1896 Cuban sympathy movement. Union leaders and rank-and-file workers responded to the Cuban sympathy movement's displays of devotion to American nationalism, but they also embraced the cries of “sympathy for the oppressed” because it offered cultural sustenance to workers facing a tremendous amount of economic, ideological, and organizational turmoil. Dedicated to white supremacy, union workers ignored the “race issue” in Cuba, instead electing to focus on the myriad ways in which the discourse surrounding the island revolution could be employed to strengthen labor's place in America's social landscape. For organized labor, in other words, it was never really ‘about’ Cuba. Instead, union workers utilized sympathy meetings to seek social reconciliation, mend ideological and organizational fissures and demand validation of working-class nationalism. The unity proffered by the Cuban sympathy movement, however, proved temporary and

equivocal. Union workers soon exploited Americans' popular fixation with the Cuban revolution to issue bitter recriminations against their domestic foes.

Chapter III, "Rallying around the Flag: Labor and the Spanish-American War," acts as a corrective to the scholarship on the U.S. labor movement and the Spanish-American War that has positioned organized labor as generally opposed to going to war against Spain.¹⁷ The majority of the labor movement called for intervention into Cuba, in fact, even before the declaration of war. Workers were partially driven into the "war camp" by a popular narrative in the spring of 1898 that implicated the "money powers" in a scheme to prevent war, discredit American "honor," and betray Cubans' claim for independence. Labor's long-held contentions – that workers represented the nation's true republican spirit, while the "money powers" were subverting it – merged during this key juncture in American history. Patriotic "flag-raising" ceremonies abounded with paeans to sectional *and* social reconciliation, leading union workers to envision the Spanish-American War, however mistakenly, as a "people's fight" that would help restore the nation's "meaning" and "purpose" after years of social discord. Here again, labor came to see the Cubans' fight as a metaphor for their own. Workers' desire to be accepted as patriotic citizens – and their desire to have their particular definition of nationalism accepted into mainstream American ideology – trumped labor's historical compunction to war.

Chapter IV, "Protecting the White Workers' Republic: Organized Labor and America's Empire," traces the arc of labor's anti-imperialist crusade and demonstrates that union workers eventually acquiesced to empire. When the Spanish-American War ended with the United States having acquired overseas colonies, much of organized labor

¹⁷ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*; Montgomery, "Workers' Movements in the United States."

originally, and defiantly, fought to preserve white union workers' racial and class privileges from the "threat" posed by colonial inhabitants potentially immigrating to the United States or undercutting white workers' wages. The national debate over U.S. imperialism took place while the American labor movement was in the midst of an immense transition. By the early years of the twentieth century, the AFL's "aristocracy of labor" was increasingly isolated from the working-class as a whole – a chasm that disturbed some workers and caused many others to worry that industrial-capitalists could eventually exploit labor's internal divisions. Turn-of-the-century white union workers, therefore, invoked the psychological "wages" of whiteness in the battle against U.S. imperialism as a means for conserving the benefits of unionism and temporarily ameliorating the masses of American workers who increasingly found themselves cut off from the mainstream labor movement. Labor's anti-imperialism, however, had been conditional from the outset, and slowly waned in the first years of the twentieth century such that by 1905 they had almost entirely abandoned their previous opposition to empire.

The epilogue, "The Wages of Empire," asserts that American union workers quickly transitioned from opposition to acquiescence to outright devotion to American imperialism. The evocation of David Roediger's influential work *The Wages of Whiteness* is intentional, as I have argued that turn-of-the-century union workers increasingly sought the material and psychological 'wages' of white supremacy through their support of aggressive, expansionist, and racist foreign policy initiatives. White union workers' sense of self – and sense of superiority – became *dependent* upon contrasting America's workforce with the "racially inferior" inhabitants of American

colonies and other “lesser” nations. The leadership of the American Federation of Labor set the labor movement on a path of aligning white union workers’ interests with the nation’s global agenda. The AFL actively supported a unionization campaign in Puerto Rico that was dedicated to the preservation of U.S. rule, and simultaneously renounced the labor movement in the Philippines due to the workers’ sustained demands for independence from American colonial control. Union workers and their leaders enthusiastically endorsed President Theodore Roosevelt’s acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone in 1904, as they envisioned an American-controlled isthmian canal would boost foreign trade, create thousands of jobs for union labor, and, again, provide a meaningful avenue for labor to “prove” their patriotic credentials – all without the drawbacks of a “formal” Empire. By 1905, then, union workers were determined to profit – materially and culturally – from the wages of empire.

Union workers’ path from empathy to empire paralleled the final collapse of the labor movement’s inclusive producerist ideology and the elevation of conservative business union tactics aimed at protecting an “aristocracy of labor.” Workers’ assumptions, aspirations, and apprehensions regarding the world in which they lived were dramatically altered between 1895 and 1905 – this was much more than just organizational transitions or tactical changes, it was a profound remaking of America’s labor movement. Union workers were sustained in this tumultuous process by their self-fashioned narrative that positioned labor as the rightful and righteous defenders of the American Republic – both at home and abroad. They used Cuba as a metaphor to press their “producers” vision for the American Republic, they assailed the “money powers”

for callously disregarding the “republican” spirit that workers deemed essential to American nationalism, and they celebrated Cuban sympathy and, especially, the declaration of the Spanish-American War for their ability to unify all classes of Americans. Union workers subsequently protested American imperialism because it threatened their vision for a white workers’ Republic, attacked the “money powers” for instigating colonial conquest as a means for subverting labor at home, and, finally, endorsed empire in return for the official preservation of their racial and class privileges. Hope for national unity, reliance upon shared working-class “whiteness,” and fear of the “Other” helped ease labor’s faltering progression through a broad reorientation of the working class.

Labor’s historical march from empathy for oppressed Cubans to endorsement of an oppressive global American empire had a pronounced effect on U.S. domestic and foreign policy as well. Organized labor’s support for war against Spain – despite a long-standing ideological opposition to war – gave considerable credibility to the contention that the War of 1898 was truly a “people’s war,” a mistaken conviction that still resonates deeply in the nation’s cultural imagination. The McKinley administration invoked the popular acclaim of the war to “liberate” Cuba in order to justify the war’s eventual results – coercive control over Cuba and colonial control over Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam, and the Philippines. Workers could hardly be assigned culpability for the outcomes of the Spanish-American War, but their misguided conviction that by “saving” Cuba they could “save” America revealed how beholden the labor movement was to their quest for patriotic acceptance and social stability. Labor’s subsequent race-based anti-imperialism fused working-class ideology with an ethno-centric definition of American nationalism at

a key moment in America's historical debate over immigration, African-American and Asian-American rights, and colonial expansion. Union workers' eventually embraced empire, moreover, securing working-class support for the United States' global ambitions. At the very outset of "America's Century," workers renounced a racially and ethnically inclusive, internationally-oriented "working class" movement in return for the promise of a mutually-profitable destiny for a select set of skilled, unionized white workers, their industrial-capitalist allies, and political proponents of an expansive and interventionist state. And yet, the very impulse behind this dissertation lay in my wish that things had unfolded differently.

I know I want an American labor movement that did not develop – one that sought to include the entire working class, one that was not manipulated by the political whims of partisan posturing, one that was driven by a global perspective befitting a global capitalist economy, and one that embraced the virtuous possibilities inherent in American nationalism but eschewed its reactionary or jingoistic tendencies. My research was partially motivated by my frustration with the state of the labor movement in the United States today. But, like any good social historian, it was also prompted by a compulsion to understand the stories of men and women whose viewpoints, experiences, and daily triumphs of "just trying to make a living" have far-too-often slipped through the cracks of our grand narratives regarding the "making of America." Throughout this dissertation I have included, whenever possible, the voices of the "rank-and-file" and countless other Americans who, for all intents and purposes, have been lost to posterity. It was a conscious decision – one driven, of course, by the necessities of labor history, but also by my dissatisfaction with historical scholarship on the Spanish-American War and

turn-of-the-century U.S. imperialism that has largely excluded the actions and interpretations of all but a sliver of the American populace. I have not always been as successful as I would have liked in recapturing the utterances of the unrenowned – as many historians could tell you, sometimes our sources simply do not give us what we ask. But if I have not done the rank-and-file justice in this account, I can offer assurances that it is not out of a lack of compassion or effort.

Like many historians, I have pursued the promise of answers in the past for persistent questions I hold pertaining to the present. But I have also agonized over the implications of those historical judgments, time-and-again shuddering at pretensions of scholarly moral authority. Remonstrances regarding what workers *should have done* can feel awfully patronizing to a working-class kid who grew up in a Midwestern city littered with the brick-and-mortar shells of America's lost industrial heyday. I hope, instead, that this dissertation provides insight into the "real-time" circumstances through which America's union workers intertwined the culture and ideology of the U.S. labor movement with the nation's militaristic geo-political interests at the turn of the twentieth century. It seeks to delve into the hearts and minds of workers who were experiencing immense social, cultural, and economic transformations that *entirely remade* the world they had once known. Such chaotic, confounding, and comprehensive change invariably forced union workers to make difficult decisions about how to best protect their already-tenuous position in America's turbulent turn-of-the-century social landscape. They sought acceptance into America's national community based on terms that at least partially fulfilled the axioms they held for decades regarding the "meaning" and "purpose" of America. When they chose war, or denounced colonial inhabitants as

“racially inferior,” or succumbed to the temptation of empire, they did so based upon their own principles and traditions, their own social and cultural needs. Racism, nationalism, and the pursuit of material self-preservation – the labor movement’s volatile, yet defining ideological concoction – acted as a bridge between labor’s past and future, between their nineteenth-century yearning for an artisan’s American Republic and their twentieth-century reality of an urban-industrial American empire. The history of the American labor movement, as lamentable as it may be, is intimately intertwined with the history of American imperialism.

Chapter I

‘They Are Just Like Us’ – The Origins of the Cuban Sympathy Movement

The crowd outside Chicago’s Central Music Hall on the early fall evening of September 30, 1895 kept growing to problematic proportions. The on-duty police force struggled to contain the swell – the South Side auditorium’s capacity was only 1,800, but over twice that number of Chicagoans attempted to push their way into the hall, spilling out onto State and Randolph streets in the disorder. Organizers Edward Cragin and his fellow Union League Club members had called for the nation’s first Cuban sympathy meeting only ten days prior.¹ Cragin, a Chicago businessman and civic activist, and the Union League Club members expressed their confidence that “a movement for the expression of sympathy for Cuba, rightly started here will sweep the country in a very short time.”² The massive turnout outside of Central Music Hall forced the freshly-minted Chicago Cuban Committee – a group that included some of the city’s prime movers and shakers, from the mayor George Swift to leading figures in the Chicago Civic Federation like William Vincent and William Giles to the fiery labor radical William C. Pomeroy – to improvise. They commandeered the nearby YMCA hall to hold dual, simultaneous sympathy meetings. Committee members and Chicago police officers guided the two-thousand-or-so Chicagoans who could not fit into Central Music Hall down a still-dirt Randolph St., snaking left at LaSalle St. to the skeleton-steel style

¹ The phrase “Cuban sympathy movement” (or even the *exact* phrase “Cuban sympathy meeting”) were by no means official phrases. But participants at the time would have understood, and perhaps even accepted, my terminology; speech after speech, petition after petition, and meeting-call after meeting-call used phrases about “expressing sympathy” for Cuba and “petitioning for belligerent rights” for the revolutionaries. Speakers and organizers, moreover, constantly referenced the breadth and popularity of the “sympathy meetings,” thus forging a collective sensibility reflective of a “movement.”

² “To Help Free Cuba,” *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Sept. 21, 1895, 1.

YMCA building – a dusty, impromptu parade representing a curious cross-section of the city’s social clubs, political parties, labor organizations and ethnic associations.

The evening’s purpose, according to Edward Cragin, the Chicago Cuban Committee’s chair, was “to declare by the American method – *by a mass meeting of the people* – our earnest sympathy with the oppressed citizens of Cuba.”³ The Cubans had reinitiated their war for independence from Spain in February of 1895, and their struggle had slowly etched its way into Americans’ popular consciousness throughout the proceeding months. But by September of 1895, there was hardly a widely accepted interpretation of the events unfolding in Cuba. American newspapers loosely reported on events on the island – an insurgent victory here, a Spanish rout there – but the “Cuban issue” had yet to gain any consistent following in the United States during the first seven months of the insurrection. That would change after Chicago’s sympathy meeting. Or, rather, meetings. Due to the overflowing crowd of Cuban sympathizers, Edward Cragin and the Cuban Committee prompted all of the evening’s speakers – once they had finished addressing the primary audience at Central Music Hall – to make the short amble down Randolph and LaSalle streets to give similar speeches to the expectant crowd at the YMCA.

Like all of the buildings in downtown Chicago, including Central Music Hall, the YMCA was relatively new. While nearly every urban center in the United States had experienced a boom in population and a concomitant boon in modern construction in the last thirty years of the nineteenth century – a mass urbanization process driven by the dynamic and world-altering phenomenon of the Second Industrial Revolution – Chicago’s conspicuous “newness” had as its foundation the Great Fire of 1871 that

³ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

burned most of the city to the ground. The celebrated rapid regeneration of the physical city itself, culminating in the lustrous and capricious White City of the 1893 World's Fair, belied deepening social conflicts within the city that were representative of worsening national fissures. While the wealth and ingenuity of the Industrial Revolution propelled the United States to the forefront of the world's economic powers, the final decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by intense, and sometimes violent, discord between the working-class, wealthy capitalists, and representatives of the State. As the Rockefellers and Pullmans inaugurated a new American aristocracy, the "other half" lived in squalid tenement housing, struggled to find even minimal employment, and suffered through a crippling decades-long cycle of economic depressions. And though millions were patriotically awestruck by America's technological advancements, exemplified by the 1893 World's Fair industrial displays, an ever-increasing population of dissident Populist farmers, organized laborers, Socialists, and splintering party factions threatened to tear asunder the political and social fabric of The Republic. In Chicago, as in the rest of nation, it was an overwhelming sense of ambivalence that defined Americans' cultural trek through the Gilded Age.

But on the warm, early fall evening of September 30, 1895, several thousand Chicagoans set aside uncertainty and division to aspire collectively for the success of the Cuban revolution through the culturally essential medium of the "mass meeting." For understandable reasons, the Cuban committee did not have enough time to decorate fully the YMCA hall for the sympathy meeting – only a few hastily arranged commemorative banners adorned the improvised stage area – but that was certainly not the case at Central Music Hall. Music Hall had the veritable appearance of an American patriotic political

rally – an image indicative of the underlying motivations for the Cuban sympathy meeting. The speakers’ platform, ostentatiously draped in red, white, and blue, seemingly hovered before a stage set with seventy-five split-back wooden chairs (one for each of the meetings’ honorable vice-presidents), innumerable Americans flags, and the modest placards of the forty-odd local and state organizations represented at the night’s affair. Garish and colorful banners festooned the walls of Central Music Hall, delivering historical messages deemed relevant for the evening’s mass meeting.⁴ On one side of the hall a banner quoted the Declaration of Independence,

When a long train of abuses and usurpations evinces a design to reduce the people under absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty to throw off such government.

Alongside were the words of Thomas Jefferson,

The God who gave us life, gave us liberty at the same time.

Across the jammed hall, Patrick Henry’s famous missive emblazoned the wall,

*Give me liberty, or give me death!*⁵

The cadre of speakers at the meetings detailed Spanish cruelty and misgovernment; each rhetorical eruption, according to news reports, “greeted with groans” by an increasingly animated audience.⁶ The Cuban people were, according to William J. Hynes, “taxed without representation...robbed day and night [and]...ruled by an absolute military despotism the like of which is not known by any other country on the face of the earth!” “We are here,” Reverend P.S. Henson avowed, “because our

⁴ “Asked to Aid Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1-2; “To Break the Spanish Yoke,” *Nebraska State Journal*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1-2; *The News* (Frederick, Md.), Oct. 1, 1895, 1; “The Insurrection,” *Manitoba Morning Free Press* (Winnipeg, Ontario), Oct. 1, 1895, 2.

⁵ “Freedom for Cuba,” *World-Herald* (Omaha), Oct. 1, 1895, 1.

⁶ “Sympathy for Cuba,” *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Oct. 1, 1895, 1.

sympathy with the struggling, suffering patriots in that sunny land, drenched so long with the blood of its heroic sons, cannot longer be choked down without national suffocation.”⁷ The solicitous crowd “shouted applause emphasized with roars” at every mention of the Declaration of Independence, every proclamation of the potency of American sympathy, every comparison between the Cuban insurgents and the American patriots of 1776, and every proffered assertion of the imperatives of American duty.⁸ “The hallowed memories of Washington and his compatriots,” E.B. Sherman reminded the audience, “are cherished as a sacred legacy.” Therefore, “the sons and daughters of patriot sires can never look on with indifference while a brave people are striving...[for] liberty, free government, and free institutions.” Dr. W.H. Thomas, echoing the sentiments of the rest of the evening’s speakers, asserted, “The American people owed it to the cause of liberty to take their stand and declare their sympathy with the brave and struggling Cubans.”⁹ One after another, on the stages of Central Music Hall and the LaSalle St. YMCA, Chicago’s proponents of the fledgling Cuban sympathy movement expounded what would ultimately become the normative American interpretation of the Cuban revolution prior to U.S. intervention in 1898.

After that first successful meeting and throughout the fall of 1895, the Chicago Cuban Committee forged a grass-roots movement that affirmed Americans’ incumbent duty to express sympathy for the Cuban cause. Augmented by a broadening local and national nucleus of dedicated advocates, they championed U.S. recognition of Cuba’s belligerent rights (a matter of international law determined by individual sovereign states)

⁷ “Asked to Aid Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 2.

⁸ “Sympathy for Cuba,” *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Oct. 1, 1895, 1.

⁹ “Asked to Aid Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 2.

as both deserved and indispensable. The movement spread rapidly throughout the nation and its popularity reached across social, economic, and political lines.¹⁰ By the first months of 1896, at wintry courthouses in locales like Knoxville, Tennessee and Marshalltown, Iowa, and in the luminous metropolitan halls of Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Washington D.C. and more, tens of thousands of Americans (likely ranging from the merely-stimulated to the entirely-dedicated) had joined a burgeoning national “sympathy movement” for Cuban independence.

This chapter seeks to explain the origins, motivations and consequences of the Cuban Sympathy Movement within the United States in the last months of 1895 and first months of 1896. The grassroots Cuban sympathy movement initiated and defined Americans’ interpretation of the Cuban revolution – a notion accepted by those involved at the time, even if it has largely gone unnoticed by scholars since. The nationwide series of sympathy meetings – as well as the popular discourse surrounding those meetings – actually preceded the infamous sensationalized newspaper coverage of the Cuban revolt. Historians have focused much of their attention on the machinations of William Randolph Hearst, Joseph Pulitzer, and the host of metropolitan newspaper editors that headlined the era of so-called “yellow journalism.” But during the first months of 1896, the coalition of editors (given so much credit, or blame, for molding American public opinion of the war in Cuba) were at least one year away from the rise of their lurid circulation battles. The big-city “yellow journals” of 1897 and 1898 can hardly be

¹⁰ This dissertation does not, unfortunately, provide an insight into the manner in which African-American workers experienced the Cuban Sympathy Movement, Spanish-American War, and “birth” of American imperialism. To spend so much time on racism and the vicissitudes of “whiteness” in this dissertation and not delve into how that was experienced by “workers of color” is a problem – but one I hope to rectify for future purposes. This is also a wider problem in the study of the labor movement. I am by no means alone in my failure to include the wider “laboring experience” in a book or dissertation ostensibly about “labor” – investigations into African-American labor or immigrant labor need to be integrated into the wider tale of the history of the U.S. labor movement to a much larger extent than they have thus far.

credited with generating Americans' ideological understanding of the war in Cuba through their daily inflammatory, and often fictional, news coverage. Hearst's *New York Journal* and Pulitzer's *New York World* – along with the handful of other “yellow rags” – merely intensified and sensationalized the narrative Americans constructed at Cuban sympathy meetings in towns and cities across the nation in the fall and winter of 1895-1896.

The “sympathy for Cuba” campaign was a strategy devised by the Cuban Junta – the political leadership of the island's independence movement predominantly located in the United States. The Cuban Junta sought to pressure the United States government into officially recognizing the belligerent rights of the insurgency and acknowledge that a state of war existed between Cuba and Spain. U.S. bestowal of belligerent rights would not only provide a morale boost to the laborious Cuban soldiers in the fields of battle, but more importantly, legitimize the cause such that the aspiring Cuban republic could sell interest-bearing bonds to non-Cubans, legally purchase arms and munitions from abroad, and have Cuban ships rightfully acknowledged in international waters.

The initial sympathy meeting in Chicago – as well as some subsequent meetings in other U.S. urban centers – was actually the product of collaboration between the Cuban Junta, civic leaders, and social organizations (particularly the labor movement). Sympathy meetings were also held in small towns – usually under the auspices of community leaders – and countless labor unions, social organizations, professional associations and political and religious groups issued sympathy resolutions supporting the Cuban insurgents. At least superficially, such a broad swath of Americans engaged with the Cuban revolution through the popular Cuban sympathy movement due to the

widespread perception of the similarities between Americans of 1776 and Cubans of 1895 and because the meetings' primary narrative furthered an orthodox interpretation of American nationalism that positioned the United States as the vanguard of republican governments.

Cuban sympathy meetings revealed, however, that Americans tendered moral support to the Cuban insurgents because of what the Cuban sympathy movement symbolized to an ambivalent and divided American populace. At meeting after meeting, Cuba – and the actual plight of the Cuban insurgents – frequently disappeared, or at the very least receded, from Americans' discourse. Even comparisons between the trials and deprivations of Cubans and American colonists existed more as a celebratory testament to what Americans themselves accomplished through their own revolution. Likewise, the ubiquitous rhetoric in the United States in the fall and winter of 1895-1896 decrying Spanish atrocities and offering American sympathy to the “oppressed” Cubans existed primarily as a vehicle for establishing the immensity of American responsibility. Lastly, assembly halls for Cuban sympathy meetings were lavishly decorated with American patriotic paraphernalia and the meeting halls themselves reverberated with nationalistic airs – suggesting Americans' underlying objectives were, in actuality, the establishment of a nationally unifying cause and a self-interested declaration of the durability of American values.

Leading voices within the Cuban sympathy movement, moreover, explicitly connected Americans' sympathy and support of the Cuban revolution to traditions and ideals imperiled by the numerous social conflicts and economic changes of the Gilded Age. The popularity of the Cuban sympathy movement resided in its promised

alleviation, even if only temporarily, of the inescapable ambivalence engulfing much of America in the tempestuous decade of the 1890s. Prominent members of American communities, representatives of local, state, and national governments, and the leadership of influential social organizations – large and small – seized upon the Cuban sympathy movement as a simple and straightforward means of uniting disparate groups of Americans behind easily-agreed-upon tenets of orthodox American nationalism.

As the often tumultuous nineteenth century wound to a close, Americans continued to struggle with ambiguous and contentious conceptualizations of national identity, conflicting interpretations of the State's responsibility to its citizenship, and contradictory and constantly shifting representations of America's past, present, and future. The Cuban sympathy movement of late 1895-early 1896, in turn, reified an orthodox interpretation of American national identity – one that focused on Americans' supposed shared heritage of liberty, democracy, and republicanism, while conveniently masking ever-growing internal divisions. Similarly, the communal and collaborative nature of Cuban sympathy meetings revealed many Americans' continued dedication to an active political role for the "The People," despite the progression towards professional politics and the proliferation of powerful interest groups. As in many other instances in the final decades of the nineteenth century, Cuban sympathizers harkened back to a largely imagined past, invoking the "meaning" and "purpose" of the American Revolution to countenance current interpretations of America's present and future direction.

The Formation and Spread of the Cuban Sympathy Movement

Edward Cragin and his fellow Chicago Cuban Committee members expected a magnificent turnout to the nation's first Cuban sympathy meeting because, as Cragin assured the press, if you "give the people of this country an opportunity to voice their wishes in this matter...the recognition of the Cuban revolutionists will have a force which no foreign nation could oppose."¹¹ But even the Committee did not realize until early that night of September 30 that their 1,800-seat venue could not accommodate the thousands of Chicagoans who descended upon Central Music Hall. Edward Cragin had undertaken the responsibility of assuring that the meeting was well attended by publishing circulars, alerting the press, and ordering the placement of advertisements throughout downtown Chicago in the days leading up to the event; at the same time he used his substantial social connections in the city to drum up interest in the proposed collective action. Cragin drew upon these connections to maneuver deftly through the social milieu of a city still simmering from the Pullman Strike and riots scarcely a year earlier. Through a week-long whirlwind of consultations, he garnered commitments from Republican and Democrat political groups, numerous religious leaders, and over forty Chicago social clubs, labor organizations, and ethnic associations – uniting the Illinois State Federation of Labor and Chicago labor councils with elite professional organizations, Irish-American groups with German-American ethnic societies, and G.A.R. and Loyal Legion veterans groups with Confederate veterans associations.

¹¹ "To Help Free Cuba," *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Sept. 21, 1895, 1.

According to press reports, “nearly every prominent club and organization in the city was represented” at the meeting.¹²

Cragin, it turned out, had considerable experience in both mass mobilization efforts and the organization of disparate interest groups within Chicago’s turbulent social and political landscape. He initiated the widely successful concept of funding Chicago’s 1893 World’s Fair through a public stock offering – an effort that raised a significant amount of funds and helped foster a citywide sense of collective ownership of the Fair among its citizens, from the pittance-earning day laborer to the Prairie Avenue elite.¹³ Cragin’s motivation for organizing Chicago’s Cuban sympathy meeting, however, was far murkier. Publicly, he professed purely altruistic intentions and disavowed any suggestion of U.S. military intervention on the island.¹⁴ He collaborated, moreover, with Gonzalo de Quesada and Henry Lincoln de Zayas – representatives of the Cuban Junta – in planning the sympathy meeting, and their influence could be seen in the assembly’s petition to the federal government for the recognition of Cuba’s belligerent rights.¹⁵ But Cragin was also an expansionist, had ties to Standard Oil, and spent the greater part of the 1890s involved in a plan to construct a trans-isthmian shipping canal across Nicaragua.¹⁶

¹² “To Break the Spanish Yoke,” *Nebraska State Journal*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1.

¹³ “To Help Free Cuba,” *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Sept. 21, 1895, 1; *Rand McNally & Co’s. Bird’s-Eye Views and Guide to Chicago*, (Chicago: Rand, McNally & Co., 1893), 24.

¹⁴ “To Help Free Cuba,” *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Sept. 21, 1895, 1.

¹⁵ Quesada and Zayas referenced in: *The News* (Frederick, Md.), Oct. 1, 1895, 1.

¹⁶ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, (1959; revised, New York: Delta Publishing, 1962), 33-34; Lawrence A. Clayton, “The Nicaraguan Canal in the Nineteenth Century: Prelude to American Empire in the Caribbean,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 19, No. 2, (Nov., 1987): 323-352. Cragin also corresponded with President McKinley’s future Secretary of War, Russel A. Alger, in the days before the sympathy meeting. Alger, according to historian Graham A. Cosmas, was by far the most aggressive Army official regarding U.S. interests in Cuba, as well as a possible trans-isthmian canal.

His moral interest in Cuban independence, in other words, was likely shaded by his material interests in the canal scheme.

Edward Cragin's motives, however, had little to do with the popularity and success of the Chicago sympathy meetings. The twofold aspirations of the Cuban Committee for the evening of September 30, 1895 – a grand show of sympathy and a collective petition for belligerent rights – ultimately succeeded in Central Music Hall and the LaSalle St. YMCA because of the manner in which the Cuban sympathy movement was rendered intelligible to an otherwise dissonant and unsettled Chicago citizenry. Virtually all of the speeches during the Chicago sympathy meetings dwelt on three common contentions: first, the historical and current plight of the Cuban people was analogous to (if not far worse than) the tyranny and oppression experienced by the American colonies leading up to their armed revolution in 1776; second, Americans had a long-entrenched and universally essential duty to offer moral support for democratic revolutions wherever they may be – but particularly within the Western hemisphere; and third, the primary responsibility of the American government – through the democratic medium of the American people – was *not* to intervene in the conflict; instead, the United States was to recognize the belligerent status of the Cubans such that revolutionists could receive aid from other nations. The American supporters' shared, collective narrative placed the Cuban revolution squarely within the purview of the supposed U.S. historical dedication to the worldwide extension of democracy, and they viewed the state of affairs in Cuba as a perfect opportunity to assert America's devotion to its historic principles. In a time of social disorder and widespread cultural ambivalence, this narrative found

Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War*, (Shippensburg, Pa: White Mane Publishing Co., 1994), 65 (and 65, note 3).

cultural meaning as a predominantly symbolic “national sympathy movement” for an (almost) unobtrusive Cuban revolution.

On the night of the first Cuba Sympathy meetings, for instance, popular Chicago minister Reverend John Henry Barrows recited the Cuban Committee’s resolutions, emphasizing, “If the fathers of American independence were justified in casting off the oppressive dominion of Great Britain, then Cuban patriots of today have far greater justification for their attempt to overthrow the tormenting, impoverishing, [and] heartless tyranny of the Spanish Government.” John Mayo Palmer, an attorney for the city of Chicago, addressed the rapt audience, asserting, “The free people of the United States of all classes and conditions most earnestly desire that the shackles of cruelty, oppression, and misgovernment which bind Cuba to Spain shall be broken, and that Cuba shall be admitted to the commonwealth of nations as a free and independent republican State.” Furthermore, he declared, “The free people of the United States have a right – and indeed it is their duty – to give expression to this earnest desire.” In one of the first speeches of the evening, Thomas B. Bryan, a civic leader and businessman, argued, “By promptly according belligerent rights to the Cubans we may hope and pray for the success of their arms, and thus aid in forbidding [Spanish] atrocities.” “We know too,” Bryan proudly continued, “If the heroism of the Cubans survives this terrible ordeal, they will hail the dawn of freedom with paeans of joy and thanksgiving to God, mingled with gratitude to this, our free republic, as the loadstar of their liberty.”¹⁷

The Cuban well-wishers in Chicago sanctioned the assembly’s second objective – a petition for belligerent rights for Cuba – with equal enthusiasm. But they maintained that “recognition” would transcend the practical implications of belligerent rights and

¹⁷ “Asked to Aid Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 2.

actually help pave the way towards Cuban independence, simply due to the sheer magnitude of American official opinion. The resolutions began with the opening paragraph of the Declaration of Independence – “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...” – and continued, “This historic declaration, made by the founders of our republic July 4, 1776, was true then and is true today.” The people of Chicago, consequently, desired “publicly to express our indignation that in this year, 1895, the spectacle is presented of shiploads of soldiers sent 3,000 miles across the ocean to America, ‘the land of the free,’ to shoot down in cold blood a courageous people who simply desire to govern themselves.” Therefore, they believed it was their “duty and privilege at this time, as citizens of this free republic, thus to express our heartfelt sympathy with our Cuban neighbors.” Furthermore, according to the determination of meeting participants that evening, it was “the privilege and duty of the United States Government to recognize the rights of the Cuban revolutionaries as belligerents as soon as possible.” The resolutions did not end there, however, as the residents of Chicago urged their “fellow citizens throughout this country to assemble in mass meeting, to diffuse information and thus arouse, or rather deepen, the sympathy of our whole people with the Cubans in their heroic attempt to cast off the yoke of oppression and to achieve that independence and freedom which are the great highways to happiness and prosperity.”¹⁸ Shortly after the resolutions were announced at the two meetings, more than four thousand Chicagoans in attendance affirmed them without dissent.

Following the immense success of the city’s two sympathy meetings on September 30, the Chicago Cuban Committee (now enlarged to a “Committee of 100”) initiated an ambitious campaign to “appeal to the people of the United States in behalf of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

Cuba.”¹⁹ The committee mailed circulars to hundreds of cities and towns across the United States, from Boston, Massachusetts to Tacoma, Washington, and from Tampa, Florida to Detroit, Michigan. The circulars read, in part, “The committee appointed by the Chicago mass-meetings on September 30...earnestly appeal to their fellow-citizens throughout the Union to call similar meetings.” Lastly, the committee implored, “Let us not say, ‘It is no affair of ours,’ for these men are our neighbors, engaging in the same struggle and for the same principle as were the founders of this Republic.”²⁰

Meanwhile, newspapers across the nation immediately published accounts of the Chicago sympathy meetings, with detailed descriptions gracing the front pages of the *Birmingham Age Herald* in Alabama to the *Grand Forks Daily Herald* in North Dakota, and from the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* in Louisiana to the *Idaho Daily Statesmen* in Boise, Idaho – and innumerable newspapers in between.²¹ Journalists recounted “a great demonstration” wherein, “one hall was not enough,” as “thousands yell[ed] themselves hoarse.”²² “Such genuine enthusiasm [had] seldom been witnessed” in the city of Chicago, according to the newspapers’ recurrent narrative, as the people of Chicago urged “the Government to recognize the insurgents as belligerents.”²³ Chicago’s Cuban sympathizers were commonly portrayed as, “lovers of liberty” who used, “the Declaration of Independence as a textbook and the spirit of liberty as inspiration” in their

¹⁹ Circular published in: “In Aid of the Cubans,” *San Francisco Call*, Oct. 22, 1895, 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “For Cuba’s Freedom,” *Birmingham Age Herald*, Oct. 1, 1895, 5; “Cheers for Cuba,” *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1; “Want Cuba Recognized,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Oct. 1, 1895, 1; “Sympathy for Cuba,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1.

²² “For Cuba’s Freedom,” *Birmingham Age Herald*, Oct. 1, 1895, 5.

²³ “Cheers for Cuba,” *Grand Forks Daily Herald*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1; “Sympathy for Cuba,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1.

collective display of moral support for Cuba and quest for U.S. consignment of belligerent rights.²⁴

As the number of sympathy meetings nationwide multiplied throughout the late part of 1895 and early part of 1896, the assertion, “The sentiment of all America is in favor of the so-called [Cuban] rebels,” became a ubiquitous refrain.²⁵ Cuban sympathizers' tendency to slip into hyperbole certainly exemplified a common Victorian-era bluster, but it was also indicative of the movement's rapid proliferation and grassroots character. Americans' burgeoning Cuban discourse generally established moral sympathy and advocacy of belligerent rights as a nearly undisputed contention of *the American people* – a popular consensus that lasted through Congress' declaration of war against Spain in April 1898. At the Washington D.C. Cuban sympathy meeting on October 31, 1895, S.S. Burdett clamored for the Federal government to give “the shout of encouragement from the whole people which is upon the lips of the mass of our individual citizenship.”²⁶ At a crowded outdoor meeting on New Orleans' Hospital Street in late November 1895, B.C. Shields recognized that “glad tidings” for the “Cuban patriots...came from every part of the land, and Louisiana longed to add her voice to the chorus.”²⁷ In Creighton Hall, at a gathering organized by the Omaha's Central Labor Union but attended by a multitude of the city's concerned residents, “regardless of party,” Nebraskans expressed their “deep and earnest sympathy with the people of Cuba in their

²⁴ “Lovers of Liberty,” *The State* (Columbia, South Carolina), Oct. 1, 1895, 5.

²⁵ G.W. Weippiert, “Freedom Now in Sight,” *Davenport Weekly Leader*, Feb. 4, 1896, 3.

²⁶ “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

²⁷ “A Meeting to Aid Cuban Liberty,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Nov. 28, 1895, 9.

heroic struggle.”²⁸ And at the Des Moines, Iowa YMCA auditorium on November 19, 1895, Samuel Strauss voiced the sentiment, held by the nearly one thousand attendees who had braved the icy conditions to attend the sympathy meeting, “that the whole American people stand in unity in an attitude of sympathy and good-will for the people of Cuba.”²⁹

From the outset of the Cuban sympathy movement in the fall of 1895, Americans affirmed symbolic moral support and advocacy for belligerent rights as an enterprise sanctioned by the entire local, state, and national communities. Cuban sympathy secured sweeping success, in part, because community and national proponents of Cuban belligerent rights persuaded Americans it would ultimately help unify a divided nation by virtue of the movement's collective veneration of “traditional” American values. “In all matters of interest, however much we may differ,” James Tanner reminded the culturally, politically, and economically disparate, capacity crowd in Washington D.C.’s Metzerrot Hall, “when we come before the great tribune of the people in such a matter as [sympathy for Cuba] we know no politics, no religion, no differences, no hope but that the God of liberty and of faith and truth shall give success to the struggling patriots.”³⁰

Cuban sympathizers' constant references to the widespread and grassroots nature of their movement assisted in the formation of an abstract community. Sympathy meetings, in other words, diffused throughout the United States in a deliberate manner, with each new convocation implicitly attaining a sense of cultural legitimacy by means of its link to the national movement. Regardless of size or geographic location, furthermore,

²⁸ “Cuba is Lauded to the Sky,” *World-Herald* (Omaha), Dec. 10, 1895, 3.

²⁹ “Have Sympathy for Cuba,” *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 20, 1895, 5.

³⁰ “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

Cuban sympathy meetings included – and were often initiated by – prominent local leaders and popular social organizations. Sympathy meetings in Jacksonville, Cincinnati, Denver, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Des Moines, Detroit, Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Anniston, Alabama – as well as many others – were overseen by the cities’ respective mayors.³¹ Gatherings in Fremont, Nebraska, Marshalltown, Iowa, Knoxville, Tennessee, Lake Charles, Louisiana, Marion, Indiana, Fort Wayne, Indiana, Decatur, Illinois, and Rochester, New York – to name a few – were held in local courthouses and town halls.³² The list of speakers at Cuban sympathy rallies included state governors, influential local ministers, lawyers, judges, Congressmen, presidents of veteran’s associations, members of popular fraternal orders, labor union leaders, and the soon-to-be Democratic Presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan. Along with supporting community-wide mass meetings in late 1895 and early 1896, ministerial associations, city councils, state legislatures, veteran’s organizations, universities, boards of trade, labor unions, national granges, peace societies, women's temperance unions, chambers of commerce, fraternal lodges, and professional men’s associations issued resolutions sympathizing with the

³¹ “Cause of Cuban Liberty,” *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville), Oct. 31, 1895, 4; “One Dollar!,” *Kentucky Post*, Dec. 15, 1896, 8; “Good Words for Cuba,” *Rocky Mountain News*, Nov. 1, 1895, 4; “Sympathize with Cuban Patriots,” *Pittsburgh Post*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; “Tell of Cuba’s Wrongs,” *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1895, 2; “Have Sympathy for Cuba,” *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 20, 1895, 5; “Don Dickenson Pleads Eloquently for the Recognition of Cuba,” *Knoxville Journal*, Jan. 19, 1896, 1; “The Eagle,” *Fort Wayne Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; “Some Alabama Specials,” *Birmingham State Herald*, Jan. 14, 1896, 5.

³² “Sympathy with Cuba,” *Nebraska State Journal*, Nov. 27, 1895, 5; “The Hawkeye State,” *Gazette* (Cedar Falls, Ia.), Nov. 15, 1895, 2; “Let Spain Hear,” *Knoxville Journal*, Nov. 5, 1895, 1; “Cuba Meeting at Lake Charles,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Jan. 12, 1896, 8; “The Lincoln League,” *Weekly Indiana State Journal*, Feb. 19, 1896, 3; “The Eagle,” *Fort Wayne Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; “Cuba Should Be Free,” *Daily Review* (Decatur, Ill.), Nov. 1, 1895, 1; “Sympathizers at Rochester,” *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville), Oct. 21, 1895, 1.

Cuban insurgents and requesting the federal government recognize Cuba's belligerent status.³³

Cuban sympathizers utilized the method of mass meetings because, in the words of Philadelphian Russell H. Conwell, "an expression of sympathy must begin with the people, like all movements for humanity."³⁴ Mass meetings – and the resolutions and petitions that often emanated from them – were the lifeblood of the late nineteenth century social and political world. Petitioning the federal government to assert personal, local, institutional, or collective judgments concerning pressing political, social, legal, and national issues had a long-established history by the late nineteenth century. "These [sympathy] meetings will be reported from all over the country," Noble Smithson assured the gathering of roughly five hundred Tennesseans in Knoxville in early November 1895, "and it is proper for us to assemble in mass meetings and speak our sentiments on such an important matter as this."³⁵ In Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, G.L. Baldwin declared in mid-December of 1895 that it was the local G.A.R. post's "bounden duty, as an organized body of American citizens...to utter an expression on the subject of the war for Cuban independence."³⁶ The Cuban sympathy meetings of late 1895 and early 1896 and the activism of mass organizing revealed the extent to which late nineteenth century Americans continued to believe in normative American democratic theory – in other words, that the "will of the people" mattered – or at least should matter.

³³ Philip Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 1: 185.

³⁴ "Cuba's Cause Indorsed," *Gettysburg Compiler* (Pa.), Nov. 12, 1895, 1.

³⁵ "Let Spain Hear!," *Knoxville Journal*, Nov. 5, 1895, 1.

³⁶ "The Cuban Cause," *Wilkes-Barre Times* (Pa.), Dec. 16, 1895, 7.

The members of Chicago's Cuban Committee originally called upon the city's residents, "to declare by the American method – *by a mass meeting of the people* – [their] earnest sympathy with the oppressed citizens of Cuba."³⁷ The committee's focus on the particular method was telling, as late-nineteenth-century Americans developed their sensibilities and opinions, and the shared narratives that gave them form and shape, in their visceral social surroundings. The final decades of the nineteenth century were, to quote contemporary social commentator W.S. Harwood, the "Golden Age of fraternity."³⁸ Between 1870 and 1910, in fact, up to half of all Americans participated in social, fraternal, and/or leisure organizations.³⁹ Americans joined political clubs, ethnic societies, fraternal lodges, labor unions, farming cooperatives and an array of other social institutions. They attended political fairs, social-movement rallies, public debates, touring speeches and mass information sessions. And they met at saloons, lodges, churches, town halls, temperance societies and YMCAs to hash-out common interpretations and inculcate collective understandings. In the meaningful crowd – and especially, at the mass meeting, big and small – late nineteenth century Americans secured substantial agency through their communal creation of social, cultural and political narratives and the realization of their power to become, in the observation of

³⁷ "To Help Free Cuba," *Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Sept. 21, 1895, 1. Emphasis added.

³⁸ W.S. Harwood, "Secret Societies in the United States," *North American Review*, CLXIV (1897), 622-23.

³⁹ Jason Kaufman, *For the Common Good? American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 21; As Kaufman notes, see also: David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to the Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989); Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1939* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Clifford Putney, "Service over Secrecy: How Lodge-Style Fraternalism Yielded Popularity to Men's Service Clubs," *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 27, no. 1 (Summer 1993): 179-190; Arthur M. Schlesinger, "Biography of a Nation of Joiners," *American Historical Review*, vol. 50, no. 1 (October 1944): 1-25.

scholars Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott, “subjects who, jointly, determine[d] their own fate.”⁴⁰

Cuban sympathy meetings attracted a diverse group of supporters whose primary connection outside of the movement was their determination to play a part in an active citizenry. Sympathy meeting organizers such as Chicago's Edward Cragin and Washington D.C.'s Simon Wolf – both of whom held considerable economic interests in Cuba and Latin America – were no doubt actuated (at least in part) by a desire for greater stability on the island or, perhaps even more likely, by the possibility of future material benefits in a free Cuba. And politicians with an eye on the forthcoming election-cycle – from city mayors to members of Congress to presidential-hopeful William Jennings Bryan – certainly embraced the opportunity to link their fortunes to a fashionable patriotic cause. Yet, the sympathy movement's animating principle – the quest for a semblance of national unity rooted in the iteration of “core American values” – appealed first and foremost to the middle-class participants in “civic associationalism,” small-town Americans anxious to restore the mores of a bygone era, and somewhat marginalized groups – first and foremost among them, organized labor – who were eager to contribute to inclusive and popularly-sanctioned public ventures.

The vitality of the early Cuban sympathy movement emanated from these latter three sources: 1) the urban middle-class, who utilized a network of existing fraternal-sororal institutions and a burgeoning Progressive-era dedication to moralistic civic action to ground Cuban sympathy in the grass-roots world of social organizations; 2) small-town Americans, whose community-centered civic life provided an established forum for the

⁴⁰ Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott, “Becoming the Subjects of History: An Outline of the Psychology of Crowds,” in *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38-39.

movement's language of restoring the ideals of the Republic through symbolic public displays; and 3) union workers, attracted by Cuban sympathy's anti-materialistic and overtly-republican underpinnings, who hoped participation in a popular patriotic movement would help validate their place in America's turbulent end-of-the-century social landscape.⁴¹ The republican idiom that lay at the heart of the Cuban sympathy movement successfully aligned such a broad spectrum of civic-minded groups because its abstract nature allowed for the bridging of economic, political and ideological divides through professions of a shared faith in the tenets of American nationalism.

The Cuban sympathy movement of 1895 and 1896, occurring at a time of palpable social, political, and economic division, was ultimately conservative and unifying in nature. The “conservative” identity of the early Cuban sympathy meetings in the United States resided in the manner in which Americans fused support of the Cuban revolution with pre-existing social and cultural identities. Americans who attended pro-Cuba rallies or signed petitions calling for belligerency rights collectively reified the State’s orthodox definition of American national identity. As Stephen Reicher and Clifford Stott have shown, politicized crowds – rallies, protests, marches, and mass meetings – “are critical to an understanding of historical change – and also historical continuity.”⁴² Throughout American history politicized crowds have often disturbed the social equilibrium, but “it is equally true that many crowds...serve to consolidate existing

⁴¹ Late-nineteenth-century fraternal-sororal organizations had come into existence as a reflection of the urban middle-class' growing social and political influence as well as a result of, to quote historian Robert Wiebe, the “search for order” that characterized many Americans' response to the discordant transformations of industrialization, urbanization and the secularization of society. See, Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

⁴² Reicher and Stott, “Becoming the Subjects of History,” 38.

identities and stabilize the role of authority as emblematic of the imagined community.”⁴³ The Cuban sympathy movement's inclusive, albeit simplistic and conformist, conception of U.S. nationalism and American responsibilities towards the island of Cuba also paved the way for the incorporation of certain marginalized social groups – especially organized labor, who would take a leading role in the Cuban sympathy movement – into a temporarily unified body politic.

The nationwide expansion of Cuban sympathy meetings would, according to William Jennings Bryan at Omaha’s Creighton Hall in December 1895, “notify the oppressed everywhere that the greatest republic in the world is satisfied with its form of government and is ready to welcome any who desire to follow its example.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Indiana Governor Claude Matthews assured his audience in Philadelphia’s Academy of Music on November 21, 1895 that their collective expression of sympathy for Cuba and declaration in favor of belligerency rights would not be “construed into reflection or criticism on our government.” On the contrary, their assembly signified “an abiding faith in the eternal principles of our government, and in the courage, the justice, and the wisdom of the men whom we have chosen to direct its affairs.”⁴⁵ In Tacoma, Washington, Cuban sympathizers rejoiced that they lived “under a free and enlightened government, protected by the folds of Old Glory,” and expressed the aspiration that it was possible, “under the laws of the United States,” for the federal government, “in the name

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ “Cuba is Lauded to the Sky,” *World-Herald* (Omaha), Dec. 10, 1895, 3.

⁴⁵ Claude Matthews, “The Cuban Patriot’s Cause is Just, the Right Shall Prevail, and in God’s Own Time Cuba Shall be Free,” reproduction of speech from Nov. 21, 1895 at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, Pa, (Philadelphia: Charles F. Simmons, 1895), 14.

of God, justice, and humanity” to say to the Spanish government, “Stop this carnage and oppression; you shall go no further.”⁴⁶

The Cuban sympathy movement in the United States, therefore, arose and advanced primarily because it offered alleviation, if only fleeting, for the apparent overwhelming ambivalence clouding America’s historical course at the turn of the twentieth century. Peering backwards and gazing inwards, a broad coalition of Americans responded to the Cuban revolution by reaffirming “traditional” republican values, demanding the federal government act upon these timeless national principles or risk damaging the “imagined” American republic, and insisting that the collective will of the American people could overcome the myriad trials currently facing the United States. In an era of immense social disorder, support of the Cuban revolution promised Americans a simple, and thoroughly “American,” means for re-establishing a nationally cohesive identity. For tens of thousands of Americans in late 1895 and early 1896 (as well as those experiencing the meetings vicariously through press coverage or by word-of-mouth through extensive social networks), Cuban sympathy meetings reflected, albeit transiently, the United States’ continued dedication to the principles of the American Revolution and revealed that the dislocating effects of industrialization, corporatization, and social conflict had not, as was feared by many, derailed America’s purported meaning and purpose.

Early Cuban sympathy meetings predominantly centered on the domestic implications of U.S. support for the Cuban revolution. The meetings, presumably initiated to support Cuban independence, frequently devolved into fits of national introspection that reflected Americans’ murky, often self-interested motivations for

⁴⁶ “Promise Aid to Cubans,” *Tacoma Daily Ledger* (Washington), Nov. 11, 1895, 3.

joining the movement. Patriotic American songs roared through jammed assembly halls at almost every Cuban sympathy meeting – with full brass bands leading the way in New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Des Moines, Tampa and other cities.⁴⁷ Similar to Chicago’s Central Music Hall, American flags and other vividly patriotic paraphernalia conspicuously adorned the auditoriums, courthouses, and meeting halls that held sympathy meetings across the nation. And most importantly, speakers at U.S. sympathy meetings explicitly connected Americans’ moral support for Cuban independence to traditional conceptions of American national identity.

James Tanner, pacing rhythmically back and forth on the patriotically ornamented stage of Washington D.C.’s Metzerott Hall, detailed the significance of the Cuban sympathy movement: “We are not here to mark any new epoch in American history,” he assured the crowd, “but [rather] to show that American freedom, under its original form, with its old hopes, its old aspirations, and its firm determination to do its level best, is here tonight as it has always been.”⁴⁸ James Ware, speaking before a capacity crowd at the Lake Charles, Louisiana courthouse, asserted, “An American who refuses assistance to Cuba does not love to be American...[since] Liberty is the soul of the American people.”⁴⁹ At Metropolitan Hall in Jacksonville, Florida, Harding W. Davis maintained that the “great wrongs and sufferings” of Cuba had brought “to the front the great characteristics and the great men” of America. The “spirit of patriotism and love of

⁴⁷ “Would Have Cuba Free,” *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1895, 5; “Asked to Aid Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1-2; “Cuba’s Cause Indorsed,” *Gettysburg Compiler* (Pa.), Nov. 12, 1895, 1; “Sympathize with Cuban Patriots,” *Pittsburgh Post*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; “Cuban Sympathy Meetings,” *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 22, 1895, 4; “Have Sympathy for Cuba,” *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 20, 1895, 5; “For Cuban Liberty,” *Daily Florida Citizen*, Oct. 10, 1895, 1.

⁴⁸ “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

⁴⁹ “Cuba Meeting at Lake Charles,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Jan. 12, 1896, 8.

country” necessary “to inspire us to do heroic deeds for home and country...is growing in this nation, both in the North and South.” Therefore, Davis asserted, “within three months our representatives in Congress and our Chief Executive will express the public sentiment of this country with the Cuban cause!”⁵⁰ Back in Washington D.C., the intersections between the Cuban sympathy movement, current domestic social ailments, and orthodox nationalism were pointedly laid bare. Following James Tanner to the stage, Simon Wolf commemorated the evening’s speeches, resolutions, and thunderous rendition of *America* as proof, “The blood of the present American generation was the same that has for the past century responded to the call of the oppressed from every part of the world.” They gathered at Metzerott Hall that evening, and Americans assembled in meeting halls across the country, according to Wolf, “not only on account of love for the struggling [Cuban] patriots, but out of love for, and the perpetuity of, the United States.”⁵¹

Molding American Opinion: The Cuban Junta

The American sympathy movement for “Cuba Libre,” and the subsequent call for belligerent rights, essentially originated with the activities of the Cuban Junta inside the United States. The Junta was the international political body of the Cuban independence movement – organized from the political leadership of the revolution and headquartered at 120 Front Street in New York City.⁵² First “officially” appointed in September of 1895 by the Cuban Constituent Assembly (the actual governing representative body of

⁵⁰ “Cause of Cuban Liberty,” *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville), Oct. 31, 1895, 4.

⁵¹ “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 3.

⁵² George Auxier, “The Propaganda Activities of the Cuban Junta in Precipitating the Spanish-American War, 1895-1898,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 19, no. 3 (Aug., 1939): 287.

the hopeful Cuban republic), the Junta was entrusted with all of the civil and governmental duties of the revolution after the death of José Martí in May 1895. The Junta leadership took on numerous roles, acting as diplomats, fundraisers, commissary officers, disseminators of propaganda, public relations managers, political lobbyists, and the day-to-day decision-makers for the political wing of the revolution.

The Junta, active throughout the Americas and even extending their fund-raising and political lobbying efforts into Europe, understood the United States' geographic and diplomatic importance to the revolution. The United States, according to José Joaquín Palma (brother of the leading Junta official, and future president of Cuba, Tomás Estrada Palma), was the "predominant diplomatic force in the Caribbean area," and U.S. recognition of Cuba's belligerent rights would convince other nations to follow suit.⁵³ The Junta's initial policy, as indicated by Tomás Estrada Palma, was "to ease the transport of arms to Cuba" by shrewdly influencing the American news media, politicians, and U.S. public opinion to foster a national atmosphere sympathetic to the Cubans' proposal to ship men and munitions from U.S. ports to Cuba.⁵⁴

The prospect of the United States following the path of "benevolent neutrality" and permitting Cuban expeditions to embark from U.S. ports unencumbered and unchecked was quickly quashed in the first year of the insurgency. On June 12, 1895, U.S. President Grover Cleveland issued a declaration of strict neutrality towards the

⁵³ José Joaquín Palma to Tomás Estrada Palma, Guatemala, May 6, 1896, in *Correspondencia Diplomática de la Delagación Cubana en Nueva York durante La Guerra de Independencia de 1895 a 1898* (Havana: Archivo de Nacional de Cuba, 1943-46), 4: 2-3. Translation from Marshall MacDonald True, "Revolutionaries in Exile: The Cuban Revolutionary Party, 1891-1898," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1965), 299.

⁵⁴ Tomás Estrada Palma to Antonio Maceo, Washington D.C., Sept. 25, 1895, in Antonio Maceo, *Documentos para su Vida* (Havana: Comisión Nacional de la Academia de Ciencias, Inst. de Historia, 1945), 149. Translation from True, "Revolutionaries in Exile," 300.

conflict in Cuba and charged U.S. port and revenue officials with diligently enforcing the prohibition against munitions sales to Cuba, as well as the ban on filibustering expeditions initiating within the United States. President Cleveland's annual message to Congress on December 2, 1895 intensified the pressure on the insurgents, as he proclaimed the U.S. government would "observe in good faith the recognized obligations of [our] international" relationship with Spain.⁵⁵ In effect, Cleveland made it clear the office of the President would remain antagonistic to the activities of the Cuban Junta on U.S. soil.

Cleveland's neutrality proclamations were actuated by diplomatic pressure from Spain and his personal contempt for the Cuban revolutionaries. Privately, Grover Cleveland expressed his disdain for the Cuban population on several occasions. On July 16, 1896, Cleveland wrote to Secretary of State Richard Olney to explain his opposition to a proposal to purchase Cuba from Spain: "It would seem absurd for us to buy the Island and present it to the people now inhabiting it, and put its government and management in its hands." Cleveland lamented to Olney following the outbreak of the Spanish-American War that the United States would find itself "in alliance and co-operation with Cuban insurgents – the most inhuman and barbarous cutthroats in the world." In March of 1900, during the U.S. occupation of the island of Cuba, Cleveland again wrote to Olney, haughtily expressing his contention that "Cuba ought to be

⁵⁵ Grover Cleveland: "Third Annual Message (2nd term)," Dec. 2, 1895. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29536>.

submerged for awhile before it will make an American state or territory of which we will be particularly proud.”⁵⁶

Spanish diplomacy also contributed to the foiling of the Cuban Junta’s designs. Spanish officials successfully implored President Cleveland and Secretary of State Richard Olney to do all in their power to prevent Cubans from using U.S. shores as an operating base for the insurgency. The Spanish *Cortes*, military leadership, and U.S. foreign minister, Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, alleged that the revolution in Cuba would quickly fall apart if it were not for financial and military support from within the United States. In response, Olney and Cleveland pledged on numerous occasions that they “would oppose any step which might be considered as unfriendly to [Spain’s] sovereignty.”⁵⁷

Although U.S. courts failed to convict alleged filibusterers, and American public opinion continued to side with the Cubans, Dupuy de Lôme expressed his “profound gratitude” to Cleveland on several occasions for “the measures adopted by the Government of the United States to prevent infringements of the law and attempts against the peace and security of a friendly nation.”⁵⁸ Olney repeatedly assured Dupuy de Lôme, furthermore, that he and President Cleveland would “cooperate with Spain for the immediate pacification of the island, on the basis of such a plan as, leaving Spain her

⁵⁶ Letters from Grover Cleveland to Richard B. Olney, July 16, 1896; April 26, 1898; March 26, 1900. Richard B. Olney papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division.

⁵⁷ Quote taken from Spanish Archives, located in Orestes Ferrara, *The Last Spanish War; Revelations in Diplomacy*, trans. William E. Shea (New York: Paisley Press, 1937), 16.

⁵⁸ Enrique Dupuy de Lôme to Richard B. Olney, June 14, 1895, U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1895* (Washington D.C., 1896), 2: 1195. (hereafter cited as *FRUS*, 1896)

rights of sovereignty.”⁵⁹ Olney’s primary fear – one aggressively backed by Spanish officials in both Madrid and Havana – was that if Cuba was to gain its independence “the sole bond of union between the different factions of the insurgents would disappear; that a war of races would be precipitated” that would last “until the one had been completely vanquished and subdued by the other.”⁶⁰

Secretary of State Olney received Tomás Estrada Palma and two other prominent Cuban officials at the State department several weeks after Cleveland’s annual message to Congress. According to an account later published by one of Olney’s close confidantes, Olney greeted Estrada Palma, Gonzalo de Quesada, and Benjamin Guerra coldly, quickly dismissing the Junta’s requests for belligerent rights. Instead, Olney responded with his own pointed inquiries. He asked the three men if they were U.S. citizens and, receiving the affirmative in reply, pressed Tomás Estrada Palma on whether or not he had “given orders to destroy the property of other [American] citizens in Cuba?” Estrada Palma answered that, “While he had not done so, he knew and approved of such orders as a war measure in their struggle against Spain.” Slowly rising from his seat, Olney retorted: “Well, gentlemen, there is but one term for such action. We call it arson.” Now standing before his certainly startled guests, his sardonic rejoinder still hovering in the air, Olney terminated the only interview, unofficial or otherwise, the Cuban legation would receive during Cleveland’s presidency.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Richard B. Olney to Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, April 14, 1896, U.S. Department of State, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1897* (Washington D.C.: 1898), 543-544. (hereafter cited as *FRUS*, 1898) This letter was “inadvertently omitted from Foreign Relations for 1896.” *Ibid.*, 540.

⁶⁰ Richard B. Olney to Enrique Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *FRUS*, 1898, 543.

⁶¹ Edwin F. Atkins, *Sixty Years in Cuba: Reminiscences of Edwin F. Atkins*, (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1926), 213-14.

Undeterred by Cleveland's and Olney's rebuffs, Estrada Palma and the Cuban Junta remained confident they could expand upon the notable successes of the flourishing American sympathy movement and extend their campaign for belligerent rights to the legislative branch "to move the spirit of the Senators and Congressmen to our favor."⁶² "Our task," Estrada Palma concluded, "is to prove to this country and to the entire world that the Cubans in arms, not the Spanish, exercise positive authority on the island."⁶³ Gonzalo de Quesada, whom Estrada Palma selected as the Junta's representative in Washington D.C., led the Cuban belligerency campaign in Congress. Through valuable contacts with several influential Senators – including John T. Morgan from Alabama, Wilkinson Call of Florida, and Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts – Quesada was able to enlist the support of a vocal contingent of Congressmen who shared "a very friendly spirit" with the Cuban directives.⁶⁴

From the Cuban perspective, the benefits of U.S. recognition of their belligerent rights were, again, threefold: they believed it would provide a morale boost for the struggling soldiers in the field; they hoped the legitimacy bestowed by U.S. recognition could lead to other nations following suit; and they contended recognition would make it easier for the aspiring Cuban republic to sell interest-bearing bonds, legally purchase arms and munitions, and have their ships and flag internationally acknowledged. "Once we get belligerency," remarked Marcos Morales, the President of the Cuban and American National League, "then we can fight in a condition much superior to our

⁶² Estrada Palma to Maceo, New York, Dec. 10, 1895, in Maceo *Documentos*, 159. Translation from True, "Revolutionaries in Exile," 300.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Quesada to Estrada Palma, Washington D.C., Dec. 16, 1895, *Correspondencia Diplomatica*, 5: 32. Translation from True, "Revolutionaries in Exile," 302.

present one...[and] we will be at liberty to supply arms to our struggling brothers in Cuba.” “Belligerency is all we hope for and all we want at present,” Morales told American reporters, “We’ll take care of independence ourselves.”⁶⁵

Representatives of the Cuban Junta shrewdly employed the language of American republicanism and American exceptionalism when appealing for aid, sympathy, and belligerent rights from mass meeting participants, politicians, and the American public. The Junta sent spokespersons to a number of the Cuban sympathy meetings – in Chicago, Philadelphia, New York City, Washington D.C., New Orleans, Denver, Cleveland, St. Louis, and others – to address the crowd, entreat for belligerency rights, and plead for moral encouragement (in the guise of mass resolutions) for the insurgents. Junta spokesmen’s speeches were unmistakably formulaic – at meeting after meeting (and in newspaper interview after newspaper interview) representatives of the Cuban Junta described Spanish brutalities and inherent anti-republicanism, argued the revolution was both widespread and legitimate, alluded – constantly – to the similarities between the American revolution and the fight for Cuban independence, and claimed their independence could only be achieved if the United States recognized Cuba’s belligerency rights.

Gonzalo de Quesada and Fidel G. Pierra were two of the most influential and high-ranking Cuban officials to speak at American sympathy meetings in late 1895 and early 1896. Pierra, along with his compatriot Henry Lincoln de Zayas, was perpetually traveling the American countryside promoting the Cuban cause during the early stages of the revolution. A tireless speaker and propagandist, Pierra was the chairman of the Cuban Delegation’s “press committee” and authored a number of syndicated newspaper

⁶⁵ “Big Cuban Meeting,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 1, 1896, 2.

and journal articles on behalf of the Junta.⁶⁶ Quesada, the Cuban Junta's representative in Washington D.C., was perhaps the most influential advocate of the Cuban cause in the United States due to his successful lobbying campaigns on Capitol Hill. He delivered moving addresses at several of the most prominent pro-Cuba mass meetings in the fall and winter of 1895-1896 – including the initial Chicago meeting on September 30, 1895 and the Philadelphia sympathy meeting on November 21, 1895.

Gonzalo de Quesada was also co-author of two of the best-selling books in the U.S. written about the Cuban revolution – *Free Cuba: Her Oppression, Struggle for Liberty, History and Present Condition* and *The War in Cuba: Being a Full Account of Her Great Struggle for Freedom*.⁶⁷ *Free Cuba* and *The War in Cuba*, first published in English in the U.S. in early 1896, were noteworthy for their grandiose republican language, vivid descriptions of Spanish atrocities, and immense popularity within the United States. Quesada's works, along with Enrique José Varona's measured legal treatise *Cuba vs. Spain*, acquired a wide and diverse national readership and a significant circulation in the halls of Congress.⁶⁸ Quesada and Pierra's speeches at American meeting halls, drawn from their own written works and the Junta's comprehensive strategy for obtaining belligerent rights, persuasively instilled into popular American

⁶⁶ For example, Fidel G. Pierra, "Cuba's Struggle for Liberty," *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly* vol. XLII, no. 2 (Aug, 1896): 123-134, APS Online; Fidel G. Pierra, "Spain's Attitude toward Cuba," *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1895, 14.

⁶⁷ Juan Guiteras (ed.), Rafael M. Merchán Gonzalo de Quesada, Fidel G. Pierra, and Ricardo J. Navarro, *Free Cuba; Her Oppression, Struggle for Liberty, History, and Present Condition, with the Causes and Justification of the Present War for Independence*, (Philadelphia: Publishers' Union, 1896); Gonzalo de Quesada, *The War in Cuba; Being a Full Account of Her Great Struggle for Freedom*, (n.p.: Liberty Publishing Co., 1896).

⁶⁸ Jacob H. Gallinger to Gonzalo de Quesada, Washington D.C., April 17, 1897, *Archivo de Gonzalo Quesada*, (Havana: 1948), 1:168. Translation from True, "Revolutionaries in Exile, 158; Enrique Jose Varona, *Cuba vs. Spain*, (New York: Rubens Power Press, 1895).

discourse the Junta's interpretation of the United States' present and future relationship with the battle raging in Cuba.

In late November 1895, Pierra spoke before several thousand people in Cleveland, Ohio. The entire floor of Music Hall was occupied by different organizations of the city – including roughly two-hundred railway union men, GAR and Confederate veterans, and various political and social club members – and the balcony was uncomfortably congested with concerned spectators. Pierra, joined on a decorous stage, according to the *New York Times*, “by Cleveland’s representative citizens, every branch of political faith, bankers and merchants, lawyers, newspaper men and clergymen, and, in fact, every line of life” in the city, held a captive audience.⁶⁹ Pierra invoked oft-utilized arguments, laying bare the case for the righteousness of the Cuban cause. War was necessary, Pierra maintained, because Cuba’s history was an “awful tale of violence and rapine on one side and of misery and despair on the other.” In a none-too-veiled allusion to the American Revolution-era clamor of “No Taxation Without Representation, Pierra revealed, “that the Cuban people have neither vote nor voice in the imposition of the taxes or the expending of the revenue.” Is there any wonder, he finally asked, why “a people so buffeted and crushed by a despotical and tyrannical Government had been in a chronic state of insurrection for the last sixty years?” No, he answered, despondently, to the crowd, “it is no wonder.” “But,” he remarked auspiciously, appealing to Americas’ inveterate republican traditions, the Cubans’ fight:

Is a touching spectacle which cannot fail to move the hearts and inflame the minds of all lovers of right, freedom and justice, and awaken in them a feeling of sympathy whose forcible and unequivocal expression shall carry encouragement and comfort to those who are engaged in the deadly struggle, and fear and terror to their cruel and merciless enemies. In behalf of my countrymen, I appeal to

⁶⁹ “Tell of Cuba’s Wrongs,” *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1895, 2.

you, and through you to the great and free American people; they need your sympathy and surely you will not refuse them your support. The cause of Cuba is the cause of free America!⁷⁰

In other words, Pierra insisted the freedom of Cuba and the freedom of America were one and the same. A Cuban failure would be an American one, too, for they would have failed to uphold and defend the very values they cherished. Shortly after Pierra finished his plea, the spellbound Cleveland audience voted unanimously to support resolutions calling upon the federal government to recognize the belligerent rights of the Cuban insurgents.

Pierra and other Cuban Junta representatives admittedly recycled their speeches, often invoking the same stock arguments in town after town when exhorting Americans to manifest their support for the islands' revolution.⁷¹ In Providence in late December 1895, Pierra's encouragement of several hundred Rhode Islanders to mobilize for Cuba's belligerent rights paralleled his entreaties at the Cleveland meeting. Pierra began obsequiously, maintaining that he was honored "to have the opportunity of addressing the people of Providence, the descendants of the magnanimous, courageous, and resolute founders of true liberty in America." His tale that night was to be, "of my unfortunate people, crushed by the most relentless and diabolical despotism that has ever afflicted any community or nation." Pierra cataloged the myriad inequities, bemoaning, "The Cubans do not enjoy freedom of thought and expression...The Cubans do not enjoy the right of holding public meetings...The Cubans have not the right to elect those who govern them...[and] The Cubans have neither voice nor vote in the imposition of taxes which they pay or in the expenditure of the revenue." And just as in Cleveland, Pierra finished

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ True, "Revolutionaries in Exile," 183, 304.

with a fervent entreaty to the American public; Cuba's independence was in their hands, if only they would show their moral support for the insurgents and call for their government to recognize Cuba's belligerent rights.⁷²

Finally, Pierra and other Junta representatives sought to utilize sympathy meetings (as well as their popular writings) to forestall any racial scruples white Americans could have regarding support for the Cuban revolution. The Cuban Junta, in fact, was particularly concerned about the "race issue." Spanish officials' repeated portrayals of the island's revolution as one driven by "ignorant negroes" and lower-class whites bent on initiating a class and race war threatened to undercut American sympathy as well as financial and logistical support for the insurgents.⁷³ The final decade of the nineteenth century was a nadir for American race relations, as white northerners and white southerners abandoned Reconstruction efforts that sought to achieve a semblance of racial equality, race-based restrictive immigration policies (aimed particularly at Asians) were enacted in Congress, and pseudo-scientific justifications for the alleged racial inferiority of blacks, Asians, Hispanics, and "new" immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe achieved preeminence among an influential contingent of American thinkers.⁷⁴ The 1890s witnessed some audacious attempts at racial unity – among black and white Populists in the South, by black and white union workers in New Orleans,

⁷² "Cuba's Struggle for Freedom," *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1895, 5.

⁷³ For example, see: "The New Spanish Minister," *Harper's Weekly*, vol. XXXIX, April 6, 1895, 330; Richard B. Olney to Dupuy de Lôme, April 4, 1896, *FRUS*, 1897, 540-544. For historical recognition, see: Foner, *Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 1:66.

⁷⁴ See, for instance: David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Cecilia O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999); Erika Lee, *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

Richmond, and the mining industry, and throughout the intellectual and activist community in the North – but *fin de siècle* America was characterized much more by the escalation of lynching and elevation of Jim Crow laws in the South, the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, and the rise of nativism backed by an ideology of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Before such a backdrop, the Cuban revolution – with an army made up of a mixture of white, Afro-Cuban and mixed-race soldiers fighting under a banner of racial equality – scarcely seemed an ideal candidate for a broad American sympathy movement.

Leaders of the Cuban Junta were well aware of white Americans' common prejudices, and they sought to counteract the possible proliferation of negative racial stereotypes by focusing their narrative on sycophantic tributes to American greatness. Moreover, most of the Junta's leadership – including Tomás Estrada Palma, Gonzalo de Quesada, Henry Lincoln de Zayas and Fidel G. Pierra – were light-skinned, and, as the visible representatives of revolution, they judiciously denied there was any sort of “race problem” on the island. Estrada Palma, for instance, emphasized that “the whole [Cuban] people, the lower as well as the higher classes,” had “engaged their sympathies in the movement.” “All orders of Cuban society, from the ignorant Negro to the intelligent merchant and the educated man of letters,” Estrada Palma assured Americans, “all are inspired with one thought, all are animated with one resolve – the independence of Cuba.”⁷⁵ The rest of the junta leadership employed similar arguments in their writings and during their appearances at sympathy meetings, as they attempted to exert a degree of control over the revolutionary discourse within the United States.

“The war in Cuba,” Fidel G. Pierra assured Cuban sympathizers in Cleveland, “is not a war of one faction against another...it is not a war of races...nor a war by a few

⁷⁵ Estrada Palma quoted in Quesada, “*The War in Cuba*,” 46-47.

malcontents.” On the contrary, he thundered, it is “a war waged by the whole Cuban people, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the white and the colored, against a Government which is the very embodiment of the most humiliating despotism and the most infamous tyranny.”⁷⁶ In Washington D.C., too, Pierra dedicated the majority of his speech to disproving the Spanish government's claim that “the Cuban revolutionary forces consist only of some ignorant negroes, a few white people of the lowest class of society, some bandits and a few foreign adventurers.” One by one, Pierra delineated the backgrounds of the revolution's leadership, using language that left no doubt regarding their class and racial make-up – they were members of the “most distinguished families of the island for social rank, wealth and talents,” preeminent scholars and prominent citizens, and respected “lawyers, journalists, physicians, merchants and planters.” The leaders of the revolution were “sincere republican[s],” Pierra informed his audience, “men of note, either for talents or wealth.” While Antonio Maceo, the Lieutenant General of the Cuban army, may have been “a colored man,” noted Pierra, he was “a perfect gentleman, and a man of more than common attainments, which he owes to his own efforts.” Moreover, “all the members of his staff are white.” Pierra pledged to his American audience that the war was not “the black against the white,” but rather, “a revolution of the whole Cuban people against the Government of Spain.” All Cubans, “whether colored or white,” Pierra declared in a timeworn Junta claim, were “in sympathy with the revolution.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Tell of Cuba’s Wrongs,” *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1895, 2.; Pierra made nearly identical remarks at the Providence, Rhode Island sympathy meeting: “It is a war of the whole Cuban people, the white and the colored, the rich and the poor, the high and the low, against a Government which threatens them with destruction.” “Cuba’s Struggle for Freedom,” *New York Times*, Dec. 21, 1895, 5.

⁷⁷ “In Accord with Cubans,” *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 5.

Spokesmen for the Cuban Junta – light-skinned, fluent in English, and displaying the habits and dress of established American politicians or businessmen – effectively neutralized the “race issue” with their proactive depiction of the Cuban revolution as a republican struggle led by white upper-class landowners and middle-class professionals. Junta literature meant for American consumption, such as Quesada's *Free Cuba* and *The War with Spain*, “pictured” the revolution in a striking manner – nearly every image of the revolutionary army (let alone the revolution's leadership) showed light-skinned and well-dressed soldiers. Cuban revolutionaries, in other words, were symbolically “whitewashed” by their discerning and manipulative leadership who understood all-too-well the biases and motivations of U.S. audiences. The Junta's portrayal of the revolution's social composition – reiterated time-and-again during the nation's narrative-defining sympathy meetings in the fall and winter of 1895-1896 – actually endured as Americans' dominant vision of the insurgency until U.S. soldiers arrived on the island in the early summer of 1898.⁷⁸

Americans accepted the Junta's characterization of the “white” and “eminently respectable” nature of the Cuban revolution because it was well suited to the sympathy movement's own abstract, self-reflective and patriotic objectives. Cuban sympathizers in the United States were bent upon forging a sense of collective harmony at a time of social discord – an aim facilitated by a racially homogenized, largely unobtrusive Cuban revolution. The Cuban sympathy movement, in this sense, was part of a wider process

⁷⁸ It was questioned, however. For example: The New York *Tribune* wondered how Southern Democrats could support the Cuban revolution, sarcastically questioning whether they “do not know that more than one-fourth of the Cubans including some of the foremost leaders, are what they politely term 'niggers.'” “Can it be,” the paper quipped, “that they regard 'niggers' in Cuba more favorably than those in Georgia or Mississippi?” New York *Tribune*, Dec. 19, 1897.

historian Cecelia Elizabeth O'Leary has termed the “racialization of patriotism.”⁷⁹ White northerners and white southerners forged a new “national” patriotism around the turn of the twentieth century predicated upon a shared conception of white America's racial destiny and the disavowal of the Reconstruction principle of racial equality.⁸⁰ The “reunification” of the (white) North and South would gain particular traction during the Spanish-American War and the nation's subsequent imperial forays, but the sympathy movement's tendency to obscure (or ignore) the “race issue” in Cuba in favor of symbolic celebrations of “traditional” American virtues symbolized the process by which African-Americans (and Afro-Cubans) were excluded from the national narrative.

The Cuban sympathy movement's central focus on abstract American principles and the domestic cultural advantages of American support for the Cuban insurgency foreshadowed ominous implications for Cuban independence. Even though the movement within the U. S. for American moral support and belligerent rights for the Cuban revolution was initiated by the Cuban Junta, once the American populace co-opted the movement for self-seeking purposes the Junta lost control over the collective American interpretation of the events in Cuba. The consequences of promoting Americas' ideological involvement with the Cuban revolution without maintaining significant constraints on Americans' actions were apparent from the beginning. While Americans' discourse concerning possible U.S. intervention into Cuba – or even U.S. acquisition of the island – remained largely on the periphery, small-town Cuban sympathy meetings, as well as larger metropolitan meetings not attended by members of

⁷⁹ O'Leary, *To Die For*, 129-149.

⁸⁰ See, for instance: Blight, *Race and Reunion*; O'Leary, *To Die For*; Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

the Cuban Junta, were far more likely to contain references to the possibilities of war or annexation.

The Cuban Junta held great aspirations for the sympathy movement – their goal, from the very beginning, was to foment popular American sympathy for the revolution and then wield that support to pressure the U.S. government to recognize Cuba's belligerent rights. The Cuban sympathy movement spread, however, due to what it promised Americans – relief from social, political, and economic strife and a unifying sense of national direction. Americans placed themselves at the center of the sympathy movement – an orientation that would have unfortunate consequences for the Cuban revolution after the destruction of the *U.S.S. Maine* and the U.S. declaration of war against Spain. The roots of Americans' acceptance of the U.S. government's eventual betrayal of the Cuban revolution (via the Platt amendment and the solidification of a coercive system of American control over the island) actually resided in Americans' original self-serving sympathy movement. Since the Cuban revolution was always a metaphor – a means for Americans' own self-seeking ends – it was prone to eventual manipulation by American leaders who would later seize upon the “race issue” to argue the supposed “racial backwardness” of the island's inhabitants justified imperial rule.

The Cuban Revolution as the American Revolution

The Cuban sympathy movement was essential to the construction of America's narrative understanding of the war in Cuba – and Americans' comprehension of their relationship to the war – due to the primacy, popularity, and collaborative nature of the Cuban sympathy meetings. While the mass meetings in major metropolitan areas often

had defined programs and planned speakers, small-town sympathy meetings and social-group gatherings had a much more free-flowing and open discussion, with volunteers from the assembly oftentimes simply rising from their seats to offer their particular opinions on the war in Cuba or suggest possibilities for collective action. Regardless of the size or format of meetings in the fall and winter of 1895-1896 – massive and organized, or small and spontaneous – speakers and their audience actively engaged with one another in defining and evaluating their shared narrative of the Cuban independence movement. Speakers neither dominated a docile crowd, nor were they mere ciphers of the crowd. The skilled orators of Cuban sympathy meetings evoked popular beliefs, traditions, and cultural interpretations, but did so discriminately and with individual flourish. Equally, mass meeting participants were partially beholden to the evidence and arguments presented by the speakers, but they appropriated the proffered narratives for their own purposes and influenced the narratives' creation through their acceptance or resistance.⁸¹ The Cuban sympathy movement's composite narrative – emanating from large cities or small towns, North or South, East or West – was strikingly consistent.

All Cuban sympathy meetings adhered to an unmistakable pattern. At grand halls filled with thousands of revelers, and at timeworn local meeting-places holding a dozen or-so club members, the burgeoning American sympathy movement advanced the three common contentions of the original Chicago meeting: Cuban sympathizers went to great lengths to establish the parallels between the Cuban independence movement and America's own revolution against a European colonial power in 1776; they fervently declared that Americans had an entrenched republican duty to support democratic revolutions wherever they may be – especially in the Western hemisphere; and they

⁸¹ Reicher and Stott, "Becoming the Subjects of History," 38-39.

contended that all that was required of the United States was moral support and the legal step of recognizing the belligerent status of the Cuban insurgents – a step, albeit largely symbolic, that American sympathizers deemed *absolutely necessary* to the future independence of Cuba. And again, as in Chicago, this nearly universal archetype of Cuban sympathy meetings reflected the Cuban sympathy movement’s actual self-reflective focus – an implicitly unifying celebration of America’s founding ideology, Americans’ dedication (despite social conflict, economic depression, and fracturing cultural and political accords) to “traditional” American values, and a proclamation of the potency of U.S. policy in the international realm.

Cuban sympathy meetings reverberated with comparisons between the Cuban insurgents of 1895 and American patriots of 1776. In Decatur, Illinois, Robert Hunt detailed the parallel injustices: Spain executed “all the laws of Cuba, including the import and export duties,” and reserved “for herself the rights of free trade with Cuba, but makes Cuba pay duties on products taken from Spain to Cuba.” He illustrated the “many grievous taxes on the Cubans,” and alluded to the similarities of the “whole machinery of the government, from top to bottom, being one of tyranny, usurpation, robbery, and corruption.”⁸² In a none-too-veiled attempt to convince hesitant listeners, many Cuban sympathizers maintained that the situation in Cuba was, in fact, worse than that experienced by the American colonists. James Tumulty insisted at a meeting in Rochester’s city hall that Cubans “are more oppressed than were our forefathers under the tyranny of Great Britain.”⁸³ And at a jam-packed Metropolitan Hall in Jacksonville,

⁸² “Decatur For Cuba,” *Daily Republican* (Decatur, Ill.), Nov. 1, 1895, 3.

⁸³ “Sympathizers at Rochester,” *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville), Oct. 21, 1895, 1.

Florida – a sympathy meeting attended by members of twenty-two city clubs, unions, and local associations⁸⁴ – J.M. Barrs read aloud the meeting’s adopted resolutions, beginning,

Whereas, The patriotic people of Cuba have been forced by oppression, the like of which our revolutionary fathers never knew, into their present heroic struggle to free their beloved island home from intolerable, insatiable, and cruel despotism; and

Whereas, The citizens of this city of Jacksonville most heartily sympathize with the patriotic Cubans in their desperate fight for freedom...⁸⁵

Likewise in Tennessee, William Dunn, a Knoxville resident, stood at the local courthouse lectern and noted that he “could not help but remember the days of 1776” and so his “heart went out to the Cuban patriots who were going through the same struggle.”⁸⁶

Decatur minister W.H. Penhallegon assured the crowd situated in the town’s city council room, “For 120 years we have reveled in independence and freedom of the highest type,” and now the Cuban people merely “want to throw off this terrible yoke and enjoy their rights and privileges as we do.”⁸⁷

The sympathy meeting in the nation’s capital made the historical connections most vividly. J.E. Rankin, addressing the audience at Washington D.C.’s Metzerott Hall, recalled, “Americans stand for certain distinctive ideas of government which were born in the fires of the Revolution.” The Cubans, he continued, working himself up to a feverish pitch, were “in arms against despotism, as our fathers were. And we ask that they be given a fair fight: a chance to lay down their lives as our fathers did, and to build after the pattern of our fathers, unmolested and not afraid.” As the crowd met each of his statements with louder and louder cheers, Rankin, spellbound, bellowed over and over

⁸⁴ “American People For Cuba,” *Iowa State Register*, Oct. 31, 1895, 6.

⁸⁵ “Cause of Cuban Liberty,” *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville, Fla.) Oct. 31, 1895, 4.

⁸⁶ “Let Spain Hear!,” *Knoxville Journal*, Nov. 5, 1895, 1.

⁸⁷ “Decatur For Cuba,” *Daily Republican* (Decatur, Ill.), Nov. 1, 1895, 3.

again, “Shall Cuba be free? Shall Cuba be free? Shall Cuba be free?” Riled up, perhaps, more by Rankin’s references to the American Revolution than the plight of the Cuban populace, which had nary a reference in Rankin’s speech, the audience thundered, “Yes! Yes! Yes!”⁸⁸ Existing accounts of Cuban sympathy meetings indicate that Americans’ references to the parallels between Cubans and the American colonists – as well as the bombastic patriotic music clanging through the meeting halls and the ornate American flags wreathing the movement’s stages – served the American sympathy movements’ self-seeking purpose. The plight of the Cubans frequently fell by the wayside, suggestively supplanted by fortifying reminders of a simpler, “purer” American past as well as determined paeans to national unity in the present.

The pervasive rhetoric in the United States in the fall and winter of 1895-1896 decrying the Spanish “minions of a tyrannical and bloodthirsty nation” and offering American sympathy “to the oppressed and downtrodden sons of Cuba” existed above all as a means of conveying the magnitude of American responsibility.⁸⁹ Americans intoned the intrinsic duty of the United States towards Cuba at meeting after meeting, as “it was her example in 1776 which animated the Cuban patriots for to-day to strike for country and independence.”⁹⁰ Victorian-era American public opinion often resided in a moral universe of duty, responsibility, and historical accountability. Late-nineteenth-century Americans, in other words, held concrete “republican” sensibilities about right-and-wrong and moral responsibility, even if their mindsets were frequently muddled by conflicting interpretations, hypocritical applications, and willful collective amnesia.

⁸⁸ “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

⁸⁹ “Promise Aid to Cubans,” *Tacoma Daily Ledger* (Washington), Nov. 11, 1895, 3.

⁹⁰ “To Free Cuba,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, Nov. 23, 1895.

Much of America was united in favor of Cuban belligerency by a common, if amorphous, narrative of civic virtue, historical dedication to ideals of liberty, and entrenched American exceptionalism. In turn, Cuban sympathizers cultivated a collective interpretation of the United States' obligations towards Cuba that positioned moral support and the bestowal of belligerency rights as a national duty.

On November 11, 1895, B.F. Fisher announced to the roughly four-thousand people in Philadelphia's Academy of Music that, "It is cowardly, selfish, inhuman for us as a people while in the full enjoyment of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, to stand silently by while another nation so directly under our eye is struggling in want, in pain and in blood, for the blessings of liberty which should be the common heritage of mankind."⁹¹ A.P. Buchanon and W.H. Shambangin expressed similar sentiments in Ft. Wayne's circuit courtroom: "I am an American, clear down to my boots," Buchanon proudly proclaimed, and if any nation "is struggling to relieve itself of oppression, I believe our country should extend all the aid in its power." Shambangin concurred, maintaining, "All that Cuba needs is encouragement, and if that is due from any nation on earth, it is due from us."⁹² Harding W. Davis railed against the selfish materialism that, he claimed, had infiltrated much of American society. "The United States, with her history of oppression from the mother country," Davis remonstrated in Jacksonville's Metropolitan Hall, "cannot afford now to turn a deaf ear to the cries of people similar situated." Davis warned, "What is true of individuals is true of nations, nations, to be

⁹¹ "Cuba's Cause Indorsed," *Gettysburg Compiler* (Pa.), Nov. 12, 1895, 1.

⁹² "The Eagle," *Fort Wayne Gazette*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

truly great, must love liberty, not money,” insinuating that collective American support for the Cuban revolution could help alleviate the supposed ills of materialism.⁹³

Nowhere was the focus on American duty more explicit – or more celebratory – than the sympathy meeting at Washington D.C.’s Metzerott Hall on October 31, 1895. James Tanner, barely audible over the clamorous crowd, promised, “This glorious republic of ours, by its power and majesty and devotion to liberty, promises to stand as the watchdog of the personal rights of every nation on this side of the Atlantic.” Later, John A. Joyce delivered a poem he had written specifically for the night’s sympathy meeting, which read, in part:

God speed every country and nation
That struggles with arms to be free;

America comes to the rescue
Of the hero that gallantly fights,
And should stand by the Cuban in trouble
With all our people and lights,
Recognize their ‘belligerent rights!’

And moments before the Henderson Drum Corps led the enthusiastic audience in renditions of “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” “America,” and “Dixie,” J.E. Rankin recited the meetings’ adopted resolutions:

Whereas, it is an American axiom that no government has a right to exist without the consent of the governed; and

Whereas, nearly a century and a quarter ago, the God of nation raised up our Revolutionary fathers to establish this axiom, by treasure and blood, in forum and field; and

Whereas, this same God of nations has enabled their descendants to carry out their ideas until we have made permanent the freest, greatest, and best republic the world has ever seen;

Whereas, the God of nations has put us into the vanguard of free governments, constituted us its advocates and representatives, and made our standard the symbol of freedom the world over: therefore,

⁹³ “Mass Meeting at Tampa,” *Daily Florida Citizen*, (Jacksonville), Oct. 29, 1895, 1.

*Resolved, That we, the citizens of Washington, the Capital of the great Republic of the West, cannot view with indifference the struggle of any people, especially a people on this continent, to secure constitutional rights or a republican form of government; and that we extend our hearty sympathy to the island of Cuban in her present effort to follow our example.*⁹⁴

Cuban meeting participants firmly established American “duty” towards Cuba within orthodox conceptions of American nationalism, helping to foster a palpable sense of a national unity of purpose. The Cuban sympathy movements’ convergence around abstract American principles – unobtrusively and successfully in the name of Cuba, but focused on outward manifestations of American unity and perseverance – temporarily bridged social, political, and economic chasms that, in many ways, continued to dominate the final decades of the nineteenth century.

Cuban sympathizers’ overwhelming focus on America’s republican heritage represented the development of a specific narrative of the events in Cuba that positioned the United States as the symbolic savior of the Cuban revolution. Cuban sympathizers often fondly recalled the assistance offered by France during the American Revolution, and claimed the United States could play a similar role for Cuba – in this case, however, merely through symbolic support. Willoughby Murphy of Knoxville, Tennessee cited “the days when French sympathy did us so much good,” and contended, “This country owed something to Cuba, it owed something to any nation struggling for freedom.”⁹⁵ At times there were appeals for help, professed Claude Matthews before Philadelphia’s crowded Academy of Music, “when it becomes almost a crime not to stretch out the hand with needed aid – when aid and encouragement mean salvation, life, peace and happiness, and their refusal is sorrow, suffering, degradation and death.” Moreover,

⁹⁴ “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

⁹⁵ “Let Spain Hear!,” *Knoxville Journal*, Nov. 5, 1895, 1.

“France found a way to aid our struggling fathers in their midnight gloom,” so it was their charge as American citizens to “span the dividing waters with a hopeful, generous sympathy, and bid Godspeed to the Cuban patriot in his sublime hope and his holy ambition.”⁹⁶

Cuban sympathizers demonstrated their moral support for the Cuban independence movement and advocated for belligerent rights for the insurgents based on ethical, historical, and practical grounds. They contended Cubans *deserved* belligerent rights because of the egregious nature of Spanish oppression and the insurgents’ proven dedication to republican freedom and maintained that for Cuba to achieve its independence, *all that was necessary* was U.S. recognition. P.D. Reevy proclaimed to a small meeting in Elyria, Ohio, “A neighboring people known to us as the Cuban patriots are striving to throw off the Spanish yoke of oppression and establish a Republican form of government,” and therefore he “recommend[ed] the U.S. government to extend to the Cuban patriots the rights of belligerents.”⁹⁷ “There are enough Cubans to protect themselves,” Russell H. Conwell opined to a Philadelphia crowd, “Sympathy is what they need.” “What is our duty?” he asked aloud, only “To give the Cubans all the liberties...within the limits of international law.”⁹⁸ And W.F. Calhoun, rising from his seat in Decatur, Illinois’ town courtroom, declared, “the spirit of American liberty says in tones that Congress and the President must hear, that this government shall recognize [the Cubans] as belligerents,” as it is, “all they need of us, and with it their patriotism and

⁹⁶ Matthews, “The Cuban Patriots’ Cause is Just...,” 13.

⁹⁷ “Sympathy for Cuba,” *Lorain County Reporter* (Elyria, Ohio), Nov. 9, 1895, 4.

⁹⁸ “Cuba’s Cause Indorsed,” *Gettysburg Compiler* (Pa.), Nov. 12, 1895, 1.

their desire for freedom will break the yoke of Spain and fling it back as a memento of her oppression.”⁹⁹

Each Cuban sympathy meeting issued resolutions professing their collective sympathy for the Cuban cause and calling on the federal government to bestow belligerent rights upon the insurgents. At a meeting in Marshalltown, Iowa, “for the purpose of expressing sympathy with and influencing legislation on behalf of Cuba,” resolutions “ringing with the spirit of patriotism and liberty” urged the Federal government “to recognize the Cuban patriots as belligerents.”¹⁰⁰ The “citizens of Calcasieu parish, in mass meeting assembled at the city of Lake Charles (LA.)” resolved, “the struggling republic of Cuba” deserved “heartfelt sympathy,” and called upon their “representatives and senators in Congress to use all efforts...to secure to the Cuban people recognition of belligerent rights.”¹⁰¹ In Providence, six hundred Rhode Islanders adopted “resolutions requesting Congress to recognize the belligerency of Cuba.”¹⁰² And hundreds of Pittsburgh residents declared, “as American freemen,” their “sympathy for the people of Cuba,” and pledged their “moral support to the Cuban patriots and hereby assert our belief that the government of the United States should recognize their rights as belligerents.”¹⁰³

The various resolutions – all unique, yet all effectively the same – interwove a symbolic support of the Cuban revolution with an ardent attempt to, for at least a brief

⁹⁹ “Decatur For Cuba,” *Daily Republican* (Decatur, Ill.), Nov. 1, 1895, 3.

¹⁰⁰ “Iowa People Are for Cubans,” *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

¹⁰¹ “Cuba Meeting at Lake Charles,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans), Jan. 12, 1896, 8.

¹⁰² “To Free Cuba,” *Providence Journal*, Dec. 21, 1895, 5.

¹⁰³ “Sympathize with Cuban Patriots,” *Pittsburgh Post*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

moment, move beyond the unremitting assaults of economic depression, social conflict, increasing materialism, and fracturing politics and express a widespread, though tentative, faith in the persistence of abstract American principles. The speech by Indiana Governor Claude Matthews, delivered at Philadelphia's Academy of Music on November 21, 1895, garnered a much wider audience than the initial four thousand Philadelphia attendants. The Cuban sympathy movement, under the guises of the "Friends of Cuba" and "Cuban-American League," published the oration and widely distributed Matthews' words in pamphlet-form across the nation. Along with several tracts written by official Cuban representatives, Matthews' *The Cuban Patriots' Cause is Just...* pamphlet became the Cuban sympathy movements' defining, and most popular, declaration. Matthews surmised, "There often comes a time in the lives of nations, as well as of men, when it becomes necessary to walk in new untrodden paths...to grasp great living thoughts, and meet the problems of a growing, progressive age – in short, to find a way or make it." The Cuban revolution brought about a great question for the American people, according to a passionate and articulate Matthews, "a question which we cannot well escape – a cry coming across the water for sympathy and for aid, to which we cannot much longer close our ears or hearts." It is, he continued with rhetorical flourish, "the purer, more unselfish question of national liberty, of human rights, and of broad humanity." Revealing Matthews' (and the Cuban sympathy movements') domestic focus, he lambasted "the American citizen who could quench the burning sympathy in his heart for the oppressed and downtrodden," as someone, "oblivious to the principles for which our fathers fought and on which our government is founded." "When Americans may suppress such sympathy," he warned, "then we may listen for the death-knell of freedom."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Claude Matthews, *The Cuban Patriots' Cause is Just...*, 13, 15, 16.

In a little less than six months time – from the initial sympathy meeting in Chicago on September 30, 1895 through March 1896 – the Cuban sympathy movement developed and extended what would become Americans' preeminent interpretation of the Cuban revolution. Cuban sympathizers collaboratively constructed a loosely defined, yet undeniably coherent, narrative concerning America's connection to the war in Cuba through the culturally indispensable instrument of the “mass meeting” – nineteenth century Americans' predominant forum for establishing collective understandings. This narrative positioned Americans as the symbolic saviors of the Cuban revolution, simply through popular moral support and U.S. recognition of Cuban insurgents' belligerent rights. The Cuban sympathy movement's manufactured narrative – and the active engagement of tens of thousands of Americans with the Cuban revolution in the fall and winter of 1895-1896 – established the national means of comprehending the Cuban revolution that determined American discourse through at least the end of 1897.

After the spring of 1896 the consensus constructed in the early sympathy movement fractured along economic, political and social lines. While “sympathy” for the Cuban rebels remained a cogent rallying point in the United States all the way through the Spanish-American War, it failed to retain its sole occupancy at the heart of American discourse. The very mutability of the republican language that allowed the sympathy movement to appeal to such a diverse body of Americans was, in the end, the cause for the increasingly divergent interpretations Americans developed regarding the nation's relationship to the Cuban revolution. The final decade of the nineteenth century was riddled with conflict, defined by economic struggles, and saturated with uncertainty – in such an atmosphere, a tenuous, allegorical, and backwards-looking civic initiative was

always likely to succumb to the realities of contemporary social dissonance. A wide variety of social groups – including the American labor movement, who had played an integral role in the sympathy movement of late 1895 to early 1896 – subsequently seized upon the “Cuban issue” and altered the accepted message to fit their own domestic and foreign policy objectives.

Chapter II

The American Labor Movement and the Metaphor of Cuba

Members of American labor unions experienced their first meaningful interaction with the Cuban revolution through the nationwide Cuban sympathy movement in late 1895 and early 1896. Inside popular metropolitan meeting halls and non-descript small-town courthouses, tens of thousands of Americans flocked to Cuban sympathy meetings and endorsed collective resolutions that framed a loosely defined, yet undeniably coherent, national narrative establishing America's relationship to the war in Cuba. Organized labor assumed a preeminent position among the grassroots coalition of Cuban sympathizers from the movement's inception. Edward Cragin, the primary organizer of the initial Chicago sympathy meeting, went to great lengths to involve "citizens of all political parties," as well as representatives of Chicago's working-class ethnic associations and trade unions, in the planning and management of the mass meeting.¹ By the mid-1890s, Chicago had approximately 100,000 workers organized in over 150 local unions, many of which were affiliated with the Illinois State Federation of Labor or the Chicago Trades and Labor Assembly.² Hundreds of union laborers, representing the Illinois State Federation of Labor and "twenty-five local labor organizations," attended that first Cuban sympathy meeting organized by Cragin. They lent organized labor's influence to the Midwestern city's collective plea for the "United States government to

¹ "To Help Free Cuba," *The Daily Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), Sept. 21, 1895, 1; "Asked to Aid Cuba," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1-2.

² Richard Schneirov, "Labor and the New Liberalism," in *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s: Essays on Labor and Politics*, ed. Richard Schneirov, Shelton Stromquist, and Nick Salvatore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); 208.

recognize the rights of the Cuban revolutionists as belligerents as soon as possible.”³

With the city of Chicago still smoldering in the aftermath of the violent suppression of the Pullman Strike, and with the unemployment rate hovering near its depression-era low of forty percent, the September 30, 1895 Cuban sympathy meeting served as a venue for a temporary, although meaningful, respite between contentious social groups. A prominent member of the original “Cuban Committee” that coordinated Chicago’s sympathy meeting was William C. Pomeroy, the dominant labor figure in both the Illinois State Federation of Labor and the Chicago Trades and Labor Assembly in the early-to-mid-1890. He and five other committee members representing Chicago’s business and religious organizations formulated the meeting’s guiding resolutions, which read as a veritable panegyric to popular conceptions of American nationalism.⁴ Copies of the Chicago resolutions, brimming with references to American “duty,” the “blessings of independence, liberty, and self-government,” and the ideals of America’s “forefathers” that were “true then and...true today” were mailed to hundreds of town and city leaders across the United States and published in newspapers throughout the country.⁵ The Chicago plea for Cuba’s belligerent rights defined the fledgling sympathy movement as a non-partisan, socially unifying, and self-interested concordance of “the American people” and was based upon cumulatively shared conceptions of purportedly intrinsic American principles. Pomeroy’s voice on the Cuban Committee, and labor’s huge turnout, lent the

³ “The Insurrection,” *Manitoba Morning Free Press* (Winnipeg, Ontario), Oct. 1, 1895, 2; “Asked to Aid Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1-2.

⁴ “Asked to Aid Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1-2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

credibility of Chicago's organized workers to such claims.⁶

Labor unions retained a prominent place in the sympathy movement as meetings proliferated in the following months – radiating from Chicago's Central Music Hall to nearly all corners of the United States via an informal network of mass meetings, convention resolutions, and club lectures. Meetings were being held “in all parts of the country to discuss the Cuban revolution,” labor radical Arthur Keep noted in late October 1895, and in many cases “the labor organizations are taking the initiative, passing resolutions of sympathy with the insurgents.”⁷ Trade unionists appealed for the Cuban revolutionists at Central Labor Union council meetings in various cities, such as in Cleveland on November 14, and at regularly scheduled gatherings of union branches, such as in Houston at the Typographical Union no. 87 meeting on October 4.⁸ A committee made up of Houston printers – N.C. Strong, Joseph Hines, Ernest Pfeiffer, and Will Lambert – professed their “profound sympathy” for “the struggling patriots of Cuba” and denounced Spain for “denying the commonest of rights of local self-government to Cuba and burdening it beyond human endurance with taxation until it has groaned under a military despotism and virtually suffered the horrors of slavery.” The Houston branch of the Typographical Union subsequently ratified the committee's resolutions in a unanimous vote, appealing to the federal government that it act “in the cause of justice, humanity, and liberty [and] to immediately recognize the Cuban

⁶ As noted in Chapter I, belligerent rights are a matter of international law determined by individual sovereign states. American supporters of bestowing belligerent rights to Cuba held that it would provide a morale boost to the Cuban soldiers and legitimize the cause such that the Cubans could sell interest-bearing bonds to non-Cubans, legally purchase arms and munitions from abroad, and have Cuban ships acknowledged in international waters.

⁷ Arthur Keep, letter to the editor, *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Oct. 31, 1895.

⁸ “Friends of Cuban Revolvers,” *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 15, 1895, 3; “The Day at Houston,” *Galveston Daily News*, Oct. 13, 1895, 3; See also, “In Washington,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Nov. 7, 1895.

insurgents...as belligerents.”⁹

The national conventions of the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the U.S. labor movement’s most influential umbrella organizations in 1895, responded definitively to the rank-and-file’s popular acclamation of the Cuban revolution. AFL delegates convened at New York City’s Madison Square Garden in mid-December 1895, unanimously approving resolutions “sympathizing with the Cubans and the poor and oppressed of all nations” and directing that copies of their declaration “be sent to the officials of the government at Washington and the Executive office of the Cubans in this country.”¹⁰ Representatives to the Knights’ General Assembly, summoned to Washington D.C. in mid-November, submitted a rousing endorsement of the Cuban revolution. The delegates to the General Assembly, self-described “citizens of the foremost republic in the world” representing “every section of the continent and all conditions of humanity,” declared “in favor of the recognition of the Cubans as belligerents” as a means of assisting those “at present engaged in a struggle, to achieve their independence, against the minions of an alien and tyrannical government.”¹¹

Over and above the judgments of select union branches, citywide labor councils, and national conventions, trade unionists played a meaningful role within the popular Cuban sympathy movement itself. Labor leaders, particularly within the American Federation of Labor, assisted in the organization of many of the nation’s most important sympathy meetings in the fall and winter of 1895 due to the overtly inclusive nature of

⁹ “The Day at Houston,” *Galveston Daily News*, Oct. 13, 1895, 3.

¹⁰ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Fifteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1895); 63, 102.

¹¹ Knights of Labor, *Record of the Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor* (1895); 73.

the popular sympathy meetings. M.M. Garland, president of the National Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers and a vice-president on the Executive Council of the AFL, helped arrange the mass meeting in Pittsburgh and spoke in favor of belligerency rights for the Cuban revolutionaries.¹² In mid-November 1895, during the only year in which he did not serve as president of the AFL between 1886 and his death in 1924, Samuel Gompers, the preeminent figure in America's late-nineteenth-century labor movement, organized what journalists described as a "monster meeting" at New York City's Cooper's Union Hall, at which over four thousand people, "made the walls of [the] old hall ring with cheers."¹³

By the mid-1890s, explains historian Julie Greene, "the AFL was largely synonymous with the person of Gompers" in the collective eyes of the American public.¹⁴ Gompers shared Union Hall's platform with contemporary luminaries such as newspaper editor Charles Dana, Rev. Thomas Dixon, and Congressman William Sulzer.¹⁵ He cajoled the audience, comprised of all classes and political parties, to "send greetings to the heroes who are battling against Spain." "There can be no peace in Cuba," Gompers declared, "except peace with honor, freedom, and independence." Finally, before turning the floor over to Dana, Gompers, with his well worn, but tenacious voice, entreated "the Government of the United States to extend belligerent rights to the brave Cubans as a

¹² "Sympathize with Cuban Patriots," *Pittsburgh Post*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1.

¹³ "For the Freedom of Cuba," *New York Sun*, Nov. 27, 1895, 1; "Would Have Cuba Free," *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1895, 5; Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor; An Autobiography* (New York: A.M. Kelly, 1967); 2: 64-65.

¹⁴ Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43.

¹⁵ "For the Freedom of Cuba," *New York Sun*, Nov. 27, 1895, 1; "Would Have Cuba Free," *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1895, 5.

recognition of their rights and privileges in their noble war.”¹⁶

Prominent local and urban figures within the U.S. labor movement also pledged their support to the Cuban cause. In Washington D.C., a popular sympathy meeting in Metzerott Hall on Pennsylvania Avenue was organized by James F. McHugh, secretary-treasurer of the Journeymen Stonecutters’ Association and president of the local Federation of Labor; William H.G. Simmons, tinner and Master-Workman of Knights of Labor District Assembly 66; and a host of other representatives from D.C. social organizations.¹⁷ U.S. labor leaders showed similar commitments to Cuban sympathy meetings across the country. D. Clem Deaver and J.B. Schupp, guiding figures of the Omaha Central Labor Union, and Thomas Powers, Omaha’s labor commissioner, organized each step of the popular assembly in Omaha’s Creighton Hall; they procured Gonzalo de Quesada of the Cuban Junta, notable Nebraska Republican John L. Webster, and soon-to-be Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan as speakers for the event.¹⁸ Even Max Hayes, Socialist editor of the caustic *Cleveland Citizen*, set aside

¹⁶ “For the Freedom of Cuba,” *New York Sun*, Nov. 27, 1895, 1.

¹⁷ “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; “In Washington,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Nov. 7, 1895. The two labor federations, D.C.’s largest, had been the first organizations in the nation’s capital to call for recognition of the Cuban insurgents. Accordingly, despite a deluge of rain on the evening of October 31, 1895, McHugh and Simmons and a “rousing representation” from the “labor orders” joined several thousand D.C. residents in ratifying resolutions, “without a dissenting voice [and] amid loud applause,” calling for belligerent rights for Cuba. See: “In Washington,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Nov. 7, 1895; “For Free Cuba,” *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; “The Spanish Stirred Up,” *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville), Oct. 27, 1895, 5; “In Accord with Cubans,” *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 5.

¹⁸ “Sympathy for Cuba,” *World-Herald* (Omaha), Nov. 29, 1895, 3; “Central Labor Union Affairs,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 26, 1895, 8; “Does Not Like the Idea,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Feb. 19, 1895, 8; “Omaha Endorses the Movement,” *Omaha Daily Bee*, Dec. 10, 1895, 1; “Cuba is Lauded to the Sky,” *World-Herald* (Omaha), Dec. 10, 1895, 3. Also, J.P. McDonnell, a momentous figure in the labor movement and longtime editor of the popular and authoritative *Paterson Labor Standard*, professed “the sympathies of all good American citizens” were with the “Cuba[ns] in their struggles for national independence.” Later, McDonnell appealed to the workers of Paterson to attend the city’s Cuban sympathy meeting held in Druid’s Hall on November 24, 1895. See: J.P. McDonnell, “Editorial Notes,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, Oct. 12, 1895; “To Free Cuba,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, Nov. 23, 1895.

his animus for Cleveland's young Republican mayor and sympathy meeting organizer, Robert E. McKisson, to implore the city's workers, "Go to the Cuban celebration...It costs nothing to sympathize with the plundered victims of Spanish plutocracy."¹⁹

And go they did. Union workers attended, in droves, the movement's largest urban assemblages – occupying innumerable seats, both on stage and in the balconies, at sympathy meetings in Chicago, Cleveland, Omaha, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Paterson (New Jersey), New York City, and Washington D.C.²⁰ Circulars announcing upcoming sympathy meetings often emphasized, "All are welcome"; "the meeting is open to everybody"; "the meeting is entirely non-partisan in character"; or "every class of citizenship is urged to be present as we are anxious to make this a universal declaration."²¹ Extant accounts of the mass sympathy meetings, furthermore, highlight that "representatives of all classes and political parties" were in attendance.²² Significantly, the substantial presence of labor unions at urban mass sympathy meetings, as well as organized labor's declarations at their own assemblies, further validated the Cuban sympathy movement as a legitimately national and popular cause.

This chapter asserts that American union workers initially embraced the Cuban

¹⁹ "Friends of Cuban Revolvers," *Iowa State Register*, Nov. 15, 1895, 3; Max Hayes, Editorial, *Cleveland Citizen*, Nov. 9, 1895, 2.

²⁰ "Asked to Aid Cuba," *Chicago Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1895, 1-2; "Tell of Cuba's Wrongs," *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1895, 2; "Omaha Endorses the Movement," *Omaha Daily Bee*, Dec. 10, 1895, 1; "Sympathize with Cuban Patriots," *Pittsburgh Post*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; "Cuba's Cause Indorsed," *Gettysburg Compiler* (Pa.), Nov. 12, 1895, 1; "To Free Cuba," *Paterson Labor Standard*, Nov. 23, 1895; "For the Freedom of Cuba," *New York Sun*, Nov. 27, 1895, 1; "Would Have Cuba Free," *New York Times*, Nov. 27, 1895, 5; "For Free Cuba," *Washington Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1; "In Washington," *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Nov. 7, 1895; "The Spanish Stirred Up," *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville), Oct. 27, 1895, 1; "In Accord with Cubans," *New York Times*, Nov. 1, 1895, 5.

²¹ "Lectures, Amusements, Etc." *Providence Journal*, Dec. 20, 1895, 8; "A Mass Meeting Tonight," *Daily Florida Citizen* (Jacksonville), Oct 30, 1895, 1; "Sympathy for the Cubans," *New York Times*, Nov. 24, 1895, 5; "To Free Cuba," *Paterson Labor Standard*, Nov. 23, 1895.

²² "Tell of Cuba's Wrongs," *New York Times*, Nov. 22, 1895, 2.

sympathy movement because of what it offered to a divided labor movement in the midst of immense upheaval. The economic depression that began in 1893 was still ravaging America's industrial workforce in the fall of 1895 – unemployment rates soared, wages crashed, and bitter conflict between workers and capitalists ruled the day. Beyond the immediate collapse of the American economy, the labor movement underwent a profound transition during the 1890s that was characterized by the slow extinguishing of workers' decades-long attempt to imprint their vision of a "Worker's Republic" upon a nation rapidly modernizing, industrializing, and urbanizing. Disputes among workers also reached a breaking point in the 1890s, further fracturing what had once been the distinguishing universality of American working-class ideology. The Cuban sympathy movement's denunciations of "oppressors," expressions of overt fealty to traditional American nationalism, and paeans to social unity provided workers a brief respite from the all-encompassing dislocation they faced as the nineteenth century wound to a close. In other words, Cuban sympathy acted as an allegorical means for workers to assuage their ambivalence regarding the "direction" of Gilded Age America, affirm the labor movement's patriotic credentials, and ameliorate labor's internal discord.

The self-centered and symbolic nature of the sympathy movement, however, soon led to alterations in labor's "Cuban narrative." Union workers seized upon worsening conditions in Cuba and frustrating foreign policy debates at home during 1896 and 1897 to attack labor's domestic enemies. They utilized a long-entrenched idiom of "conspiracy" to lay blame for America's failure to recognize Cuba's belligerent rights firmly at the feet of the "money powers" and their allies in the federal government. In this manner, Cuba – and the popular American discourse surrounding Cuba – became a

metaphor for labor's broader class struggle and contest for the future of the American Republic. As the impetus for labor's ire shifted, schisms also developed among workers regarding "the Cuban situation." Much of the rank-and-file continued to advocate for sympathy and belligerent rights for the island revolutionaries, while a growing contingent of conservative unionists expressed dismay that union workers were involved in divisive political issues that they deemed outside labor's proper scope. Finally, a violent attack upon striking workers in Lattimer, Pennsylvania, in the fall of 1897 – at a time when Americans' wider discourse regarding Cuba was taking on an increasingly martial tenor – forced union workers to confront the paradox of a national sympathy movement for foreign revolutionaries co-existing alongside a brutal campaign of repression at home.

Labor, the 1893-1897 Depression, and the Significance of Cuban Sympathy

A wide range of American cultural, social and political historians, often differing in ideological orientation and conflicting in overall interpretation, have nonetheless found common ground in emphasizing the immensity of moral and political anxiety in the 1890s. The final decade of the nineteenth century, frequently described by historians as one of the most significant "watersheds" in American history, witnessed a succession of society-rattling conflicts that both culminated thirty years of post-Civil War social and political transformations and set in motion the rearrangement of America's cultural landscape in the early twentieth century.²³ More than mere *fin de siècle* uneasiness,

²³ See, for instance: David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (1987; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963); Harold U. Faulkner, *Politics, Reform, and Expansion, 1890-1900* (New York: Harper, 1959); Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Restructuring of American Capitalism, 1890-1906: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Robert Wiebe, *The Search*

historians have recognized that there were vast disruptions to the social order in the 1890s, causing what historian Alexander Saxton has described as a breakdown of the “ruling-class hegemony,” as “the moral and cultural authority of the ruling class appeared to become too selective, too self-serving, to justify a broad social order.”²⁴

More often than not, the decade of the 1890s has served as either a convenient and practical “beginning” or “ending” point for historical narratives. Yet, for turn-of-the-century Americans, these decade-long permutations were lived experiences – the omnipresent, yet intangible, daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly upheavals slowly, but ever-so-surely, reordering the cultural guideposts that men and women used to construct their personal and group identities. Along the way Americans acquiesced to, as well as lashed out against, the driving forces of the new social order – at times blindly, occasionally with insightful precision. Some relished America’s political and technological advancements, while many others embraced seemingly faded traditions precisely because the dominant social forces in America were wrenching the culture in the opposite direction. Many continued to show an unwavering faith in America’s democratic system, while others sifted longingly through a cacophonous series of radical alternatives. And, significantly, while there is every reason to give credence to historian John Higham’s assertion that in the 1890s “pessimism became in America neither general nor profound,” the ubiquitous popular acknowledgment that time had closed the proverbial door on one age – and opened that of an unfamiliar other – permeated all

for Order, 1877-1920 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 2003); Gerald Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974); Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

²⁴ Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 352.

aspects of American life as the nineteenth century drew to a close.²⁵

This “reorientation of American culture,” to borrow Higham’s phrase, was characterized by starts and stops, ambiguities and contradictions.²⁶ The undeniable convergence of a multitude of moral, political, social and cultural transformations in the 1890s, in other words, was really a contingent and highly-circuitous “transition,” rather than a definite, identifiable and conclusive “change.” For those in the middle class, as Higham reveals, the profound gradual shifts of the 1890s, “took many forms, but it was everywhere a hunger to break out of the frustrations, the routine, and the sheer dullness of an urban-industrial culture.”²⁷ Many working-class Americans, on the other hand, experienced the all-encompassing displacement of the 1890s as confirmation that in the urban-industrial age America’s social order had finally become bereft of moral control and was now unable to meet their cultural and material needs.

As the Cuban sympathy movement burst forth nationwide in the fall of 1895, America’s working class was undoubtedly in a state of immense upheaval. The U.S. economy was ending its third year of what economic historians Douglas Steeples and David O. Whitten have called, “one of the most severe contractions in the history of the United States,” with no conclusion to the economic catastrophe seemingly in sight.²⁸ Considerable research has shown that late-nineteenth-century workers and their families already lived precariously close to the possibility of abject poverty when the depression

²⁵ John Higham, “The Re-Orienting of American Culture in the 1890s” in *Writing American History: Essays on Modern Scholarship*, ed. John Higham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 93.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

²⁸ Douglas Steeples and David O. Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation: The Depression of 1893* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 79.

struck in 1893.²⁹ The “nation’s first great industrial collapse,” according to Steeples and Whitten, subsequently devoured tens of thousands of essentially sound U.S. businesses and hurled nearly three million workers into the anguish of unemployment.³⁰ The number of wage earners in the United States had more than doubled between 1880 and 1890 – from 2.75 million to 5.88 million – which only accelerated the already staggering pace of urbanization and industrialization.³¹ National unemployment rates subsequently hovered between 15% and 19% throughout the duration of the depression – spiking to highs of 40% in urban centers such as New York and Chicago – while millions more managed to eke-out a barely-tolerable existence through sporadic employment and occasional support from relief organizations.³² Joblessness rampaged in all corners of the United States and touched occupations across the board – regardless of skill-level – as half to three-quarters of all union workers, according to AFL president Samuel Gompers, were unemployed at some point during the year of 1894.³³

By the 1890s, years of dangerous working conditions, miniscule wages, long hours (six-day work weeks, with ten to twelve-hour days, were still common) and an overall loss in workers’ autonomy – characterized by the mechanization of work

²⁹ Eric Arnesen, “American Workers and the Labor Movement in the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *The Gilded Age: Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, ed. Charles W. Calhoun (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1996), 44.

³⁰ Steeples and Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation*, 129, 36, 60, 50.

³¹ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 2: 12.

³² Steeples and Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation*, 50, 169; Robert Hunter, *Poverty: Social Conscience in the Progressive Era*, (1904; repr., New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 21-25, 29-34. Charity relief organizations did not include any form of State or Federal relief, as no State or Federal agency appropriated funds for the relief of the poor and indigent during the depression (Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 238); James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 25.

³³ Samuel Gompers to American Federation of Labor Executive Council, Oct. 27, 1893, *AFL Correspondence*. Located in Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 244.

processes, the introduction of the time-clock, the ominous presence of factory overseers, frequent and arbitrary firings, and prohibitions against singing, drinking, and even lawful assembly – had created a sharp divide between workers and owner-capitalists. Strikes had already become a common worker response to wage cuts and firings, but the depression witnessed heretofore unseen numbers of picketing laborers – from 1894 through 1897 there were over 4,800 strikes nationwide involving an estimated 1.76 million American workers.³⁴ Work stoppages, however, were about more than lost wages, long hours, and union recognition – even if these continued to be primary driving forces. “Contests over pennies on or off existing piece rates,” muses historian David Montgomery, “ignited controversies over the nature and purpose of the Republic itself.”³⁵ The new social order of late-nineteenth-century America, historian Eric Arneson agrees, “raised critical questions about the place and power of labor in a capitalist economy, the morality of capitalist industrialization, [and] the compatibility of political democracy and economic concentration.”³⁶

Workers continued to challenge the ascendancy of exploitative industrial-capitalism during the depression, but due to the widespread reductions in hours, slashed wages, and frequent bouts of unemployment, “actual dollar” and “real earnings” for American workers plummeted 22.7% and 18.1%, respectively, in the mid-1890s.³⁷ Considering 95% of America’s industrial workforce in the mid-1890s earned less than \$500 per year – of itself, barely a subsistence wage – an average decrease of 20% of a

³⁴ United States Bureau of Labor, *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor: Strikes and Lockouts*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), 478.

³⁵ Montgomery, *House of Labor*, 171.

³⁶ Arneson, “American Workers,” 44.

³⁷ Steeples and Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation*, 50.

worker's wages inevitably flung tens of thousands of working-class families into the streets.³⁸ Rampant depression-era homelessness, shocking to many in a so-called 'land of plenty,' introduced to the United States the phenomenon of "tramping." Such prodigious numbers of homeless Americans "rode the rails" in search of food, shelter, and employment that roughly five thousand of them *died* each year in railroad accidents during the depression.³⁹

"The distinguishing spirit of America's working people," Charles Spahr suggested at the turn of the twentieth century, remains "hopeful discontent."⁴⁰ Representative of this ambivalence, by the middle of the 1890s the American labor movement had lost its characteristic moral universality. "Visions of a cooperative economy within a democratic republic," historian Richard Oestricher explains, were struck down violently at Haymarket, Homestead, and Pullman, only to wither further under the combined strains of workers' ethnic, ideological and political differences.⁴¹ And as David Montgomery has reflected, working-class militancy survived during the mid-1890s, but "no single set of values, no commonly accepted vision of the republic, any longer guided the many streams of working-class struggle into a single-minded flood of protest."⁴²

During the final decade of the nineteenth century, workers, unanimous in their uneasiness, yet harrowingly fragmented along cultural, theoretical, and occupational

³⁸ Noel Jacob Kent, *American in 1900* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 79.

³⁹ Green, *World of the Worker*, 21; Hunter, *Poverty*, 36.

⁴⁰ Charles Spahr, *America's Working People* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), vii.

⁴¹ Richard Oestricher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1875-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), xix.

⁴² David Montgomery, "Labor and the Republic in Industrial America: 1860-1920," *Le Mouvement Social*, 111: 1980; 211.

lines, clashed frequently with one another over the future of the labor movement in the United States. The “house” of labor, once inhabited by the Knights, not yet solitarily settled by the AFL, had, in the mid-1890s, a variety of tenants vying for supremacy. One group were the advocates of “producerism,” who still clung on to beliefs about the vitality of workers in advancing a “Producer’s” egalitarian republic. They still found adherents to its inclusive organizational tactics and abiding faith in republican institutions among the members of the Knights of Labor, American Railway Union, the five Railroad Brotherhoods, the United Mine Workers of America, the American Federation of Labor, and city central labor councils. But while “producerism” retained its preeminent place in the mentalities of the “rank-and-file” for the duration of the 1890s, many union leaders, particularly within the AFL, drifted towards a more narrowly circumscribed conception of the labor movement. As “craft-conscious” workers and vanguards of “business union” tactics, this influential faction of conservative-leaning unionists, orbiting around the central figure of AFL president Samuel Gompers, embraced pure-and-simple unionism – an ideology that accepted the permanency of wage-labor; excluded unskilled laborers from their organizations; and disavowed social reform and political partisanship for the “here and now” maintenance of steady wage increases, shorter work days, and interest-group lobbying strategies.

Finally, both the advocates of a “mutualistic producerism” and the proponents of pure-and-simple unionism faced a relentless barrage of criticism from a small and often estranged – yet frequently bedeviling – contingent of ideological and radical Socialists. Socialists shared “producerism’s” denunciation of wage labor, but instead of viewing current exploitative conditions as an anomalous perversion of America’s republican

system (that could be remedied by moral suasion or government action), they perceived these plights as the necessarily tainted fruits of capitalism, incapable of amelioration and needing transformation through a radical refashioning of the industrial system.⁴³ While radical Socialists by-and-large failed to penetrate the leadership rungs of the mainstream American labor movement during the 1890s, socialist ideology nonetheless radiated throughout labor organizations and influenced the development of labor's political programs.

Surveying the landscape of organized labor in the century's final decade, the Knights of Labor appeared to be dwindling away in the early 1890s, but not before making spirited attempts at an alliance with the AFL and actually joining forces with the Populist revolt. The American Railway Union (ARU), self-proclaimed heir to the popular wellspring of working-class producerism, enrolled 150,000 members between June of 1893 and June of 1894, its first year in existence.⁴⁴ But by the end of July 1894, with the failure of the Pullman strike, the ARU had been crushed by the combined forces of the federal judiciary and the U.S. military, leaving the future of "producerism" hanging in the balance. Socialists, meanwhile, bickered relentlessly among each other over doctrinal interpretations; significantly (yet unsuccessfully) challenged the leadership of both the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor; and ultimately coalesced around either Daniel De Leon's Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance (and the Socialist Labor Party) or Eugene V. Debs' Social Democracy.

The American Federation of Labor of the mid-1890s was not yet divorced from

⁴³ See, for instance: Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1987); Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, vols. 2 and 3; Seymour Martin Lipset, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000).

⁴⁴ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 258.

the greater masses of laborers – the “aristocracy of labor” was not fully ensconced until the early years of the twentieth century – as the ranks of the AFL teemed with ideological Socialists (even if practical trade unionists), laborers active in politics, and union men such as George E. McNeill, who hoped to, “incorporate the unskilled and semi-skilled industrial workers” within the AFL and “organize the unorganized, regardless of creed, color, nationality, [or] sex.”⁴⁵ AFL unionists, moreover, debated political alliances, argued over whether to organize African-Americans, women, and unskilled laborers, and in 1894 nearly endorsed the Socialist program of “collective ownership by all the people of all means of production and consumption.”⁴⁶ Further complicating the overall picture of organized labor in the middle of the 1890s, city central labor councils functioned largely outside the control of the umbrella organizations; they entered the political fray, led citywide strikes, sponsored labor newspapers, and united workers from different occupations, ethnicities, and unions at cultural and entertainment events.⁴⁷

America’s changing social and economic landscape in the final decades of the nineteenth century rattled the foundation of the American labor movement during the 1890s. Characterized by the continued consolidation of capital, the blossoming intimacy between “big business” and the federal government, and the fallout from the depression, the decade witnessed the growth of ideological fissures within the organized working class as workers tried to make sense of their devolving situation. The bitter organizational rivalries, intra-union squabbles, and contested political activity that dominated the early

⁴⁵ George E. McNeill, “The Trades Unions and the Monopolies,” *American Federationist*, December 1896, 208-209.

⁴⁶ Plank Ten of Thomas J. Morgan’s proposed “Political Programme,” located in *American Federationist*, March 1894, 19.

⁴⁷ Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 359.

and mid-1890s were characteristic convulsions of a deep refashioning of America's working class. Historians have long recognized the ethno-cultural fragmentation and gradual demise of labor's solitary driving force – "producerism" – that defined the American labor movement during the 1890s.⁴⁸ Likewise, scholars largely agree that by the early twentieth century the AFL's pure-and-simple unionism represented the mainstream labor movement and American workers were increasingly integrated into a developing mass commercial culture.⁴⁹ But in the fateful years *in between*, as a debilitating economic maelstrom shattered any illusions workers may have had about their place in an industrial Republic, the American labor movement encountered a dizzying amount of uncertainty and searched longingly for a sense of unity, stability, and acceptance.

The abstract and nationalistic character of the early Cuban sympathy movement, at once culturally unifying in its paeans to America's revolutionary ideals and socially mutable in its adaptability to alternative democratic visions, particularly appealed to members of organized labor. For white working-class Americans, the significance of the timing of the Cuban revolution, and the resulting Cuban sympathy movement inside the United States, cannot be overstated. In the fall of 1895, as a grassroots and largely symbolic call for Americans to support Cuban insurgents in their quest for independence

⁴⁸ See, for instance: Oestricher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*; Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*; Green, *World of the Worker*; Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*.

⁴⁹ See, for instance: Lawrence B. Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of a Consumer Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*; Francis G. Couvares, *The Remaking of Pittsburgh: Class and Culture in an Industrializing City, 1877-1919* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984); Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*; Green, *World of the Worker*; Andrew Neather, "Labor Republicanism, Race, and Popular Patriotism in the Era of Empire, 1890-1914," in *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define their Patriotism*, ed. John Bodnar (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996); 82-101.

circled the country, organized labor was in a veritable state of disarray. The social-leveling atmosphere of the Cuban sympathy movement's raucous and patriotically-adorned mass-meeting halls offered to organized labor (as well as other working-class Americans) considerable cultural sustenance. In place of class conflict, ethnic divisions, rampant unemployment, political partisanship, and accusations of "un-American" radicalism, workers encountered celebratory pronouncements of an essential "American-ness" – one rooted in a homogenized and unified republican past, instead of a contentious and confusing present. White union workers, in turn, hoped their leadership position within such a patriotic movement would help unite union workers as well as accommodate the labor movement to the rest of America.

The symbolic nature of "belligerent rights" and "moral support" for Cuba, coupled with the recognizable popularity and non-partisanship of the cause, certainly facilitated labor's commitment to the Cuban sympathy movement. Nevertheless, the underlying reasons for organized labor's receptiveness in late 1895-early 1896 lay in the union workers' long-running endeavor to convince critics of the labor movement's inborn patriotism. They felt the need to do so because from the beginning of the labor movement in the United States, union workers struggled to infuse organized labor's "mutualistic ethos" into popular conceptions of America's "defining characteristics." Wage workers, allayed against the dominant culture of acquisitive individualism, frequently encountered obstacles to their efforts at collective organization. Middle- and upper-class challenges to unionization habitually relied upon accusations that unions advocated unpatriotic conspiracies against individualism and wealth. "When the poor combine," one union sympathizer sarcastically remarked, "it is a 'conspiracy.' If they act

in concert, if they really do something, it is a ‘mob.’ If they defend themselves it is ‘treason.’”⁵⁰ Allegations that the labor movement fomented a radical “anti-American” agenda, present in U.S. discourse for much of the nineteenth century, acquired a tenor of urgency after the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Haymarket bombing of 1886, the Homestead steel strike of 1892, and the Pullman crisis of 1894 exposed middle- and upper-class Americans to the clamorous embitterment of the organized working class and the legitimate prospect for all-out “class warfare.”

While some labor activists, particularly within Socialist organizations, denounced “patriotism” and “national-feeling” as bourgeois mechanisms of the ruling class formulated to set the working classes of the world in opposition, most union workers passionately proclaimed their allegiance to American democracy. Working-class discourse at the end of the nineteenth century bristled with defiant declarations of labor’s patriotism – albeit a definition of nationalism with theoretical foundations in the early republic and the mid-nineteenth-century development of a “producer’s ethic.” Prominent labor figures such as Samuel Gompers and George E. McNeill spoke frequently about the relationship between organized labor and the American Republic.⁵¹ Likewise, the U.S. labor press abounded with editorials and articles preoccupied with working-class patriotism, with such apt titles as, “Who is the Patriot?,” “The Glorious Fourth,” “Are We Patriots?,” “Patriotism and Patriotism,” “Business vs. Patriotism,” and “Patriotic Common People.”⁵²

⁵⁰ Robert Ingersoll, “Modern Cannibalism [sic],” *Paterson Labor Standard*, July 20, 1895.

⁵¹ See, for instance: George E. McNeill, “Democracy of Labor Organization,” *Arena*, Dec., 1889; 69-81; George E. McNeill, “The Privileged Classes,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, Sept. 11, 1897; Samuel Gompers, speech before the New York Central Labor Union, published in *Paterson Labor Standard*, Jan. 4, 1896.

⁵² “Who is the Patriot?,” *United Mine Workers’ Journal*, May 14, 1896, 3; Walter MacArthur, “The

Union workers pressed a “producer’s” understanding of American patriotism, claiming, for example that “the men who produce this nation’s wealth are the true patriots.” These “country makers...build our homes, manufacture our goods, raise our produce, saw our lumber, dig our fuel, our iron, gold, silver, copper; build our railroads, run the trains, move our commerce, run the whole industrial world.”⁵³ Union workers also argued working-class organizations were the fulfillment of American patriotism, as AFL veteran George Smith contended in the *American Federationist*:

Every effort to advance the masses must of necessity be patriotic. Every raise in wages gained is an act of patriotism. Every struggle for shorter hours and better homes is the height of patriotism, and all of this because it makes better men and women, and in better men and women we find the only hope of better citizenship.⁵⁴

These convictions help explain why white workers in Pittsburgh endorsed the Pro-Cuba resolutions as “American freemen” who held “that the only right government is the kind that derives its power from the consent of the governed,” and why they offered moral support to Cuba, an island, “robbed of the wealth it has produced without any return in government benefits,” which has created “a condition of affairs [that] is contrary to American tradition, principle...spirit...and the sacred right of possession to the *producer of wealth*.”⁵⁵ Members of organized labor, moreover, purposefully maintained that their particular “producer’s” interpretation of patriotism represented orthodox American

Glorious Fourth,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, June 26, 1895; Frank A. Myers, “Are We Patriotic,” from *American Federationist*, located in *Trackmen’s Advance Advocate*, Aug. 1897, 473-474; George A. Smith, “Patriotism and Patriotism,” *American Federationist*, Aug. 1895, 99-100; “Business vs. Patriotism,” from *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, located in *Toledo Union*, June 5, 1897; “Patriotic Common People,” *The Union* (Indianapolis), Aug. 21, 1897.

⁵³ “Who is the Patriot?,” *United Mine Workers’ Journal*, May 14, 1896, 3.

⁵⁴ George A. Smith, “Patriotism and Patriotism,” *American Federationist*, Aug. 1895, 100.

⁵⁵ “Sympathize with Cuban Patriots,” *Pittsburgh Post*, Nov. 1, 1895, 1. Emphasis added.

nationalism. Writing in the *American Federationist*, Frank Myers argued patriotism was the “love of the eternal principle of abstract liberty,” and that “he is most patriotic who neglects no public duty that concerns the welfare of all.” Consequently, “failure to vote is unpatriotic...indifference is unpatriotic... failure to serve one’s country in the best manner he knows how is unpatriotic.”⁵⁶

Union workers regularly drew upon popular ideals of America’s revolutionary heritage, even when severely criticizing contemporary conditions. Walter MacArthur, a San Francisco labor activist and editor of the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, discouraged laborers from attending Fourth of July festivities in 1895, as it was “clearly the right and the duty of those who disagree with existing conditions to so express themselves by remaining apart from the celebration.” Wage workers’ absence from the parade ground on the Fourth, MacArthur stressed, would be a declaration “that existing conditions are not what they conceive to be the purposes for which the Republic was founded.” Daily encountering “the destruction of those safeguards of liberty and equality which the forefathers held dearest,” and feeling “the blight of poverty driving them to the wall,” America’s working class, according to MacArthur, would be “celebrating in their own way,” gathering in “meeting halls and public places throughout the land,” to work for “economic equality... [while] arousing hope and love and reverence for the Republic.”⁵⁷ In the same breath, MacArthur, like many other late-nineteenth-century wage-workers, railed against present conditions in the United States, yet paid homage to America’s republican heritage.

⁵⁶ Frank A. Myers, “Are We Patriotic,” from *American Federationist*, located in *Trackmen’s Advance Advocate*, Aug. 1897, 474.

⁵⁷ Walter MacArthur, “The Glorious Fourth,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, June 26, 1895.

Union workers' definition of “republicanism” contained both class and racial connotations. American union workers developed a working-class consciousness during the nineteenth century that inscribed “whiteness” as one of the bedrocks of their social and cultural identity.⁵⁸ White workers forged a collective sense of self that insisted that they were both the rightful inheritors and industrious defenders of the American Republic. As inheritors, they claimed full citizenship rights and demanded social (and, at more radical times, economic) equality based on their shared racial characteristics: their “whiteness,” they persisted, was demarcated through the qualities of manly independence, dedication to difficult and skilled work, disciplined organization, and the ability and willingness to be an active republican citizen.⁵⁹ Wage workers’ concept of “whiteness” materialized during the nineteenth century alongside, and essentially in contrast to, the institution of racial slavery – “whiteness” was set in opposition to “blackness,” “slavery,” “Other-ness,” “laziness,” “dependence,” and the perceived lack of capacity to play a role in an active republican citizenry.

Nineteenth-century white workers, in other words, fused their racial and class identities into a single, mutually-reinforcing ethos that was simultaneously inclusive and

⁵⁸ American workers’ “working-class consciousness” took the form of “republican producerism” for most of the 1800s until its slow, piecemeal transition to the pure-and-simple ideology of craft unionism in the years surrounding the turn of the century. The centrality of “whiteness” to Americans’ working-class identity experienced occasional challenges during the final quarter of the nineteenth century, but at no time did it ever come close to fully disappearing.

⁵⁹ As David Roediger et. al. have shown: Working-class whiteness was “a gendered phenomenon, particularly expressing and repressing male longings and the perils and pride of republican citizenship among men.” David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, (1991; rev. ed., New York: Verso, 1999), 11. See also: Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*; Elliott Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prizefighting in America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986); Anthony E. Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*; p. 25-26; Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

exclusive. Working-class whiteness was inclusive in its cross-class focus on race-based citizenship: it created a logic that justified white male workers' claim to equal citizenship with the men of the middle and upper classes, while simultaneously defining a list of virtues that the "questionably white" (such as Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants) could aspire to and potentially achieve.⁶⁰ White working-class consciousness was exclusive in its rejection of the radical individualism of many Americans as well as the unwillingness to expand the definition of republican citizenship to include women or the cultural precepts of numerous immigrant groups. The defining exclusivity of working-class whiteness, however, lay foremost in its (only occasionally challenged) pronouncement that Asian, Black, and Mexican workers were biologically incapable of fulfilling the requirements of a socially equal republican citizenry and actually endangered the future of the workers' Republic.⁶¹

White union workers' concerted efforts on behalf of Cuban freedom may seem curious given the labor movement's entrenched racism, but the seeming contradiction spoke volumes about the nature of the sympathy movement. The Cuban Junta successfully established a popular narrative about the Revolution that largely ignored the "race" issue, while most Americans, for their part, were more than happy to "ignore" the Cubans (and all race talk) and reconfigure the sympathy movement to meet their own

⁶⁰ For scholarship on "Whiteness," see: Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*; Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).

⁶¹ There were, of course, "gradations" within this line of reasoning, as some workers held that "racially inferior" workers would *never* be able to become proper citizens, while others maintained that Asian, Black, and Mexican (or even "inferior" European immigrants) were currently unable to play an active role in the American Republic, though they potentially could do so in the future. See: Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*; Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

self-serving motives. The Cuban sympathy movement was a venue for organized labor to express its opposition to “oppression” in general and its dedication to protecting the core tenets of American nationalism. The realities of race in Cuba would have merely hindered labor's own narrative of working-class patriotism, and yet, by ignoring race, white workers were able to use the sympathy movement to try to imprint their own conceptions of republicanism upon the national stage. White union workers, in this sense, “de-raced” Cubans in constructing their interpretation of the islanders as the “fellow oppressed” – the sympathy movement was an allegorical means for labor to strengthen its own place in America's social landscape and, ironically, defend white workers' racial privilege.

White workers' self-interest, in fact, had long been the determinant factor in the establishment of late-nineteenth-century cross-racial alliances. The labor movement of the mid-1890s essentially retained the contradictory racial impulses found in the Knights of Labor, albeit with a considerably higher degree of cynicism. The Knights, historian Joseph Gertais shows, “simultaneously pursued strategies of racial inclusion and exclusion and defended both in the name of collective interest.”⁶² While the “producerist” identity of the Knights certainly offered greater potential for cross-racial alliances than the narrower constructs of pure-and-simple unionism, the idiom and imagery of labor's deep-seated republican tradition hardly vanished overnight, signifying that intra-class and inter-racial organization remained, if expedient to white unionists, within the realm of conceivability.⁶³ If African-American workers were successful in

⁶² Joseph Gertais, *Class and the Color Line: Interracial Class Coalition in the Knights of Labor and the Populist Movement* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 8.

⁶³ For an analysis of the shifting probabilities of “racially inclusive” labor organizing based on

their efforts at self-organization and revealed a dedication to labor's republican principles – and, most importantly, if proposed alliances promised white workers “material” advantages – then some within the labor movement were willing to ally with black workers.⁶⁴ Instances of white union members allying with black workers – among New Orleans dockworkers and throughout the United Mine Workers of America, for example – revealed the possibilities (however infrequent) of cross-racial alliance at the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ They also help explain how an otherwise-racist white working-class could align itself with Cuban revolutionaries. As long as the discourse surrounding Cuba focused on the insurgents' dedication to liberty, rather than their race, and offered cultural and political benefits to white union workers, then many within the U.S. labor movement were amenable to an abstract alliance.

The Cuban sympathy movement of late 1895 and early 1896 united disparate groups, including organized labor, behind abstract principles of orthodox American nationalism. Cuban sympathizers promoted devotion to an idealized past and emphasized shared national responsibility as a means to combat the accelerated and bewildering transformations of late-nineteenth-century modernization that had generated considerable societal instability. Union workers, moreover, embraced the patriotic rhetoric of the sympathy movement because it offered an opportunity to unite a divided workforce and

organizational ideology, see Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 300-316.

⁶⁴ To be clear, these “rhetorical coalitions” usually resided primarily in the abstract, as most tentative racial alliances crumbled when African-Americans demanded social equality or, for one reason or another, the relationship no longer offered overt benefits to white unionists.

⁶⁵ See: Eric Arneson, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (1991; Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Arneson, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Gertais, *Class and the Color Line*; David Alan Corbin, *Life, Work and Rebellion in the Coal Fields: The Southern West Virginia Miners, 1880-1922* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1981).

advance the broader cause of labor. “The United States has taken her stand,” A.R. Hamilton, editor of Pittsburgh’s *National Labor Tribune*, boomed in early 1896, “and that stand is rooted deep down in the patriotism, the love of freedom, [and] the traditions of our nation... The patriots of this country will rejoice. There is no question of the American nation’s sentiment. Mass meetings throughout the country have reflected it. We are for Cuban freedom.”⁶⁶

Labor Leaders Battle over the ‘Meaning’ of Cuba

The most noteworthy characteristic of the early Cuban sympathy movement was the consistency of its message across social and geographical boundaries. During a span of six short months – from late September 1895 to early March 1896 – a broad, yet unlikely, coalition of Americans developed an organic and widespread narrative that endorsed the predominantly symbolic ventures of moral support and the recognition of belligerent rights for the Cuban revolutionaries. Rooted in mass ambivalence engendered by end-of-the-century transformations in American society, Americans’ creation of a brief, but defining, consensus towards the Cuban revolution was founded upon a deeply entrenched popular mythology concerning the United States of America’s “meaning.”

For most Americans, the Cuban revolution resided in the realm of metaphor from its very inception in 1895. The islanders’ struggle for independence entered American discourse primarily as a symbolic means for different groups to engage with contemporary domestic matters and fashion a national identity. “Americans from all walks of life,” historian Louis A. Perez Jr. has shown regarding the end of the nineteenth century, “arrived at their knowledge of Cuba and Cubans principally by way of

⁶⁶ A.R. Hamilton, “For Cuban Independence,” *National Labor Tribune*, March 5, 1896, 1.

metaphor.”⁶⁷ The reality that the Cuban sympathy movement was an imminently self-reflective and self-serving enterprise meant that it was prone to or, in fact, *demanding* social-group manipulation. In a decade defined by conflict, rather than consensus, Americans’ cultural accord relative to *Cuba Libre* soon fell victim to the splintering forces of late-nineteenth-century social discord. From the spring of 1896 through the U.S. declaration of war against Spain in the spring of 1898, various social groups – organized labor, evangelical ministers, white-collar proponents of “strenuous” masculinity, advocates of an imperial “large policy”, conservative businessmen, et al. – transformed the unifying narrative of “moral support” and “belligerent rights” to match their particular visions of America’s present and future course.⁶⁸

By the end of the year 1896, in which Republican William McKinley defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan in one of the most portentous U.S. Presidential elections in the nation’s history, organized workers had etched the outline of an alternative understanding of the Cuban independence movement’s relationship to the United States. Labor’s divergent interpretation – or interpretations, actually, as the distinct voices within the labor movement grappled over the implications of the Cuban revolution for America’s working class – firmly dovetailed with organized labor’s end-of-the-century “movement narratives.” Working-class movement narratives, historian

⁶⁷ Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 52.

⁶⁸ Arnold Shankman, “Southern Methodist Newspapers and the Coming of the Spanish-American War: A Research Note,” *Journal of Southern History*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Feb., 1973), 93-96; Linderman, *Mirror of War*; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Kristen L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998); Walter LaFeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

Joseph Gertais explains, represented the overarching “cultural and historical patterns [that] shap[ed] the movements’ own definitions of their interests and identities.”⁶⁹

Members of organized labor, in other words, often employed a common language, and drew upon a shared cache of recognizable memories, explanations, and axioms, to express their collective hopes, dreams, and discontent.

Indicative of the labor movement’s overall disjunction in the mid-1890s, however, even union members who held similar ideological orientations sometimes developed contrasting viewpoints towards the Cuban revolution. Certain Socialists assailed Cleveland, McKinley, and “Wall St.” for ignoring the atrocities being committed by a “cruel monarchy” upon the Cuban population. Others, such as Daniel De Leon, ignored the public debate over Cuba, belligerency, and war, deeming it a useless relic of bourgeois nationalism. Likewise, Samuel Gompers and a number of proponents of pure-and-simple business unionism actively supported the Cuban cause, but others such as Cincinnati printer Thomas J. Donnelly believed “it ill-fitted a trades union to take such action.” Donnelly maintained that the AFL should instead “devote all their energies” towards “the better organization of the working people of this country.”⁷⁰ Gompers, in the end, failed to maintain control over labor’s Cuban narrative – he never quite mollified a rank-and-file that found great cultural sustenance in Cuban sympathy, and yet he simultaneously angered conservative union leaders who feared his pandering would contribute to war with Spain.

Thus in a period of prolonged crisis, class conflict, and internal labor strife,

⁶⁹ Gertais, *Class and the Color Line*, 8.

⁷⁰ “Third Days’ Work,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Dec. 17, 1896, located in *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 4, ed. Stuart B. Kaufman, Peter J. Albert and Grace Palladino (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 274.

working-class Americans' understanding of the Cuban revolution and, later, the U.S. wars against Spain and the Philippines became a terrain of struggle *about* class and *about* the defining characteristics that made up the American Republic. The leadership void within the American labor movement in the mid-to-late 1890s necessitated that the working class consider a broad array of schemes, suppositions, and symbols that could potentially counterbalance the disquieting social transformations set in motion by late-nineteenth-century industrial-capitalism. Although organized labor never constituted more than ten percent of the overall American workforce during the decade of the 1890s, "it nonetheless represented," as scholar Eric Arneson contends, "the aspirations, articulated the fears, and offered alternatives on behalf of large numbers of American workers."⁷¹ Union influence, argues historian Alexander Saxton, further diffused throughout working-class neighborhoods by ways of associated networks of kinship and ethnicity, as well as through urban ward clubs, fraternal organizations, public holiday celebrations, and workers' saloon-culture.⁷² Moreover, as labor historian Richard Oestricher and others have noted, recurrent working-class unrest in the 1880s and 1890s "created a significant working-class presence in the minds of all strata in American society."⁷³ Labor's particular interpretation of the Cuban revolution, therefore, converged with its prevailing end-of-the-century movement narratives to help shape the realities of American politics as well as the character of the labor movement itself.

As the early consensus regarding the war in Cuba dissipated, much of organized labor converted an abstract moral affinity for the Cuban independence movement into a

⁷¹ Arneson, "American Workers," 46.

⁷² Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 359.

⁷³ Oestricher, *Solidarity and Fragmentation*, 214.

scathing, but certainly circuitous, condemnation of the “callous” federal government and the “greedy money powers” for America’s failure to provide Cuban insurgents with economic, political, and moral support. Criticisms of Presidents Cleveland and McKinley for their reluctance to confer belligerent rights to the Cuban insurgents – reproofs buttressed by many workers’ enduring conviction that America’s republican system had been compromised by the intimate relationship between the federal government and wealthy industrial-capitalists – acquired a prominent position in organized labor’s evolving interpretation of the Cuban revolution. Workers invoked entrenched social narratives, connecting the insurgents’ battles in Cuba to the struggles of the working class in the United States and formulating a lasting symbolic interpretation of the events in Cuba as yet another touchstone in the ever-present battle between labor and capital, the oppressed and the oppressors, the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots.’

Even as organized labor’s interpretation of the Cuban independence movement shifted over the two years leading up to U.S. intervention in spring of 1898, many rank-and-file workers in central labor councils and local trade assemblies continued to symbolically fuse Cuba’s historical oppression and battles for independence with American labor’s self-perceived republican heritage and struggles for economic emancipation.⁷⁴ City central labor unions and trade federations, reveals Julie Greene,

⁷⁴ The Atlanta Federation of Trades held a special gathering of the city’s trade unions in December of 1896 to discuss the “Cuban question.” The meeting culminated with the issuance of a set of “unanimously adopted” resolutions that endorsed the recognition of “belligerent rights to the Cubans” and pledged the “moral and financial support” of Atlanta’s organized laborers’ “to the patriots of Cuba, whom are now engaged in their final struggle for liberty and independence.” “More Resolutions on Cuba,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 19, 1896, 2. Galveston’s labor council met at the Texas city’s Union Hall on July 11, 1897, passing resolutions “favoring the concurrent resolutions before Congress acknowledging Cuban belligerency.” “Labor Legislative Council,” *Galveston Daily News*, July 12, 1897, 8. Hundreds of workers, representing the twenty-one Washington D.C. labor organizations that constituted the city’s central labor union, gathered to support “the people of Cuba [who] are now engaged in a struggle for liberation from the oppressive control of Spain,” adopting resolutions “strongly recommending the recognition of the belligerency of Cuba.” “Organized Labor Favors Cuba,” *The Union* (Indianapolis), July 3, 1897; “Labor’s

“dominated working-class institutions at the local level” during the 1890s.⁷⁵ These local labor assemblies were organized on a geographic basis, uniting workers within a particular region regardless of craft distinctions, and provided a forum for broader solidarities. City centrals assumed many of the duties on a local level that the American Federation of Labor did nationally, such as lobbying city politicians in regards to labor legislation and coordinating the organizational efforts of an ideologically and occupationally diverse community of workers.⁷⁶ Central labor unions represented the workers’ “class, rather than craft, interests” and were “more responsive and in-tune with what was happening in the workers’ immediate life.”⁷⁷ And, as Gary Fink has shown in his study of the Missouri State Federation of Labor, local labor leaders “placed a much greater emphasis upon the exercise of [their] potential political power and influence than did the national leadership.”⁷⁸ Local labor councils and trades’ federations were also, almost by necessity, more democratic in their operation as they responded directly to the immediate needs and objectives of a wide array of skilled and unskilled laborers.⁷⁹ Central labor council’s repeated efforts on behalf of the Cuban insurgents’ request for belligerent rights in 1896 and 1897 stood as evidence of the “rank-and-file’s” abiding sympathy for the revolution.

The rank-and-file’s interminable advocacy for Cuban belligerent rights was, to

Cuban Sympathy,” *Washington Times*, June 27, 1897, 12.

⁷⁵ Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*, 41.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Gary M. Fink, *Labor’s Search for Political Order: The Political Behavior of the Missouri Labor Movement, 1890-1940* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 9.

⁷⁹ Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*, 44.

some extent, reinforced by the U.S. labor movement's hierarchy. Support for belligerency rights spanned organizational and ideological lines through much of 1896 and 1897 – uniting “old guard” labor republicans and the vanguards of conservative business unionism. Influential editors, such as J.P. McDonnell of the *National Labor Standard* and Walter MacArthur of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, occasionally promoted recognition. McDonnell declared during October of 1896 that he felt assured, “all the probabilities point to a recognition...of Cuba by the United States early in the spring, no matter whether McKinley or Bryan be elected.”⁸⁰ In April of 1896, MacArthur expressed gratitude that “Congress has recognized Cuba,” but offered critically, “May we hope that Uncle Sam's turn will come soon?”⁸¹ Henry B. Martin, editor of the *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, was even more pronounced in his support. Martin mimicked the pitch of mass sympathy meetings from the previous fall, insisting that the U.S. government “should give the same kind of aid to a long-suffering people in Cuba that France gave to the oppressed people of this country during the American Revolution.”⁸²

The General Assembly of the Knights of Labor and, more significantly, the annual conventions of the American Federation of Labor, further cemented “sympathy” and “belligerent rights” as the baseline interpretation of America's organized working class, even as labor's dominant interpretation of the Cuban revolution was being transformed. The Knights' General Assembly quickly endorsed a resolution in November of 1897 reaffirming their “declarations in favor of Cuban liberty,” and renewing their “pledges of sympathy and support to those patriots who are making, and have made, such a heroic

⁸⁰ J.P. McDonnell, Editorial, *Paterson Labor Standard*, Oct. 24, 1896.

⁸¹ Walter MacArthur, Editorial, *Coast Seamen's Journal*, April 8, 1896.

⁸² Henry B. Martin, Editorial, *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, April 16, 1896.

struggle for liberty.”⁸³ Delegates to the American Federation of Labor’s 1896 convention, on the other hand, vigorously debated resolutions demanding that “the President and Congress...recognize the belligerent rights of the Cuban revolutionists.”⁸⁴

Veteran labor activist George E. McNeill, author of the “Declarations of Principles of the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor” as well as a founding member of the American Federation of Labor, introduced the Cuban belligerency resolutions during the third day of the 1896 AFL convention. McNeill’s resolutions carried the significance of a labor leader who resided, according to historian Robert R. Montgomery, “at the epicenter of struggles over the direction of the labor movement” throughout the late nineteenth century.⁸⁵ During the depths of the depression in 1893 and 1894, McNeill gave a keynote address at the international labor conference at the Chicago World’s Fair and traveled the nation on behalf of the AFL, holding rallies to educate and organize the mass of unemployed Americans.⁸⁶ McNeill had dedicated his life in the labor movement to the contention “that mutualism is preferable to individualism,” and he remained, even in his sixties, an outspoken proponent of an expansive definition of the labor movement, one that would “hold the position of protectorate to the unorganized,” “overcome the competition of wage-workers with wage-workers, in the interest of its class,” and “join

⁸³ Knights of Labor, *Record of the Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor* (1897), 67.

⁸⁴ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1896), 53. (hereafter cited as AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896)

⁸⁵ Robert R. Montgomery, “‘To Fight This Thing till I Die’: The Career of George Edwin McNeill,” *Culture, Gender, Race, and U.S. Labor History*, ed. Ronald C. Kent, Sara Markham, David R. Roediger, Herbert Shapiro (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993); 5.

⁸⁶ George E. McNeill, “The Philosophy of the Labor Movement.” A paper read before the International Labor Congress in Chicago, Illinois, Sept. 1893 (New York: American Federation of Labor, n.d.); Foner, *History of U.S. Labor Movement*, 2: 238.

hands with all who struggle for industrial liberty.”⁸⁷

As one of Samuel Gompers’ favored speakers, and an influential intermediary between the AFL the rest of the American working class, McNeill tendered the AFL convention’s “heartly sympathy to all men struggling against oppression, and especially to the men of Cuba,” contending, “that the example of the people of France, in giving recognition and aid to the Fathers in their struggle to secure the independence of the colonies, is worthy of imitation.”⁸⁸ McNeill drew upon the rhetoric of the Cuban sympathy movement, with its emphasis on belligerency rights and allusions to the American Revolution, as well as his own enduring devotion to the legacies of producerism – characterized by the embrace of “all men struggling against oppression.” The resolutions found vocal advocacy, moreover, among a diverse body of delegates – from evolutionary Socialists such as P.J. McGuire and John McBride, philosophical anarchists like Henry Weismann, pro-silver Populist allies such as Sam Yarnell, and conservative pure-and-simple unionists like Samuel Gompers and John Lennon.⁸⁹

Sympathy for Cuba provided a means by which the needs of many American workers who yearned for a wider conception of the labor movement in these pivotal and transformative years could be temporarily fulfilled. Yet, the “story” of Cuba – a narrative framework designed and standardized inside American fraternal lodges and convention halls, manipulated daily by the press, and, subsequently, recast by various social-groups within the walls of their own meeting places and columns of their own press – also served the purposes of union leaders who held alternate motives. For those less sensitive to the

⁸⁷ George E. McNeill, “The Philosophy of the Labor Movement,” Sept. 1893; George E. McNeill, “The Trades Unions and the Monopolies,” *American Federationist*, Dec. 1896, 208-209.

⁸⁸ AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896, 53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

perceived privations of the end-of-the-century ascendancy of pure-and-simple unionism, expressions of sympathy for the Cuban revolutionists assisted the complex process of conforming the AFL's "business unionism" to both the rest of the working class and American society as a whole.

Samuel Gompers attempted to use the Cuban sympathy movement to forestall detractors of the American Federation of Labor – both inside and outside of the labor movement. Gompers and the AFL consistently endured criticism from the middle and upper classes, as well as from a wide network of American laborers, during the final decade of the nineteenth century. The former, historically conservative and leery from more than a decade of whispers of revolution, aimed a reproachful eye at the seemingly radical machinations of unions, while the latter, dissident unionists opposing AFL policies and unskilled laborers ignored by the Federation, often questioned the AFL's dedication to the broader struggle of the working-class. Cognizant of the AFL's tenuous position in turn-of-the-century American society, the AFL President spoke before myriad business associations, Chambers of Commerce, and Congressional panels, all the while maintaining that the vast majority of AFL unionists were conservative, patriotic Americans eager only to acquire a permanent place at the collective bargaining table.⁹⁰ Additionally, the AFL president, according to historian Shelton Stromquist, employed "resolutely ambiguous" rhetoric throughout the 1890s when attempting to rally non-union and unskilled laborers, as well as union adherents to Socialism or the Producer-ethic, to support the Federation's objectives.⁹¹

⁹⁰ See, for instance: U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Education and Labor, *Report of Hearings...relative to H.R. 7389...*, 55th Congress, 3rd sess., 1898, S. Doc. 127.

⁹¹ Shelton Stromquist, "The Crisis of 1894 and the Legacies of Producerism," in *The Pullman Strike and*

On December 16, 1896, Gompers made shrewd use of the popularity of the Cuban cause. His convention speech in favor of McNeill's belligerency resolutions – resolutions that he had co-signed – managed to masterfully connect the labor movement to a patriotic and popular cause and, however disingenuously, assuage a wide segment of the Federation's rank-and-file by broadcasting the AFL's (as well as the organization's leading figure's) remaining dedication to an inclusive working-class social movement. "Gompers' power within the labor movement," Julie Greene reveals, "became most visible at the annual AFL conventions."⁹² Gompers held procedural advantages as AFL president – for example, he appointed the members of convention committees – and wielded considerable influence as the recognized "leader" of the Federation, meaning he was often able to impose his directives upon the annual assembly.

When the convention commenced in the middle of December, Gompers was aware of the widespread ire in the United States concerning the seemingly never-ending chain of atrocities attributed to the rule of Spanish general Valeriano "The Butcher" Weyler, which had only recently erupted into a national fury after reports of Spanish treachery involved in the battlefield death of Cuban general Antonio Maceo.⁹³ He also knew that Congress was confidently pressing the Cleveland administration to uphold a popular mandate to support the Cuban independence movement and was putting the

the Crisis of the 1890s, 181. For further info on Gompers' appeals to non-union workers and adherents to Producerism, see: Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 186; Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 315.

⁹² Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*, 43.

⁹³ For an example of the activity – one that Gompers would have been able to witness himself in the city of Cincinnati and the surrounding area during the week of the AFL convention – see the Cincinnati/Kentucky Post, Dec. 14, 1896 to Dec. 24, 1896 for accounts of the creation of a popular \$1 subscription to aid the Cuban cause as well as a series of meetings and rallies in support of *Cuba Libre*. For instance: "Funds for Cuba!," *Kentucky Post* (Cincinnati edition), Dec. 14, 1896, 2; "Aid for the Cubans," *Kentucky Post* (Cincinnati edition), Dec. 15, 1896, 1; "One Dollar!," *Kentucky Post* (Cincinnati edition), Dec. 16, 1896, 8; "A Pretty Nest Egg," *Kentucky Post* (Cincinnati edition), Dec. 17, 1896, 8.

finishing touches on concurrent resolutions in favor of belligerent rights for the island.⁹⁴

After more than a year of sympathy meetings, at which the popularity of the Cuban cause among labor leaders, as well as the rank-and-file, was consistently reaffirmed, Gompers adeptly manipulated what one newspaper correspondent to the assembly in Cincinnati described as an, “intense feeling of Cuban sympathy among the delegates to the American Federation of Labor [convention].”⁹⁵

Gompers was anxious to establish the Federation’s credentials as patriotic Cuban supporters. His fiery speech on behalf of belligerency and Cuban independence indicated that he was largely preoccupied with the potential domestic advantages afforded by the Federation’s expression of sympathy for Cuban independence and was certainly conscious that his comments on Cuba would be widely reported by the press. “Cuban liberty must be attained,” he cried, before assuring the delegates that he would use the power of his position to help achieve Cuban independence because he was “always on the side of the oppressed and the weak.”⁹⁶ Following a long, eloquent lamentation of the “sufferings being endured by the brave Cubans now struggling for independence,” The AFL president aggressively reiterated the popular contention that, “Liberty and freedom should prevail,” and he assured his wide audience that he, “wanted peace and would fight for it.”⁹⁷ Gompers was mindful of the rapid growth of patriotic organizations and the decade’s elevated tenor of nationalism, and therefore he added a stirring, albeit ultimately unsuccessful, decree that he “would not have it go on our records that any of our

⁹⁴ *Congressional Record*, 54th Congress, 1st session, 2257, 3627-3628.

⁹⁵ “Weyler Hanged in Effigy,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 17, 1896, 1.

⁹⁶ “Labor Speaks for Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 17, 1896, 2; AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896, 53.

⁹⁷ AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896, 53.

delegates were opposed to this measure.”⁹⁸

The AFL president recognized the popularity of “Cuba Libre” within the halls of organized labor and artfully positioned labor’s collective sympathy for Cuban independence as an extension of the labor movement itself. Gompers assured union workers and non-union workers alike that, “in America I am a trades unionist, in England I would be a trades unionist, in Germany I would be a Socialist, in Russia I would be a Nihilist, and,” he paused for emphasis, “in Cuba I would be a rebel.” He swore that he was not “blind to the terrible conditions that exist here [in the United States], where profit mongers and trust directors rule almost as absolutely as does the Czar of Russia,” but, he intoned assuredly, “we should aid the struggling masses in every land where our influence can be felt, and we must fight existing conditions as we find them.”⁹⁹

Despite the AFL president’s pleas for a resounding uniform endorsement, McNeill’s resolutions faced opposition. Debates at AFL annual conventions were sharp-tongued and suspenseful, as delegates, often skilled orators intensely devoted to their craft unions and specific interpretation of unionism in America, clashed over the ideological and practical future of the labor movement. AFL conventions during the mid-1890s were particularly contentious, as Socialists, philosophical anarchists, conservative advocates of business unionism, and converts from the Knights commingled and bickered on urban convention hall floors, each retaining, during these years, reasonable expectations of eventually steering the Federation’s course. The AFL conventions, held each year in a different U.S. city, usually lasted an entire week, with all

⁹⁸ “Labor Speaks for Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 17, 1896, 2; “Patriotism,” *Kentucky Post* (Cincinnati ed.), Dec. 18, 1896, 6. For more on labor and the proliferation of “patriotic” organizations in the 1890s, see: Neather, “Labor Republicanism, Race and Popular Patriotism,” 82-101; Stuart McConnell, “Reading the Flag: A Reconsideration of the Patriotic Cults of the 1890s,” in *Bonds of Affection*, ed. Bodnar, 102-119.

⁹⁹ “Labor Speaks for Cuba,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 17, 1896, 2; AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896, 53.

out-of-town delegates residing in the same hotel, oftentimes two, three, or even four men to each room. When delegates were not sparring over official union business, they toured local union factories, attended union balls, and drank late into the night at union saloons. Verbal disagreements, really the essence of mid-1890s AFL conventions, sometimes turned into physical scuffles, as was the case the night after the debate over McNeill's Cuba resolutions, as two delegates reportedly drew pistols on one another inside Cincinnati's Dennison Hotel following heated accusations of official improprieties.¹⁰⁰

As contests for the future of the American labor movement, the conventions *meant something* to the delegates and the rank-and-file. The delegates' daily official confrontations over the practices and plans of the labor movement, reserved for Cincinnati's Odd Fellows Hall that December, were the ultimate purpose of the annual conventions. Eager-to-speak union representatives leapt to their feet to demand recognition from the chairman, pounded their fists into tables while denouncing opposing speakers, and haughtily impugned the character and ability of their ideological enemies. For union leaders, the convention was a place to assert, or question, authority within the labor movement, as the executive council maneuvered to maintain control of Federation policy, while delegates from dozens of U.S. cities and hundreds of labor organizations forged temporary or permanent alliances as a means to challenge the union hierarchy. For union members across the United States, the importance of the American Federation of Labor's annual convention (reported upon in detail by both the national and labor press) consisted in the articulation of grievances, definition of priorities, and implementation of programs for their federated craft unions.

Patterns of division emerged within the labor movement after the initial wave of

¹⁰⁰ "Silver and Unionism," *Washington Post*, Dec. 18, 1896, 1.

Cuban sympathy meetings, as some conservative business unionists began intimating that the movement was outside the proper purview of pure-and-simple unionism. These smoldering conflicts erupted on the Cincinnati convention hall floor in response to the McNeill/Gompers resolution. Delegates such as Iron Molders Union of North America representative David Black argued against the adoption of the resolutions by asserting that jingoism and political activity diverted the Federation from the avowed practical goals of tighter organization, shorter work days, and higher pay. Black was appointed head of the *Iron Molders' Journal* in 1895, and he spent the next eight years as editor avidly promoting a conservative definition of pure-and-simple unionism. Inside the walls of Cincinnati's Odd Fellows Hall, hardly a moment elapsed after McNeill's resolutions had been introduced before Black bounded to his feet, dismissing, as with a petulant wave of the hand, the resolutions as "outside [the Federation's] jurisdiction." Black, invoking what would become (if, at that point, it was not already) a well-worn expression, admonished the delegates to "confine ourselves to our own particular and peculiar functions."¹⁰¹

Andrew Furuseth, representative of the International Seamen's Union of America, seized upon, and expanded, Black's arguments. Defiantly conservative in his unionism, Furuseth held that labor's policies should only be to, "organize, educate, and get such legislation on conservative lines as we can."¹⁰² He admitted that he "would prefer the question [of Cuba] had not been brought up," insinuating that when it came to labor's current state of affairs in the United States, "he did not see that the question of Cuba had

¹⁰¹ AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896, 53.

¹⁰² Furuseth letter to Gompers, Nov. 1896, AFL Correspondence, first located in Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 342.

much to do with liberty.”¹⁰³ Furuseth feared that U.S. recognition of Cuban belligerent rights would eventually lead to a war against Spain, that “would not be one of days but of months,” ultimately resulting in the people of the United States, “being burdened with an immense army and navy” and a large “national debt.”¹⁰⁴ Once “the war was over and Cuba a republic,” Furuseth inquired rhetorically, then “what have we [workers] gained?” Thus, he contended the Federation should not, “add to the flame already burning as to whom should not rob the Cubans.”¹⁰⁵ Although Black’s and Furuseth’s judgments of the “Cuba question” unquestionably placed them in the minority of delegates to the 1896 convention, their narrowly circumscribed understanding of unionism and legitimate trepidations regarding the deprivations that war would bring to the working class testified to the crucial development among some labor figures of apprehensiveness towards the Cuban situation.

The delegates to the 1896 AFL convention eventually adopted McNeill’s resolutions by the emphatic margin of sixty to nine, with twenty-eight organizations either absent or abstaining – in this case, the overwhelming majority revealing, even at the close of another trying year, the sustainable force sympathy for the revolution had to unite a frequently fractured labor movement. The opposition, on the other hand, classified the Federation’s entanglement with the “Cuban question” as political in nature and therefore characteristically divisive, since it purportedly ran counter to the narrow

¹⁰³ AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896, 53.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 54; “Third Days’ Work,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, Dec. 17, 1896, located in *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, 4: 274.

¹⁰⁵ AFL, *Sixteenth Proceedings*, 1896, 54.

tenets of pure-and-simple unionism.¹⁰⁶ Regardless, the fractious debate over Cuban belligerency resolutions at the December 1896 AFL convention, and the emergence of a sense of wariness among some workers towards Cuba, signified that organized labor's collective understanding of the Cuban revolution, as with the initial national eruption of the "Cuban sympathy movement" in late 1895, had become contested social terrain for Americans with divergent conceptions of the labor movement's (and the nation's) future.

Assailing the "Money Powers": Labor, Cuba and the Class Struggle

When it came to the "narrative of Cuba," much of the rank-and-file remained wedded to the original script of patriotic "republicanism," sympathy for fellow "strugglers," and advocacy for belligerency rights, while an influential minority of business unionists disavowed labor had a part to play in the story altogether. It was a third contingent, however, loosely composed of organized labor's fluctuating "ideological center," voiced predominantly within the labor press, that ultimately sculpted labor's official interpretation of the Cuban revolution. These union leaders and labor editors – seizing the mantle in the spring of 1896 and continuing until the *U.S.S. Maine* battleship exploded in Havana's harbor – largely obscured the actual plight of the insurgents. Instead, they manipulated the national discourse surrounding the Cuban independence movement in order to attack so-called "enemies of labor" at home.

Prominent union figures converted popularly held beliefs regarding the Cuban revolution into an abstract means through which to challenge labor's domestic

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 53; the vote of 60 to 9 has been misunderstood by historians, such as John Appel – while there were 117 delegates in attendance, the vote over the Cuban resolutions was a "unit vote" – thus 69 out of the 91 eligible organizations voted on the matter, with the remaining either absent from the proceedings or abstaining from the vote. Those who abstained from the vote, according to the *Boston Herald*, likely sympathized with Cuba, but held back their votes out of concern that foreign policy debates should be left out of the convention's proceedings. "Labor Projects," *Boston Herald*, Dec. 1896, p. 3.

opposition, revealing a willingness to expand the scope of the U.S. labor movement when they believed it to be in organized labor's best interest. In doing so, labor leaders fundamentally altered the group narrative developed during the initial Cuban sympathy movement, turning what was once a unifying celebration of orthodox American nationalism into a hypercritical assault upon the "money powers" and their purported allies within the federal government. As self-identified defenders of the Republic, furthermore, white workers embraced a commitment to oppose those forces that they believed threatened to degrade both themselves and the nation. Organized labor's condemnation of the "money powers" positioned greedy capitalists – whose machinations, they argued, weakened democracy and ground independent workers into menial "wage slaves" – as betrayers of the nation's white egalitarian ideals.

The genesis for labor's shifting rhetoric lay in President Grover Cleveland's – and his successor William McKinley's – refusal to recognize the belligerent rights of the Cuban insurgency. Cleveland ignored the popular appeals of the grassroots Cuban sympathy movement and dismissed Congressional resolutions in favor of belligerency or independence for Cuba as merely "advice...voluntarily tendered to the Executive," that in no way impinged upon the exclusive authority of the President "to recognize the so-called Republic of Cuba," and may have, according to Cleveland's Secretary of State Richard Olney, unnecessarily "raise[d] expectations in some quarters which can never be realized."¹⁰⁷ Cleveland's repudiation of the popular clamor for belligerency rights for the Cuban rebels was vilified by the U.S. labor press, particularly in light of worsening conditions on the island under General Weyler, as well as the Cuban Junta's unremitting

¹⁰⁷ "Grover Says No!," *Kentucky Post*, Dec. 21, 1896, 3. This was a statement by Secretary of State Richard Olney, but it was given in an official capacity as the opinion of President Cleveland.

declarations that the fledgling republic would finally achieve its independence if it possessed the benefits of American recognition.

With reports of Spanish atrocities an almost daily occurrence in U.S. newspapers, and with Junta representatives such as Marcos Morales regularly assuring the American public, “[B]elligerency is all we hope for and all we want at the present, [then] we’ll take care of independence ourselves,” organized labor soon drew upon entrenched perceptions of Cleveland to assail the president’s inactivity as proof of his indebtedness to the “money powers.”¹⁰⁸ Labor leaders implied the President and his supposed cohorts on Wall Street had long ago betrayed the ideals of American democracy, opposing belligerency rights out of fealty to Spanish and American capital invested in the island as well as fear that an international confrontation with Spain would disrupt the still-teetering economy. “Grover Cleveland has made himself solid with Wall Street,” roared J.P. McDonnell, editor of the *Paterson Labor Standard*. “He is the willing servant of the great moneyocracy and admirably suits the speculators of all political parties.”¹⁰⁹ Invoking a similar, and all-too-common criticism of Cleveland, McDonnell asserted, “The belligerent rights of Cuba should at once be recognized by this government, but, alas and alack, this government is no longer a government of the people.”¹¹⁰

Comparable accusations dogged Cleveland into the final months of his presidency, as organized labor officially transitioned from “sympathy for Cuba” to “antipathy for the money powers.” Henry B. Martin, editor of the *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, expressed alarm towards Cleveland’s “remarkable proposition that the

¹⁰⁸ “Big Cuban Meeting,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 1, 1896, 2.

¹⁰⁹ J.P. McDonnell, Editorial, *Paterson Labor Standard*, Dec. 14, 1895.

¹¹⁰ J.P. McDonnell, Editorial, *Paterson Labor Standard*, Feb. 8, 1896.

executive alone, and not Congress, has the power to recognize the belligerency or independence of any people struggling to throw off the yoke of an oppressor.”¹¹¹ AFL president Samuel Gompers joined the chorus of condemnation directed towards President Cleveland, illustrating the commonality of Martin’s charges, even across opposing organizations. He sarcastically thanked the Queen of Spain for her acknowledgment, in a speech to the Spanish *Cortes*: “[T]he people of the United States [were] of one opinion and the president and *his government* act[ed] in opposition thereto.” “Is it not a sad commentary on our present conditions,” Gompers opined, when “public opinion” and “even the resolutions of Congress, almost unanimously adopted, favoring the recognition of Cuban belligerency, [are] ignored by the president and *his government*.”¹¹²

While President Cleveland faced the brunt of labor’s initial critical turn, some labor figures aimed invectives directly at the so-called “money powers.” The January 1897 issue of the *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, for example, contained a political cartoon in which a fashionably dressed figure identified as “American Capitalist” physically restrained a visibly distressed Uncle Sam from rushing to the aid of Cuba – symbolized, as was often the case, by a light-skinned woman prone before a brutish, sword-wielding General Weyler.¹¹³ Beneath the revealing cartoon, *Locomotive Firemen’s*

¹¹¹ Cleveland’s executive “usurpations,” according to Martin, indicated that he was determined to make the executive branch “the dominant factor in the government,” while consigning the “legislative and judicial branches” to a status as “merely the tools of the executive power.” “The money power” supported Cleveland’s position on executive authority with regards to Cuba, and preferred this relationship between the three branches, reasoned the outspoken Knight, because they found “it easier to control the actions of the lone man acting as president than they do the three or four hundred who constitute a Congress.” Henry B. Martin, “Congress or King?,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Dec. 31, 1896.

¹¹² Samuel Gompers, “As Others See Us,” *American Federationist*, June 1896, 71. Emphasis in original. “Resolutions of Congress” referred to the passage of concurrent resolutions that recognized the belligerency of the Cuban insurgents in March and April of 1896. *Congressional Record*, 54th Congress, 1st session, 2257, 3627-3628.

¹¹³ “Cuba Libre,” *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, January 1897, p. 21; For further analysis of the

Magazine editor W.S. Carter offered encouragement to Cuba and delivered a scathing attack against a shared adversary:

*Shall Cuba be free? No, not so long as American owners of capital invested in Cuba deem it detrimental for their interests! Should Spain, by force of numbers, crush out the spirit of liberty and again secure undisputed control, the United States government will be used as an agent to collect preposterous damage claims for American owners of Cuban investments... When it becomes evident that American investors can profit nothing by a Spanish victory, or when that victory is no longer possible, then the United States government will put a stop to the butchery of a liberty-loving people – and not until then.*¹¹⁴

Carter was not alone in assigning culpability to American capitalists for the President's repeated rebuffs of the popular call for belligerent rights for Cuba. "It has been a hard year in many respects, an anxious one," noted Edward Shriver, a New York union rail-conductor, in a January 1897 letter to the *Railway Conductor*, but, "Cuba, of course, holds premier place in the public eye here, as elsewhere." Among local New York unions, "that [Cuba] has general sympathy goes without saying," but, Shriver bemoaned, it is "the commercial timidity which shirks any disturbance that has led to some disposition to hold back from more positive assertion[s] of sympathy, since the stock market was upset the other day by proposed action in the Senate."¹¹⁵

Intimations that wealthy capitalists had corrupted the "meaning and purpose" of the American Republic, not to mention swayed specific government policies, had a prominent place in the mythology of America's labor movement. A decade prior to

gendered representation of Cuba in the U.S. press, see Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood*; Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy*, 61-62, 66-67.

¹¹⁴ "Cuba Libre," *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, January 1897, 21.

¹¹⁵ Edward J. Shriver, "Our New York Letter," *Railway Conductor*, Jan. 1897, 17. Immediately after the Foreign Relations Committee in the U.S. Senate reported favorably upon Senator Don Cameron's (Republican, Penn.) resolution recognizing Cuban independence (a resolution eventually 'tabled') in late December 1896, the stock market did decline swiftly in the following days. Steeples and Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation*, 68.

George E. McNeill's 1896 AFL convention resolutions advocating belligerency rights for the Cuban rebels, he famously declared that the "extremes of wealth and poverty are threatening the existence of the government," creating "an inevitable and irrepressible conflict between the wage-system of labor and the republican system of government – the wage-laborer attempting to save the government, and the capitalist class ignorantly trying to subvert it."¹¹⁶ The rhetoric of "conspiracy," in fact, was an essential component of labor's republican tradition, its vocabulary thriving as a viable interpretive framework – particularly within the Knights of Labor and among the rank-and-file, but even including the highest leadership rungs of the AFL – into the early twentieth century.¹¹⁷

Belief in conspiracy, historian David Brion Davis explains in his treatise on the "slave power conspiracy" of the mid-nineteenth century, should be understood as a "theoretical construct, not necessarily less reasonable than other constructs which help explain disturbing and unexpected happenings."¹¹⁸ Organized labor continued to evoke the idiom of conspiracy during a period of cataclysmic economic and social change for both its expository and palliative qualities. Workers not only identified reasonable sources of economic injustice, but also did so while remaining deeply rooted in the ideological traditions of labor republicanism. Likewise, workers personalized the forces

¹¹⁶ George E. McNeill, "The Problem of To-Day," in *The Labor Movement: The Problem of To-Day*, ed. McNeill (1887; reprinted, New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1971), 459.

¹¹⁷ For scholarship on organized labor and labor republicanism – including "conspiracy" – see: Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 167-184; Bruce Laurie, *Artisans into Workers: Labor in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York: Knopf, 1967); Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Knopf, 1976); Saxon, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*; Glickman, *A Living Wage*; Rosanne Currarino, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2011).

¹¹⁸ David Brion Davis, *The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 5.

responsible for their economic and political deprivations in a rationalizing attempt to comprehend what surely seemed incomprehensible and because doing so allowed them to remain optimistic that these individual-driven (rather than structural-driven) transformations could still be reversed.

Union spokesmen decried what they viewed as the illegitimate wealth and authority of America's capitalist class throughout the depression of 1893-1897 (and beyond). Workers interpreted the growth of trusts, instances of price-gouging, accusations of secret "handshake deals" between corporate and government officials, the proliferation of watered stocks, bond deals between banking syndicates and the federal government, and court injunctions against striking workers that were enforced by federal troops as evidence of the combined efforts of the "money powers" (and their stable of obedient congressmen and judges) to circumvent democracy and control the United States for the benefit of the capitalist minority. Samuel Gompers, employing his ever-malleable rhetoric in Chicago during the depths of the depression, maintained that "the laborers know that the capitalist class had its origin in force and fraud, that it has maintained and extended its brutal saw more or less directly through the agency of specified legislation, most ferocious and barbarous, but always in cynical disregard of all law save its own arbitrary will."¹¹⁹ In contrast, the labor movement, according to the AFL president, "has clearly revealed the power of the working people to realize and improve the industrial system and raises the hope that we may yet be able to stem the tide of economic, social and moral degradations robbing those who work of four-fifths of their natural wages and keeping the whole of society within a few months of

¹¹⁹ Samuel Gompers, "What Does Labor Want?" A paper read before the International Labor Congress in Chicago, Illinois, Sept. 1893 (New York: American Federation of Labor, n.d.).

destitution.”¹²⁰

Others within America’s labor movement, less wedded to the conservative tenets of pure-and-simple unionism, impugned the so-called “money powers” with even higher frequency and even greater venom. In a letter to Pittsburgh’s *National Labor Tribune*, prominent Ohio labor leader James Brettell harangued “these ‘anarchists of wealth’ that rob the poor by law, that pose as patriots and sing ‘protection to home industries’ and ‘America for Americans,’ [who] have mortgaged the ‘land of the free and the home of the brave’ and pocketed the proceeds.”¹²¹ “Patriotism is a thing of the past amongst the men of great wealth,” agreed J.P. McDonnell of the *Labor Standard* in August 1896, as “there is more danger to the perpetuation of free institutions existing today from the moneyed element than there was over a hundred years ago to the establishment of free institutions from the British Tories.” McDonnell pleaded with his readers to stop “the conspirators of the Wall Street stripe, [who] regardless of their political affiliations, can, whenever it suits them, precipitate a panic, ruin business, turn millions into paupers, and even run the government as *they please*.”¹²²

Some labor leaders, spurred first by Cleveland’s recalcitrance towards belligerency rights, and then McKinley’s failure to adhere to his campaign assurances to assist Cuba, seized upon governmental inaction as a pretext to convoke long-standing

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ James Brettell, “Doesn’t Love McKinley Financially,” *National Labor Tribune*, April 18, 1895, 5; E.E. Clark, the leading official of the Order of Railway Conductors of America and an imposing figure within the railroad brotherhoods, similarly inveighed against “our American dictators,” those “few parasites who use ‘liberty’ merely as a word to conjure with!” “Wall Street is, indeed, becoming boldly defiant in its treasonable policy,” Clark excoriated in July of 1896, as “through its control of the country’s resources and activities it can bring pauperization, desolation and death upon millions of families in this republic at any time it sees fit.” E.E. Clark, “Comment,” *Railway Conductor*, July 1896, 442.

¹²² J.P. McDonnell, “Wall Street Conspirators,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, Aug. 1, 1896. Emphasis in original.

allegations that a ruthless cabal of business and government officials had betrayed the Republic.¹²³ Journal editors and union officials' utilization of the "idiom of conspiracy" instigated a subtle shift in labor's discourse concerning Cuba, as they transitioned from criticisms of the government for its moral failure to support belligerent rights to accusations that the White House and Wall Street were actively scheming against Cuban independence.

Walter MacArthur of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* reported in early January 1897 that "President Cleveland and Secretary of State Olney have made a compact with Spain to crush the Cuban rebellion in event of the latter's inability to do so alone."¹²⁴ A month later, W.S. Carter of the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, expressed his disgust that "American capitalists" had struck a deal with Spain to "bring pressure to bear on the United States government in a manner that will aid in suppressing the rebellion." Carter derided the "'great financiers' of Europe and the United States," but he could not help admitting that when they worked together, "they generally make their point, whether it is for the purpose of cornering the market, reducing wages or controlling the government."¹²⁵ Though convinced of Cleveland's duplicity with the so-called "money

¹²³ McKinley's 1896 presidential platform contained the following message concerning Cuba: "We watch with deep and abiding interest the heroic battle of the Cuban patriots against cruelty and oppression, and our best hopes go out for the full success of their determined contest for liberty. The government of Spain, having lost control of Cuba, and being unable to protect the property or lives of resident American citizens, or to comply with its treaty obligations, we believe that the government of the United States should actively use its influence and good offices to restore peace and give independence to the island." Excerpted in: W.S. Carter, "Hope for Cuba," *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, Feb. 1897, 81. Labor journals frequently printed excerpts of political programs, party platforms, and State of the Union addresses that dealt with issues deemed particularly "relevant" to labor. That W.S. Carter, editor of the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, printed McKinley's Cuban platform (and he was by no means alone in doing so) was indicative of union leaders' contention that "Cuba" was an issue pertinent to American union workers.

¹²⁴ "Home News," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, Jan. 6, 1897.

¹²⁵ W.S. Carter, "Hope for Cuba," *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, Feb. 1897, 81.

powers,” Carter maintained a modicum of “hope for Cuba,” commenting, “if political party platforms mean anything – and some people believe they do – the Cuban patriots have much to expect from the new [McKinley] administration.”¹²⁶ Three months later, however, he was once again disillusioned, claiming many Americans had “lost faith in the President.” “If ever there was lacking evidence that capital controlled all governments,” bemoaned Carter, “the manner in which stock and bond holders have paralyzed all feelings of humanity [towards] the deplorable conditions of poor Cuba would supply that evidence.”¹²⁷

It was left to Henry B. Martin of the General Executive Board of the Knights of Labor, the only existing umbrella organization that continued to officially embrace the ideology and traditions of labor republicanism, to fully explicate the manner in which Cuba fit into the “money power” conspiracy. Martin expounded upon Wall Street and government officials’ supposedly inborn “hatred for the cause of human liberty, whether in the Island of Cuba or on the continent of America” in a lengthy diatribe against the “moneyed oligarchy of America” in June of 1897. According to Martin, the same “force and influence in American affairs” that had “held the United States government back for the last two years from extending a helping hand to the cause of liberty in Cuba, in defiance of the wish of nine-tenths of the American people,” was the force and influence of the “stony-hearted aristocracy” that held “millions of Americans in almost slavish subjection to the power of its money.” This “clique of bondholders,” who had “conspired for years to reduce millions of American citizens to beggary,” had “no hearts to be touched with tender human sympathy for...Cuba.” “This merciless clique of money

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ W.S. Carter, “Poor Cuba,” *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, May 1897, 288.

kings in the United States,” Martin railed feverishly, had a “mighty grip on the machinery of our government,” enough that they could “compel a President and a House of Representatives to defy the expressed wish of the whole people of the nation.” Laying the stakes bare, Martin reiterated that Spain’s “career of murder and rapine in Cuba” would have been “stopped long ago had it not been for the fact that the government of the United States as it stands today, and has stood for the past twenty years, is much more of a monarchy than a republic.”¹²⁸

Accusations that the “money powers” were conspiring against Cuba’s liberty – just as they conspired against America’s working class – endured throughout McKinley’s first year in office.¹²⁹ Yet, throughout 1896, 1897, and the early months of 1898, as American discourse regarding Cuba assumed an increasingly martial tenor, many within the U.S. labor movement responded by declaring their frustration towards the widespread attention being paid to Cuba, or by insisting that capitalist sympathizers in America harbored imperialistic designs on the island. These union leaders and labor editors departed significantly from the popular narrative constructed during the Cuban sympathy meetings of late 1895, but they emulated the rest of the labor movement in their utilization of the popular discourse surrounding the Cuban revolution to denounce labor’s adversaries inside the United States. Significantly, the abstract quality of Americans’ engagement with the Cuban independence movement, combined with the ideological fluidity then underlying the U.S. labor movement, actually fostered a scenario in which

¹²⁸ Henry B. Martin quoted in “Cuban Liberty,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, June 3, 1897.

¹²⁹ As late as mid-September 1897, Mason Warner, editor of the *Toledo Union* (the official mouthpiece of the Toledo Central Labor Union and the Ohio Federation of Labor), contended “the real cause” of America’s “friendship to Spain” was “that Spanish bonds are a factor in the commercial world and in these latter days civilized nations are ruled by the dealers in stocks and bonds.” Mason Warner, “Lights and Shadows,” *Toledo Union*, Sept. 18, 1897.

the same union official employed multiple, and perhaps even slightly contradictory, lines of reasoning in order to shed light upon the inequities faced by labor at home. In other words, it was not uncommon for labor leaders – at different times, or even one after another – to express their sympathy for Cubans as “fellow strugglers,” implicate both Wall Street and the President in a bond-driven scheme to suppress the insurgency, criticize Americans due to their eagerness to plead for Cuban liberty and unwillingness to support the labor movement, and admonish jingoistic capitalists for intentionally steering the nation towards an imperialistic war.

Some labor leaders, with varying degrees of bitterness, transformed the early popular narrative concerning Cuba’s fight for independence by contrasting the struggles of Cuban insurgents with the current plight of labor within the United States. They applauded Congressional recognition of the belligerent rights of Cuba in the spring of 1896 as “one of the most commendable things ever done by Congress,” but then, almost in the same breath, harangued the same governing body for possessing “an unlimited amount of sympathy for...Cuba,” but holding “apparently no sympathy at all” for the “distressed, impoverished, debt-ridden, suffering people of the United States.”¹³⁰ These union leaders made use of the expansive national discourse concerning Cuba to inveigh incessantly against current oppressive conditions confronting America’s working class. Walter MacArthur, tireless promoter of pure-and-simple unionism and editor of San

¹³⁰ Henry B. Martin, Editorial, *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, March 5, 1896; Editorial, April 2, 1896. Likewise, as much of the country, including a contingent of wealthy and distinguished American women, attempted to intercede on behalf of the imprisoned Cuban women Evangelina Cisneros in the fall of 1897, the *Labor Leader* criticized “these rich and refined” women, nothing that they “need not go so far away as Cuba to extend a helping hand to unfortunate members of their sex.” “Right here in this ‘land of the free and home of the brave,’” the author insisted, “are thousands” of “American working girl[s]” who are “compelled to endure conditions...in the marts of trade” that “are just as hellish and just as repugnant...as the conditions which are pictured as existing in [Cisneros’] jail.” “Cuba and America,” *Labor Leader* (Lancaster, Pa.), Sept. 4, 1897, 1.

Francisco's *Coast Seamen's Journal*, drew more attention than most to Americans' discordant attitudes towards the respective travails of the insurgents in Cuba and the working-class in the United States. The situation in Cuba, MacArthur conceded in January 1897, was "a bad case, undoubtedly, and one worthy of all the sympathy bestowed upon it, and more." Yet, he pondered, "Why can we not feel and see the wrong that is done at our own doors?" "Look at the case of the striking miners in Leadville, Colorado," MacArthur implored, as "these men are fighting for liberty" and "they and their wives and children are suffering just as much as any Cuban patriot." Why is it then, he asked, that "the enthusiastic lovers of liberty... [do not] hold mass meetings and pass resolutions, and contribute funds, and stir up the Senate...on behalf of the struggling patriots in Colorado and other parts of the country?" More prescient than he probably realized, especially when it came to the nation's future involvement in Cuba and the Philippines, MacArthur assessed the popular uproar as proof that Americans "admire the patriot and are willing to do almost anything for him, but he must be a long way off – when he comes near us he is a horse of another color."¹³¹

It took the September 1897 "Lattimer massacre" in Luzerne County,

¹³¹ Walter MacArthur, "Bring Things Home," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, Jan. 6, 1897. The Leadville, Colorado miners' strike pitted the Cloud City Miners' Union (an affiliate of the Western Federation of Miners) against the Mine Owners' Association of Colorado. The strike was repressed with violence, arrests of strike-leaders, and the importation of Pinkerton detectives and "strike-breakers." The failure of the strike led, in part, to the "radicalization" of the Western Federation of Miners and its eventual break with the AFL. For more, see: David Brundage, *The Making of Western Labor Radicalism: Denver's Organized Workers, 1878-1905* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1994). MacArthur was hardly alone in his state of exasperation regarding all the attention that the American public paid to Cuba. Matthew Charlton, a coal miner from Creek, Pennsylvania, ridiculed the country's "bloated aristocracy" and pitied the "millions of tramps" in an April 1897 letter to the *National Labor Tribune*, but offered "hope that the present investigation of the [coal] miners' [working] conditions will spring up and bear fruit, and the sympathizing mockery of Cubans...will be let alone until we pull the beam out of our own eye." Matthew Charlton, "A Coal Miner's View," *National Labor Tribune*, April 29, 1897, 2. In a similar vein, a tin mill worker from Sharon, Pennsylvania wondered rhetorically if anyone had found, "that prosperity and confidence which was promised so faithfully to all wage-earners if McKinley were elected." "Instead of getting our just dues," he insisted, "the politicians and those in power" have asked that "a large sum of money...be donated to the suffering of...Cuba," while "the citizens of our own country are in as pitiable [of a] condition." "Waiting for Prosperity," *National Labor Tribune*, May 27, 1897, 5.

Pennsylvania, however, to reveal the full extent to which organized labor had internalized the apparent inconsistencies of Americans' popular discourse regarding Cuban insurgents and American wage earners. A group of three hundred to four hundred immigrant miners – primarily Slavs, Poles, and Lithuanians – took to the highways of Luzerne County in the midst of the great anthracite coal miners' strike in the fall of 1897, marching towards a coal mine near the town of Lattimer, Pennsylvania with the intention of providing a show of support for the newly created United Mine's Workers branch. The miners, bearing no arms and prominently carrying an American flag, encountered Luzerne County Sheriff James L. Martin and one hundred or so temporary sheriff's deputies, specifically recruited by mine owners to squash the rapidly expanding strike, near the town of Hazelton, Pennsylvania. Sheriff Martin had issued a proclamation on September 6, 1897 barring unlawful assemblies, marching on county highways, and interfering with the peaceful operation of any of the area's mines. He therefore ordered the strikers to disperse. When the miners refused, Sheriff Martin and his deputies shockingly opened fire on the crowd, killing nineteen and seriously wounding dozens more. Martin and seventy-three of his deputies were eventually arrested and tried for the wanton murder of the immigrant marchers, but despite evidence that the miners were unarmed and the deputies had planned the attack, as well as testimony from the county coroner that the majority of those killed had been shot in the back while fleeing the scene, Martin and his deputies were acquitted by an all-white, native-born jury amidst a barrage of local and national anti-immigrant propaganda. The Lattimer (or Hazelton) massacre, as it came to be known, ultimately drove over ten thousand anthracite coal miners into the fold of the U.M.W., and, for a brief time, unified America's workers – native-born and immigrant,

skilled and unskilled – in an overwhelming condemnation of corporate and governmental violence against the working-class.¹³²

Within days of the carnage in Hazelton, irate union spokesmen drew unrestrained analogies between the massacre and the much-maligned situation in Cuba. “General Weyler has been held up as an example of barbarity for his warfare on ‘pacificos,’” admitted Percy Carpenter of the *Labor Leader*, “but where in all his crimes against humanity can be found a more indefensible and bloody outrage than that committed by Weyler Martin and his gang of deputies?”¹³³ Likewise, H.C. Smalley, editor of the *Galesburg (Ill.) Labor News*, eviscerated Sheriff Martin and his deputies, maintaining, “Weyler, the cruel and blood-thirsty Spaniard, has been outdone, and that, too, by a so-called American.” “Sheriff Martin and a hundred deputies, armed with Winchesters,” he recounted dejectedly, “killed in cold blood” nineteen immigrant miners who were simply “marching peaceably along a public highway.” Perhaps what was even more tragic, ruminated Smalley, was that “if this diabolical deed had happened in Cuba the public everywhere would have held indignation meetings.” “But this is America,” he acknowledged ruefully, “from whence the spirit of Patrick Henry has been driven, and his smoldering bones the only evidence that liberty once was thought superior to human greed.”¹³⁴ The stark contrast between popular sympathy for armed Cuban revolutionaries and popular apathy towards the murder of unarmed American workers was particularly

¹³² For scholarship on the Lattimer Massacre, see: Michael Novak, *The Guns of Lattimer: The True Story of a Massacre and a Trial, August 1897-March 1898* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Priscilla Long, *Where the Sun Never Shines: A History of America's Bloody Coal Industry* (New York: Paragon House, 1989); Perry K. Blatz, *Democratic Miners: Work and Labor Relations in the Anthracite Coal Industry, 1875-1925* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1994).

¹³³ Percy Carpenter, Editorial, *Labor Leader* (Lancaster, Penn.), Sept. 18, 1897, 2.

¹³⁴ H.C. Smalley, Editorial, *Galesburg Labor News*, Sept. 18, 1897. Emphasis added.

distressing for members of organized labor. Like other instances of Gilded Age violence against working-class Americans, the Lattimer massacre prompted workers to contend that the very foundations of the American Republic had been betrayed.

Over the following months, union leaders frequently, and critically, juxtaposed Americans' contempt for the admittedly deplorable conditions in Cuba with the nation's apparent indifference towards atrocities committed against labor at home. In early January 1898, D.L. Cease of the *Railroad Trainmen's Journal* strayed from his previous rhetorical lionizing of the insurgents, instead reproaching the American public for once again having "gone into mourning for the Cuban and their cause." "The wrongs endured at the hands of the proud and haughty Spaniards," Cease iterated, "have been set forth in the most emphatic terms and we wept." Yet, "down in Pennsylvania a sheriff and several sympathetic deputies killed a score and wounded twice as many more American workmen because they refused to give up their guaranteed rights as citizens of this country," but instead of a national outrage on par with that directed towards Weyler and Spain, the massacre in Hazelton "has been partly atoned for because 'they were ignorant foreigners.'" "What a discrimination and what an excuse," Cease remarked scornfully, before dryly completing his criticism by noting that for the miners, "the sympathetic tears are missing."¹³⁵

Samuel Gompers seized upon the lack of correlation between public sentiment concerning Cubans and America's laboring classes. "Perhaps not in all history," Gompers mused when considering the Lattimer massacre, "has there been such a criminal slaughter of men who were fleeing for their lives." Yet, he could not help but recognize that while Americans were "justly indignant at the cruelty practiced upon Cuban non-

¹³⁵ D.L. Cease, "Why We Weep," *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, January 1898, 87-88.

combatants by the Spaniards,” there was no such compassion for the Pennsylvania miners “right at our doors, men who [were] not only non-combatants, but who retreated in disorder, their very lives depending upon their running, and yet [were] murderously shot in the back by a band of irresponsible and blood-thirsty mercenaries as was ever brought together.”¹³⁶ Gompers’ lament drew upon a wellspring of workers’ frustration. For a quarter of a century, American industrial workers had pressed their claims for a Republic that placed the interests of its workers at the heart of a moral economy. Their calls not only went unheeded, but were all-too-frequently met with anger and incredulity, the bayonet and the bullet. All of the popular American talk of “liberty” and “freedom” for the “struggling” Cubans, therefore, seemed disturbingly hypocritical in light of the Lattimer massacre.

Organized labor’s escalating resentment pertaining to the country’s popular fixation with Cuban independence primarily emanated from the gradual replacement of patriotic and anti-Spanish sentiment with the labor movement’s long-entrenched narratives denouncing the “money powers.” Labor’s shift in focus had its origin, of course, in the abstract nature of the Cuban sympathy movement, by which numerous U.S. social groups subsequently exploited the popular feelings towards Cuba to press their particular domestic or foreign policy agendas. The escalation of bellicose pronouncements among certain Americans during 1896 and 1897, moreover, actually expanded labor’s vituperative scope, interweaving contempt for Wall St. and governmental indifference to Cuba’s struggle for independence, indignation towards such

¹³⁶ Samuel Gompers, “Lattimer Tragedy – Wilkes-Barre Farce,” *American Federationist*, March 1898, 12.

a broad popular outcry against Spanish outrages while atrocities committed upon American laborers were largely ignored, and suspicions that American capitalists intended to take advantage of popular sentiment to embroil the U.S. in an imperial land-grab, into a definitive (if, again, somewhat contradictory) narrative that utilized Cuba as a pretext to assail the “money powers.”

The 1897 American Federation of Labor convention revealed the extent to which the elevated martial tenor within certain wings of America’s popular Cuban discourse had altered much of labor’s outlook. Gathering in Nashville, Tennessee in mid-December, ninety-seven union delegates, representing seventy-four affiliated organizations, took up the Cuban issue on the fifth day of the convention. Samuel Yarnell, Owen Miller, and Stephen Bonbright, representatives of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, the American Federation of Musicians, and Cincinnati’s Federal Labor Union, respectively, submitted the following resolution:

Whereas, The working people of the United States and the American Federation of Labor are on record as in favor of the formal recognition by the United States Congress of the fact that a state of war exists in the island of Cuba; and,

Whereas, The President of the United States and all the members of Congress were elected on party platforms pledging them such recognition; and,

Whereas, The policy of delay on the part of the present Administration has reached the point where discretion ceases to be a virtue and becomes national cowardice and disgrace; there for be it

*Resolved, That it is the sense of this convention that the United States Congress should waste no more time in useless debate and diplomatic chicanery, but should take such immediate action as may tend to put an end to the indiscriminate murder of the common people of Cuba by Spanish soldiery.*¹³⁷

¹³⁷ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1897), Res. 117; 75. (hereafter cited as AFL, *Seventeenth Proceedings*, 1897)

Yarnell, Miller, and Bonbright's resolution harkened back to labor's early support for belligerency rights, castigated President McKinley for exemplifying "national cowardice" in the face of "the indiscriminate murder of the common people," implied a willingness for some form of intervention – perhaps even war – and, consequently, incited an immediate uproar on the floor of the convention.

Several delegates, such as Thomas Crosby, Peter Doyle, and P.J. Geraghty, spoke out in favor of the resolutions.¹³⁸ Crosby, Doyle, and Geraghty, as representatives of state federations of labor and urban central labor unions, were perhaps more in tune with the sentiments of the rank-and-file. Crosby felt that "the Cubans deserved liberty," and remarked that the resolution in question "simply meant that we should recognize the Cubans' right to their political liberty and their right to fight for it." However, "if a war did follow," Crosby temporized, "Americans should remember their own struggle for liberty."¹³⁹ Doyle assumed the floor immediately after Crosby finished, quietly proclaiming that "the American labor movement was a movement of peace, [but] there was no peace where there was not liberty." Doyle declared that he was "for Cuban independence from the yoke of Spain," as, "the scene at our doors was a disgrace to our civilization."¹⁴⁰ Geraghty criticized the McKinley administration, claiming they "had promised to give to Cuba the recognition it demanded, but had failed to do so." He saw

¹³⁸ Thomas Crosby, a New Britain, Connecticut printer, represented the Connecticut Federation of Labor; Peter F. Doyle was a Chicago stationary engineer, represented the National Union of Steam Engineers, and was secretary-treasurer of the Chicago Federation of Labor and the Illinois State Federation of Labor; P.J. Geraghty represented the St. Paul (Minn.) Trades and Labor Assembly.

¹³⁹ "Many Reports," *Nashville American*, Dec. 18, 1897, located in *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 4: 410; AFL, *Seventeenth Proceedings*, 1897, 89.

¹⁴⁰ "Many Reports," *Nashville American*, Dec. 18, 1897, located in *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 4: 410; AFL, *Seventeenth Proceedings*, 1897, 89.

no reason why the AFL representatives should “deny an expression of sympathy for the Cuban people,” asserting simply, “if the delegates are in favor of freedom for Cuba, they should so decide.”¹⁴¹

While Crosby, Doyle and Geraghty emulated many rank-and-file organizations in their enduring sympathy for the Cuban independence movement, the majority of convention delegates actually argued against the passage of the resolution. Some delegates expressed an explicit aversion for war, particularly while labor continued to face violent opposition at home. Robert Askew, representing the Northern Mineral Mine Workers’ Progressive Union, maintained the position that if he “went to war, [he meant] to go to fight his own battles,” as he was most “anxious to see the American wage-worker free.”¹⁴² Edward Moore, a Philadelphia hatter and delegate of the United Hatters of North America, asserted, “The slaves of America should be freed before liberating those of Cuba was attempted,” especially considering “the excesses here, and the wrongs which...were unrighted in this country.”¹⁴³ Owen Miller claimed he agreed to introduce the resolution alongside Sam Yarnell, an avowed Cuban sympathizer, merely “to get an expression of the delegates,” but he personally believed “that the sufferings of the American working people were greater than those in Cuba,” and cautioned that, “if a war came up with Spain, the burden would fall upon the laboring class.”¹⁴⁴

Meanwhile, other AFL delegates attacked the sincerity of Cuban sympathizers

¹⁴¹ AFL, *Seventeenth Proceedings*, 1897, 90.

¹⁴² “Many Reports,” *Nashville American*, Dec. 18, 1897, located in *The Samuel Gompers Papers*, vol. 4: 410.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

among government and financial “elites.” As Andrew Furuseth of the International Seamen’s Union of America put it, the debate was simply “a question whether the New York speculator or the Spanish capitalist should skin the Cuban workingmen.”¹⁴⁵ Thomas Kidd, secretary of the Amalgamated Wood Workers International Union of America and a soon-to-be vice-president of the AFL, bemoaned the “strong spirit of jingoism developing throughout the land,” and alleged that “if the Cuban had the independence the American speculator wanted him to have, the Cuban would not be independent, because it would simply be a change from the Spanish speculator to the American.”¹⁴⁶ Ernst Kreft, a member of the International Typographical Union, could not believe “that jingoism should find defenders on the floor of the American Federation of Labor.” Jingoism, Kreft argued, “would result in involving the United States in war with the great European powers, and the wage-workers of this country would be the sufferers.” Regardless, American involvement would just lead to “a change of masters in Cuba,” and Kreft was “not in favor of a change in masters until the workingmen became their own masters.”¹⁴⁷ The opponents of the 1897 AFL Cuban resolution bewailed the possible burdens of militarism upon the working-class and denounced the ulterior motives of American capitalists, ultimately defeating the attempt to bind the American Federation of Labor to the support of an aggressive posture towards the “Cuban question.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ AFL, *Seventeenth Proceedings*, 1897, 89.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 91 – The vote upon the motion was announced as 854 for, 1,394 against (with the vote based upon the allotment of votes to each represented organization – an allotment determined by size of organization for craft unions, while federal, state, and urban central labor unions were assigned only one vote each).

Thus, by the end of 1897, union workers were at a peculiar crossroads with regards to America's present involvement, and perhaps pending entanglement, in the war on the island of Cuba. While not altogether disconnected from the debates about Cuba presently swirling throughout every corner of the United States, labor had nonetheless negotiated a distinct interpretive framework that revolved around a class-based condemnation of predatory capitalists. The different manifestations of this framework *within* organized labor, however, signified that important divisions still remained concerning labor's – and on a broader scale, America's – prerogatives towards the island conflict. The destruction of the *U.S.S. Maine* in February 1898 – and the subsequent wrangle over a declaration of war – intensified these divisions, ultimately pitting labor leaders and organizations against one another in a defining and controversial moment in the history of the American labor movement.

Motion to reiterate the position taken during the 1896 AFL convention, however, carried.

Chapter III

Rallying around the Flag: Labor and the Spanish American War

Americans from all walks of life were shocked and saddened by the explosion of the *U.S.S. Maine* battleship in Havana's harbor on February 15, 1898. The mysterious blast in "the treacherous waters of the Antilles," Mason Warner lamented just days later, "hurled into eternity" 266 of the "bravest hearts in the American navy." This "terrible disaster," reflected the spokesman for the Toledo Central Labor Union, "is a tragedy not be spoken of lightly."¹ Many workers expressed profound sadness for the loss of American life – several of whom were actually members of the Machinists' Union. Union workers in New York City voted to support the construction of a monument in remembrance of the fallen sailors, while a member of the Stereotypers' union named Dempsey mourned for the "mothers, sweethearts, sisters and children" of the "men who died on the Maine."² Aside from such expressions of outrage and sympathy, organized labor's immediate response to the *Maine* disaster revealed yet again a growing divergence of opinion towards the Cuban situation.

Reactions within the American labor movement ranged from professed hesitancy for war and fears of an ensuing militarism to outright demands for the swift mobilization of the U.S. military and a declaration of war against Spain. A week after the event, long-time Knight John W. Hayes recognized there was a "general feeling throughout the country" that the *Maine* "was the victim of Spanish treachery," causing a patriotic stir "as at no prior time within a quarter of a century." But Hayes cautioned against passing "an

¹ Mason Warner, "The Methods of Spain," *Toledo Union*, Feb. 19, 1898.

² "Central Labor Union Patriotic," *New York Times*, Feb. 28, 1898, 2.

impulsive opinion” until more could be known about the ship’s sinking.³ Sharing Hayes’ “wait-and-see” approach was Thomas W. Davis of the United Mine Workers of America, albeit in a slightly more combative manner. Davis expressed frustration that the destruction of the *Maine* had “caused some very indiscreet statements to be made and some very unwise actions to be suggested.” He believed the state of affairs “too grave a matter to trifle with, too serious to determine from prejudice or passion,” and maintained the decision on which actions to take “should only be determined after all the facts in the case are made known.” Even so, Davis acknowledged that if the people’s “worst fears are realized,” America should not hesitate to demand reparation from Spain, “even though the demand will have to be made from the cannon’s mouth.”⁴

In contrast, some union workers, particularly within the rank-and-file, immediately declared themselves ready to clash with Spain on the battlefield. The “mill boys,” according to a Pennsylvania member of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers, were “waiting patiently to shoulder arms.” If “President McKinley called for volunteers to go to Cuba,” the Ellwood City tin mill worker continued, “there would not be men enough left in the mill to blow the whistle.”⁵ Another Amalgamated Association man from Gas City, Indiana described his union lodge meeting one week after the *Maine*’s sinking, noting that “the cry of war is heard in every factory in Gas City, especially in [our] tin plate mill.”⁶ The bellicose response of some

³ John W. Hayes, “The Maine Disaster,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Feb. 24 1898.

⁴ Thomas W. Davis, Editorial, *United Mine Workers’ Journal*, Feb. 24, 1898, 4.

⁵ “Ready for the Call,” *National Labor Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1898, 4. The National Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers (commonly referred to as the AA) changed its name to the National Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers in 1897.

⁶ N.D.M., “Full of the War Scare,” *National Labor Tribune*, March 10, 1898, 4.

union workers soon after the destruction of the *U.S.S. Maine*, in fact, foreshadowed the rank-and-file's subsequent widespread and passionate ratification of the U.S. declaration of war in April of 1898.

Several prominent American Socialists were similarly steadfast, but in opposition to war, in their initial pronouncements after the *Maine* incident. Though the leading Socialist figures in the United States largely found themselves on the fringe of the mainstream labor movement, their rhetorical and ideological influence on union labor penetrated much further – especially regarding political and “international” issues. Daniel de Leon promptly rebuked the “attempt of the felon class that now robs the country to profit by the death of our ill-starred marines.” War, according to the Marxist editor of *The People* and leader of the Socialist Labor Party, would play directly into the hands of the capitalists, distracting the proletariat and creating a standing army that would be converted into a national “Pinkerton force” to crush striking workers. “A foreign war,” De Leon railed, “ever has been the refuge of tyrants from the turbulent elements at home.” There was little question, he continued, that the “capitalist class of America” looked favorably upon “the opportunity that will afford a wholesale bloodletting” of American workers.⁷ Fabian Socialists A.S. Edwards and Herbert N. Casson, editor of *The Coming Nation* and pastor of the Labor Church of Lynn, Massachusetts, respectively, admonished those stoking what they perceived to be “war hysteria.” “Let [every congressman and senator who votes for war] go to Cuba,” intoned the ever-caustic Casson, “and if they never come back there will be no valuable lives lost.”⁸ Combining,

⁷ Daniel De Leon, “That ‘Leaven,’” *The People*, March 13, 1898, 2; Daniel De Leon, “Why War,” *The People*, March 20, 1898, 2.

⁸ *The Coming Nation*, March 19, 1898, first located in Howard H. Quint, “American Socialists and the

in the words of historian Howard H. Quint, “the economic criticism of the Marxists with the political idealism and pacifism of those non-socialist Americans who condemned war on moral grounds,” Edwards and Casson adamantly maintained, “This un-American militarism should meet with our contempt.”⁹

Organized laborer’s initial response to the sinking of the *U.S.S. Maine* – whether reticent or resolute, pugnacious or pacifistic – underwent considerable reassessment in subsequent months as the entire nation plunged headlong into fateful war deliberations. In the three years preceding the *Maine* disaster, the call for American military action in the Caribbean existed as merely one opinion in a sea of alternative viewpoints and possibilities. Indeed, according to numerous regional histories of popular opinion and the Spanish-American War, a relative single-mindedness in favor of war was not achieved in the United States until well into the spring of 1898.¹⁰ As the varying reactions to the

Spanish American War,” *American Quarterly*, vol. 10, No. 2, Part 1 (Summer 1958), 135-136.

⁹ Quint, “American Socialists and the Spanish American War,” 135; *The Coming Nation*, March 12, 1898, also located in Quint, “American Socialists and the Spanish-American War,” 135, note 10; American Fabians, like their British counterparts, sought to advance the principles of “democratic socialism” through a gradualist approach. Unlike their “revolutionary Marxist” counterparts, Fabians actively supported reform-minded movements within the U.S., confident in the nation’s ultimate evolution towards a Socialist system.

¹⁰ George W. Auxier, “Middle Western Newspapers and the Spanish-American War, 1895-1898,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* XXVI (March 1940): 523-534; David C. Boles, “Editorial Opinion in Oklahoma and Indian Territories on the Cuban Insurrection, 1895-1898,” *Chronicle of Oklahoma*, 47 (Autumn 1969): 258-267; Raymond A. Detter, “The Cuban Junta and Michigan: 1895-1898,” *Michigan History* 48 (March 1964): 35-46; William J. Donahue, “The United States Newspaper Press Reaction to the Maine Incident – 1898” (unpublished dissertation, University of Colorado, 1970); J. Stanley Lemons, “The Cuban Crisis of 1895-1898: Newspapers and Nativism,” *Missouri Historical Review* 60 (1965): 63-74; Joseph A. Fry, “Silver and Sentiment: The Nevada Press and the Coming of the Spanish-American War,” *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, 20 (Winter 1977): 222-239; George H. Gibson, “Attitudes in North Carolina Regarding the Independence of Cuba,” *North Carolina Historical Review*, 43 (1966): 43-65; Carmen Gonzalez Lopez-Briones, “The Indiana Press and the Coming of the Spanish-American War, 1895-1898,” *Atlantis*, vol. XII (June 1990): 165-176; Edward M. McNulty, “The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New Jersey Press, 1895-1898” (unpublished dissertation, Rutgers University, 1970); James Warren Neilson, “Congressional Opinion in Missouri on the Spanish-American War,” *Missouri Historical Review*, 51:3 (April 1957): 245-256; William J. Schellings, “Florida and the Cuban Revolution, 1895-1898,” *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 39 (1960-1961): 175-186; Arnold M. Shankman, “Southern Methodist Newspapers and the Coming of the Spanish-American War: A Research Note,” *Journal of Southern History*, 39 (1973):

Maine attested, labor was split on the question of opening hostilities. Indeed, in the early spring of 1898, the real possibility of war splintered Socialist from Socialist, producerist from producerist, and conservative “business unionist” from conservative “business unionist.”

Thus the destruction of the *Maine* did not suddenly forge a popular and headlong consensus demanding war. Workers came to support war for reasons peculiar, and significant, to their own lives. There was, in other words, a sense of cultural legitimacy in their motives and actions that (consciously and unconsciously) defied the machinations of expansionists, yellow journalists, or even the Cuban Junta. Much has been written about the popular outpouring of patriotism within the United States when war against Spain was declared in April 1898. Yet, little has been written on the Cuban sympathy movement, which was essential to the fabrication of a popular “ownership” in the moral fight to gain Cuban freedom and prove national righteousness. To many Americans, Cuba was *their* cause from the beginning – not Hearst’s and the yellow journals’ or Mahan’s and the expansionists’. Without the Cuban sympathy movement, historians have viewed much of America as either reactionary – wildly lashing about for a sense of order they hoped to find through war – or thoughtless – anxious for the excitement of war, yet naively oblivious to the schemes of their manipulators. Without the Cuban sympathy movement, moreover, more than two years of advocacy for sympathy and belligerency rights have been condensed into a much narrower “war fever” in the spring of 1898.

Setting aside the question that has dominated the historiography of the Spanish-

93-96; Daniel Simundson, “The Yellow Press on the Prairie: South Dakota Daily Newspaper Editorials Prior to the Spanish-American War,” *South Dakota History*, 2 (1972): 211-229; Harold J. Sylwester, “The Kansas Press and the Coming of the Spanish-American War,” *The Historian*, 31 (1969): 251-267; Ruby Weedel Waldeck, “Missouri in the Spanish-American War,” *Missouri Historical Review*, 30 (1936): 365-400; Mark Welter, “Minnesota Newspapers and the Cuban Crisis, 1895-1898: Minnesota as a Test Case for the ‘Yellow Journalism’ Theory” (unpublished dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1970).

American War (why did the war happen, or, in other words, who is to blame for the war?), by the middle of April 1898 most Americans – organized labor included – braced themselves for war. When the masses (generally), or the workers (specifically), have appeared in the scholarship on the War of 1898, however, they have normally done so as simple, or even tragic, “horses led to the trough of war.” Irrational and easily manipulated, fired by the sensationalized stories of the yellow journals or foolishly goaded by conniving imperialists, the “masses” have rarely been assigned thoughtful motives or distinctive and meaningful interpretations of their own. Even less often have they been allowed to speak for themselves. Yet, the efforts and thought-processes of union workers regarding the Cuban question, the *Maine* explosion, and America’s war-march reveal that Americans were not simply duped into following the paths paved for them by other, perhaps more powerful, historical actors. Workers’ choice to support war as a means for liberating Cuba set them in opposition to their professed capitalist antagonists and (hopefully, in their eyes) positioned the organized working class as the true defenders of American republicanism.

Still, for much of the nation (including organized labor) the tragedy in Havana’s harbor ultimately narrowed the accepted parameters of debate regarding the island conflict. The death of 266 U.S. sailors moored in a harbor rife with revolution – and the legitimate (even if were possibly untrue) perception that they may have lost their lives due to Spanish treachery – pressed the political realities of war to the forefront of Americans’ public consciousness. U.S military intervention into Cuba was far from certain even after the *Maine* disaster, but recognition of the possibility of war rose after the battleship sank. Sympathy and belligerency, diplomacy and arbitration, indemnity and

independence – all retained a place in Americans’ vocabulary. But war talk understandably gained a greater prominence within the national discourse after the *Maine* explosion. The limits of public discussion became constricted by the increasing centrality of the question: “Will we fight Spain?”

This war talk and war fervor marked a contrast with the ideological opposition to militarism and war that organized labor developed during the second half of the nineteenth century. Laborers’ general aversion to war emanated from the notion of a “rich man’s war, poor man’s fight” – specifically, their contention that the workers of the world (who had in common their exploitation by the moneyed class) were forced to endure the horrors of the battlefield merely to enrich the coffers of the capitalist class who stayed at home. Additionally, violent clashes between striking workers and U.S. troops in the last quarter of the century fomented a deep suspicion within organized labor towards the increased military presence brought by war. That said, however, union workers struggled with balancing opposition to war with their abiding sense of patriotism and quest for acceptance into the national community of American decision-makers.

Labor’s anti-militarism, in fact, had been challenged as recently as the early months of 1896, when union workers were forced to confront an intense tide of jingoism provoked by President Grover Cleveland’s aggressive invocation of the Monroe Doctrine during the Venezuela border dispute with England.¹¹ Many retained their anti-militarist stance. Labor journalist Lizzie Holmes, bristled at that the “greedy speculators [and] scheming politicians” who were using the Venezuela controversy to “clamor for war and

¹¹ At stake in the dispute was whether the mouth of Orinoco River was in British Guiana or Venezuela. The Cleveland administration cited the Monroe Doctrine as if it were established international law and came down on the side of the Venezuelans, thus asserting U.S. hegemony in the western hemisphere.

seek to inspire the common people with a thirst for blood.”¹² Similarly, Frank K. Foster of the Boston Central Labor Union proclaimed, “[T]he labor organizations of America [would] stand as a unit in opposition to any policy which would embroil the nation in a contest” with England.¹³ Other labor leaders feared the ramifications of war: “One evil and menacing feature” of “the Venezuela dispute,” worried the General Secretary of the Knights of Labor, Henry B. Martin, “is the enormous impetus which it gives to the movement for...a great permanent war establishment in the United States.” “The only practical use” of such a military presence, concluded Martin, was “to assist the plutocracy in holding down the masses of the common people.”¹⁴

Other labor leaders and members of the rank-and-file, however, were less committed to anti-militarism. In Boston, Frank K. Foster’s resolution that organized labor would stand shoulder-to-shoulder against any war against Britain passed, but a third of the city’s Central Labor Union members voted against it.¹⁵ Likewise in Brooklyn, W.H. Allen, a member of the Knights of Labor asserted, “A war in defense of the Monroe doctrine, and to protect a weak little sister republic, like Venezuela, from the aggressions of a big bully like England, would be perfectly just and proper.”¹⁶ And Thomas O’Leary, a delegate to the New York Central Labor Union (CLU), responded to anti-war talk in the CLU with professions of labor’s patriotism: “We are loyal citizens of the United States,”

¹² Lizzie Holmes, “Not Labors War,” *Boston Labor Leader*, Jan. 25, 1896.

¹³ Frank K. Foster, “Wherefore War?,” *Boston Labor Leader*, Dec. 21, 1895.

¹⁴ Henry B. Martin, “Preparing for War on the People,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Dec. 26, 1895.

¹⁵ A small, but vocal, coalition that claimed the Central Labor Union delegates’ vote “did not represent the true sentiment of organized labor throughout the city.” “War Versus Unionism,” *Boston Labor Leader*, Jan. 11, 1896, 1.

¹⁶ W.H. Allen, letter to the editor, *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Feb. 14, 1896.

O'Leary shouted over the din of the chairman's gavel, "and if there is a war with England we will do our share as true citizens of this great republic."¹⁷

At no time during the "Venezuela crisis," however, did the American labor movement become generally – let alone predominantly – in favor of war with Great Britain. Bellicose bluster most often emanated from the rank-and-file, who exhibited a far greater tendency to emphasize the "duty" representatives of the working class had to protect the nation. Yet, even among the mass of America's union workers, the dispute over the Monroe Doctrine failed to foster a broad rejection of labor's long-entrenched anti-militarism. Several Boston union locals, such as the Typographical Union no. 13, responded to the Foster's resolution opposing war against Britain with unanimous resolutions supporting the CLU's anti-war declaration.¹⁸ Representatives to the Federated Trades Council of Milwaukee, meanwhile, voted overwhelmingly to condemn President Cleveland's martial invocation of the Monroe Doctrine.¹⁹ And, while other New York workers shared Thomas O'Leary's pro-war position, the New York Central Labor Union actually endorsed AFL president Samuel Gompers' anti-war stance. Gompers, visiting the city's most important labor organization before heading to the AFL's annual convention, encapsulated most eloquently labor's ideological denunciation of war:

Those who are stirring up this war scare are covering themselves with a mask of patriotism behind which is hidden nothing but bluster and pomposity. Around, below and beneath this so-called patriotism is a scheme to enlarge the army and the navy. The true patriot is not looking for war. He wants peace. The workers of our country have no quarrel with the workers of other countries. They will not be swayed by political schemes. In the ranks of the sensible, cool-headed workers and true American citizens you will find this so-called war scare has had no effect.

¹⁷ "Labor Men on the War Cloud," *New York Sun*, Dec. 30, 1895, 2.

¹⁸ "Printers," *Boston Labor Leader*, Feb. 1, 1896, 2.

¹⁹ "How Will Boston Vote?," *Boston Labor Leader*, Feb. 1, 1896, 1.

Labor is never for war. It is always for peace. It is on the side of liberty, justice and humanity. These three are always for peace.²⁰

Organized labor's response to the Venezuela crisis effectively, if not decisively, re-iterated the movement's traditional opposition to war. The dispute with Great Britain, however, emanated from the President (not "the people"), lacked a coherent justification for military conflict, and lasted for a relatively brief time. The apparent contradiction between two of labor's primary movement narratives – anti-militarism and patriotism – was hardly rectified during the Venezuela crisis.

Throughout the first years of the Cuban revolution, the majority of American labor leaders repeatedly expressed their abhorrence for war in general, even as they offered sympathy to the island's insurgents in the fight against their Spanish colonizers. Labor's support for the revolution, however, was predicated on the popular sympathy movement's recurrent allusions to the American Revolution, the specific depiction of the insurgents' cause as that of "oppressed versus oppressor," and the relative detachment engendered by a foreign conflict. Significantly, for roughly the first three years of the Cuban fight for independence labor rarely wavered in its resistance to American intervention – essentially, organized labor's ideological opposition to war actually imparted greater meaning to the symbolic gestures of "belligerency" and "sympathy." Union workers, in other words, hoped to achieve social reconciliation, as well as solidify their patriotic credentials in the minds of all Americans, without the resort to military conflict.

The destruction of the *Maine* tested the fortitude of labor's anti-war doctrine. Yet, however ominous, the ship's sinking far from guaranteed that labor would forsake its

²⁰ Samuel Gompers, speech given at New York Central Labor Union meeting on Dec. 29, 1895, located in "Gompers Speaks Out For Peace," *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 30, 1895, 3.

opposition to war and militarism. The AFL convention, organized labor's strongest representative body, had only several months prior come out decidedly against war with Spain.²¹ Moreover, the last time the nation had been threatened with the specter of military conflict – a fresh memory scarcely two-years old – union workers predominantly refused to abandon their principles and join the cries of the war-hawks. And, of course, current economic, social, and political conditions in America unquestionably offered laborers little incentive to embrace the prospect of war's inevitable carnage.

Labor's recent history, therefore, exposed the real possibility that America's union workers would collectively repudiate a war with Spain, regardless of its popularity or ultimate intentions. Indeed, that organized labor stood firm in resisting war is still commonly believed. Even eminent labor historians such as David Montgomery and Philip Foner argued such.²² Much of organized labor, however, paralleled the path taken by D.L. Cease of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. In January 1898, Cease, editor of the official journal of the twenty-eight thousand member union, reflected upon the "chances of a war with Spain." Along with dismissing all the "exhibition of jingoism" and noting that "war and militarism are the greatest curses to industrialism," Cease pledged that "the working people of this great country...are not for war."²³ Three months later, however, he had remarkably changed course, finding it "eminently fitting that the United States, 'the sentinel of liberty,' should intervene in behalf of the Cuban people and

²¹ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Seventeenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1897), 91.

²² Montgomery cited Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 2: 405-412, to assert: "In 1898, most of the labor and socialist press warned against a resort to arms." David Montgomery, "Workers' Movements in the United States Confront Imperialism: The Progressive Era Experience," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 7:1 (January 2008), 9.

²³ D.L. Cease, "It Does Not Please," *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, Jan. 1898, 88-89.

save them from extermination.” Of course, “the working people do not want war,” tempered Cease, “but they realize there are conditions that are worse than war...and now the sword is drawn in defense of suffering humanity, to avenge the insults offered the flag and the deaths of the crew of the *Maine*.”²⁴ This chapter spans the sinking of the *Maine* in mid-February to the first weeks of the Spanish-American War, tracing organized labor’s trajectory from mixed views regarding anti-militarism to an all-out support for war. In so doing, it explains the workers’ vested interests in supporting war.

Labor’s Mixed Responses

The sheer volume of discord among organized labor regarding Cuba during the suspenseful two months following the *Maine* disaster is quite striking compared to the near unanimity of empathy for *Cuba Libre* in 1895-1896. The fractured interpretations and uses of Cuba within the labor movement that had developed in the interceding years – especially between the leadership and the rank-and-file – became more pronounced, at least temporarily. Now labor leaders, even those within the same organization, frequently disagreed about the righteousness of a war against Spain as well as the immediate and long-term effects of war for the labor movement. It was not uncommon, furthermore, to encounter alternative viewpoints about intervention in the same labor journals. Union workers’ debates at times mirrored elements of the ongoing war discourse nationwide, yet always confronted the uncertainties and implications specific to labor’s fragile place in the evolving social landscape of the United States. As Americans debated U.S. military action in the spring of 1898, hanging like a pall over workers was their ongoing sense of ambivalence, the tenuousness of the movement’s organizational and ideological bonds,

²⁴ D.L. Cease, “Intervention,” *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*, May 1898, 430.

and the anxiety they held regarding their place in American society.

The “war question” simultaneously exposed and exacerbated the fractious nature of America’s organized labor movement in the final decade of the nineteenth century. Workers’ position on a possible war with Spain could not be predicted along geographical factors, craft lines, or ideological orientation. Very few patterns of interpretation actually emerged – and those that did were partial and tentative. The most significant discernible distinction that developed within the labor movement was, again, between the leadership and the rank-and-file. Although numerous local union leaders and craft officials endorsed war at some point in the spring of 1898, the highest leadership rungs of the labor movement – including John W. Hayes in the Knights of Labor and Samuel Gompers, Peter J. McGuire, and Walter MacArthur in the AFL – either remained silent on the issue or spoke out against war. Meanwhile, rank-and-file labor organizations seized control of the war debate, as union workers from across the nation utilized their central labor union, labor council, and local branch meetings to declare the labor movements' patriotic support for war.

American socialists developed a variety of opinions about war with Spain. American Fabians – gradualist and reform-minded in their socialism, as well as more apt to advance a nationalist perspective – eventually endorsed war. Most Marxists, on the other hand, remained virulently opposed. William J. Ghent, editor of the *American Fabian* magazine, believed Americans were righteous in their eagerness “to sacrifice fortune and life in behalf of their helpless and oppressed neighbors.” History, he noted, had “no record of so chivalrous and widespread an awakening in behalf of so just a

cause.”²⁵ Similarly, Daniel O’Loughlin, editor of another Fabian magazine, *Twentieth Century*, encouraged war, but he did so due to some notion of American chivalry. Instead, he predicted that contractors and corporations would make outlandish profits in supplying the military needed war products – and this would provoke public outrage, thus furthering the call for the socialization of industry.²⁶ But Eugene Debs was morally opposed, looking upon war as “national murder.” He also called attention to “the appalling fact that about the same number of American workingmen as lost their lives” in the *Maine* disaster “are slaughtered every month in America.”²⁷ On the other hand, Victor Berger, writing in Debs’ mouthpiece, the *Social Democrat*, saw potential in the war, essentially agreeing with O’Loughlin. He asked: “Can it be doubted that America’s success will contribute to ripen the fruit of capitalism, to hasten the downfall of the economic system...now enslaving the workers of the world?”²⁸ Yet by the time war was declared, most American Marxists agreed with Daniel De Leon, offering “a curse on both your houses – feudal, unrefined, cannibal Spain and refined cannibal American capitalism.”²⁹ However, as historian Howard H. Quint has shown, even those socialists who dogmatically opposed the war with Spain failed to advocate “any form of direct action, such as a general strike, to obstruct the war effort or to bring the war itself to a

²⁵ *American Fabian*, IV (April 1898), 4, located in Quint, “American Socialists and the Spanish-American War,” 135.

²⁶ *Twentieth Century*, XX (March 12, 1898), 1, located in Quint, “American Socialists and the Spanish-American War,” 135.

²⁷ “World of Labor,” *Washington Post*, March 6, 1898, 14.

²⁸ *Social Democrat*, May 28, 1898, located in Quint, “American Socialists and the Spanish-American War,” 134.

²⁹ Daniel De Leon, “Pot and Kettle: Spanish Feudalism and American Capitalism,” *The People*, April 24, 1898, 2.

halt.”³⁰ That said, socialist writers had much less influence within organized labor than the leaders of America’s unions.

This included the Knights of Labor who, during these early weeks, reflected some of the internal conflict concerning war. The Knights retained an important voice in the labor movement – despite membership rolls declining sharply during the 1890s and a General Executive Board constantly shifting in composition – by drawing upon the ideological tradition of producerism and actively participating in the political sphere. Henry B. Martin was one of the first labor leaders to press for American military intervention in Cuba, telling the *Washington Times* that the U.S. government “should long ago have sent ships and soldiers if necessary to Cuba in sufficient force to help the Cubans win their freedom at the earliest possible moment.”³¹ John W. Hayes, who took over as editor of the *Journal of the Knights of Labor* at the beginning of 1898, maintained a much less bombastic tone after the destruction of the *Maine*. In mid-March, Hayes worriedly remarked, “that in all the war talk going the rounds...the opinion of no wage slave is quoted.” As for the “statesmen and politicians who get up the fight – they never fight,” Hayes continued, noting that it was left to the laborer “to do the patriotic duty of ‘dying for his country.’”³² In April, Hayes urged the government to “[recognize] the independence of Cuba,” after which “these gallant patriots will drive Spanish troops from the Island without any further assistance from this country.”³³ Finally, his exhortations to avoid American military intervention having gone unheeded, a resigned Hayes remarked

³⁰ Quint, “American Socialists and the Spanish American War,” 138-139.

³¹ Henry B. Martin, quoted in “Cuban Liberty,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, June 3, 1897, 1.

³² John W. Hayes, Editorial, *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, March 10, 1898, 5.

³³ John W. Hayes, “The Cuban Question in Congress,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, April 1, 1898, 4.

curtly in May, “War has been declared and the people will suffer.”³⁴

The American Federation of Labor was even more mixed on the war issue than the Knights. By the early months of 1898, it had begun to recover from the aftershocks of the recent depression and had been witnessing its membership rolls slowly advancing. But although its organization appeared to be securely in the hands of its president, Samuel Gompers, the AFL was still defined by its internal differences. Largely autonomous urban central labor unions and state federations of labor pressed a “rank-and-file” agenda firmly based upon producerist principles. But conservative unions such as the Cigarmakers’ Union, the Typographical Union, and the Iron Molders’ Union had already incorporated the tenets of “business unionism,” becoming the first members of an “aristocracy of labor” that would solidify in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, numerous ideological Socialists could be counted among both more progressive unions, such as the Brewery Workers, the International Association of Machinists, and the Journeymen Bakers’ Union, as well as industrial unions such as the United Mine Workers. The relative lack of cohesion in the American Federation of Labor, readily apparent during the organization’s annual conventions and important political campaigns, overwhelmed the labor movement after the *Maine* disaster. Significantly, no one voice stood out as the recognized official opinion of the AFL. Thus, union spokesmen disagreed with one another about the advantages or disadvantages of military intervention; labor journals offered conflicting interpretations of war’s effects upon the working class; and Samuel Gompers employed “resolutely ambiguous” rhetoric, as he

³⁴ John W. Hayes, “Beware How You Vote – No More Bonds!,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, May 1, 1898, 4. Hayes, however, did not remain in opposition long. He championed workers’ patriotism during the war, contrasting it with that of “capital.” John W. Hayes, “A ‘Patriotic’ Monopoly,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, June 1898, 4. And despite criticizing the government’s conduct of the war, by its end Hayes celebrated the victory and the unifying sentiment it had engendered. John W. Hayes, “Peace Has Come,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Sept. 1898, 4.

remained at least outwardly hesitant to support or oppose a possible U.S. war effort.³⁵

Labor leaders who spoke out in opposition to war with Spain in the spring of 1898 utilized a variety of arguments, ranging from traditional anti-militarism to sentiments of “rich man’s war, poor man’s fight” to issue bitter protestations that American workers faced too many tragedies and injustices at home to justify a foreign war. Peter J. McGuire, president of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a co-founder of the AFL, cautioned that the burden of war would fall upon the working class. “When a war does come,” McGuire declared, “[the workers] are only fit to be the food cannon, and when it is over, they can pay for all the damage and destruction.”³⁶ Walter MacArthur, spokesman for the International Seamen’s Union, warned laborers not to be swept up in the jingoistic rush emanating from certain politicians and newspapers. Writing in the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, the most widely read labor journal on the west coast, MacArthur determined that “war with Spain, unless forced upon us as a measure of defense, would be utterly unjustifiable from any point of view.”³⁷ MacArthur also hoped to remind the workers of the world that if only they would refuse to follow the war spirit, then “war is a game that neither kings, presidents, nor newspapers may play at.”³⁸ With influential positions in the AFL and a combined thirty-five years of experience in the labor movement, McGuire’ and MacArthur’s anti-war statements signified that labor’s

³⁵ As noted in Chapter II, historian Shelton Stromquist has shown that Samuel Gompers utilized “resolutely ambiguous” rhetoric when attempting to garner the support of rank-and-file workers. Shelton Stromquist, “The Crisis of 1894 and the Legacies of Producerism,” in *The Pullman Strike and the Crisis of the 1890s: Essays on Labor and Politics*, ed. Richard Schneirov, Shelton Stromquist, and Nick Salvatore (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999); 181.

³⁶ Peter McGuire, Editorial, *The Carpenter*, March 1898, 1.

³⁷ *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, March 2, 1898, 6.

³⁸ Walter MacArthur, Editorial, *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, March 2, 1898, 6.

customary aversion to militarism would remain strong in certain quarters – particularly among the AFL's leadership structure – despite the sinking of the *Maine*.

McGuire and MacArthur were not alone in their opposition, as the labor press revealed that a cross-section of AFL members in the early spring of 1898 expressed reservations about, or even actively protested against, war with Spain. D. Douglas Wilson, editor of the *Monthly Journal of the International Association of Machinists* remarked that after the *Maine* sank, “Men raved and women wept...the great newspapers shrieked for war... [and] the pulpit even advocated the unleashing of the war dogs.” “All this,” Wilson continued, “because there had been a great and useless sacrifice of human life.” Yet, “the carnival of carnage that takes place every day, month and year in the realm of industry; the thousands of useful lives that are annually sacrificed to the Moloch of greed; the blood tribute paid by labor to capitalism,” complained the IAM spokesman, “brings forth no shout for vengeance or reparation; no tear, except from the family of the victims.”³⁹ Otto F. Thum, editor of the *Pueblo Courier*, a general labor paper in the West, offered a similar lament: “Congress appropriates money for the relief of the families of the dead marines who were thrown into eternity by the disaster at the cruiser Maine... [but] the men of the New England cotton mills...they and their whole families may starve ere a cent of relief comes from the government.”⁴⁰ Such criticisms, the mildest and most common anti-war sentiments within organized labor, invoked the

³⁹ D. Douglas Wilson, Editorial, *Monthly Journal of the International Association of Machinists*, April, 1898, 191.

⁴⁰ Otto F. Thum, “What a Difference,” *Pueblo Courier*, located in *Labor Leader*, April 2, 1898, 1. Roughly 15,000 members of the National Cotton Mule Spinners’ Association of America, along with various independent unions, struck in January 1898 in response to wage cuts. The strikers’ demands expanded in scope during the early spring as the strike became a popular cause within the labor movement. Ultimately the strike was unsuccessful, as workers returned to work by May 1898 without having achieved their demands.

injustices workers experienced at home, without openly censuring the proposed U.S. intervention in Cuba, as a means of forestalling workers' willingness to rush off to war.

Others were not so hesitant to condemn a possible U.S. war with Spain. H.C. Smalley, editor of the *Galesburg (Ill.) Labor News*, found it despicable that "Congressmen as a rule would rather talk of their patriotism and their love for Cuba than to fight injustice at home." Moreover, the U.S. government "would rather the common people fight Spain than for themselves to raise a hand against commercial and industrial tyrants of the United States." Workers, he maintained, should ignore the jingoistic bluster of the battle cry, "Remember the Maine." Instead, Smalley insisted, working-class Americans should recall the slaughter of unarmed workers in Pennsylvania, since "'Remember Hazelton' would be a better ode for those who love liberty more than money."⁴¹ Finally, the editor of *The Craftsman*, the official organ of the Connecticut Federation of Labor, was harshest with his denunciation of the seemingly encroaching militarism:

The concentrated wealth...who control the government of the United States...are moving with alarming rapidity either to a military despotism, or to such a curtailment of the ballot that the common people will have practically nothing to say in the legislation of the nation. See how this *Maine* disaster has been used...A gigantic...and cunningly-devised scheme is being worked ostensibly to place the United States in the front rank as a naval and military power. The real reason is that the capitalists will have the whole thing and, when any workingmen dare to ask for the living wage...they will be shot down like dogs in the street.⁴²

Thus, in the early spring of 1898, as Americans' Cuban discourse increasingly narrowed in focus as the question of whether or not to declare war against Spain came to supersede all others, much of the conservative leadership of the nation's largest labor federation

⁴¹ H.C. Smalley, Editorial, *Galesburg Labor News*, April 16, 1898.

⁴² *The Craftsman*, April 1898, 87, located in Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, 2: 410.

initially opposed war.

Numerous AFL leaders, however, expressed their support for war against Spain even before the U.S. declaration of war in late April. The release of the Naval Board of Inquiry's findings at the end of March – which determined the ship had been sunk by a mine, implicating (in the eyes of most Americans) Spain for the blast – began the process of labor leaders joining those in favor of war. Thomas W. Davis, editor of the *United Mine Workers' Journal*, declared several days after the Court of Inquiry's announcement that he was in favor of American military intervention, proclaiming his “hope that the lengthy arms of Uncle Sam will be stretched across the Florida straits, extending aid, succor, *Liberty* and *Independence*, to the starving, struggling, fighting, freedom loving Cubans.”⁴³ The president of the United Mine Workers of America, Michael D. Ratchford, spent much of an address before miners in Brazil, Indiana making “patriotic” remarks. For instance, he drew the attention of the roughly five thousand miners to “a Cuban flag [which] floated from a window,” and implored them “to stand by America in case of war.”⁴⁴ Elsewhere, Joshua R. Lawrence, the secretary of the New York City Actors' Protective Union, asserted, “I believe Congress should declare war without delay.” He could “see no honorable way in which this country can avoid war, and this being the case the sooner the war begins the better.”⁴⁵ The explosion of the *Maine* worriedly turned laborers' attention towards the war question, but it took the U.S. government's release of “proof” of Spanish duplicity for a considerable number of union

⁴³ Thomas W. Davis, “‘Cuba Libre,’” *United Mine Workers' Journal*, March 31, 1898, 4. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁴ “Down In The Mines,” *The Bee* (Earlington, Kentucky), April 7, 1898, 2.

⁴⁵ “The Central Labor Union,” *New York Times* April 4, 1898, 7.

leaders to begin to discard their anti-militarism and endorse war.⁴⁶

Some of the AFL's most widely read labor journals called for war in the first weeks of April 1898. Mason Warner, editor of the official newspaper of the Ohio Federation of Labor, the *Toledo Union*, admitted that there were many "reformers – workers for a better social system – who will decry such unavoidable issue between the great masses of two nations," but he counted himself among the "real heart to heart friends of the working class, who not only fight all the battles but pay the huge cost in the years following...[yet] who know war is not an absolute curse." "This condition now confronts the United States," Warner solemnly declared, "so let war come. The working classes have little to lose."⁴⁷

J.P. McDonnell, editor of organized labor's perhaps most influential and widely read journal, the *Paterson Labor Standard*, also came to speak out in favor of war after an initial period of hesitancy. McDonnell, along with his friend and editorial contributor, George E. McNeill, had long been recognized as a guiding conscience of the U.S. labor movement. Even as he switched his allegiance from the Knights of Labor to the AFL, McDonnell never wavered from his producerist-inspired vision of America. In the weeks following the *Maine* disaster, McDonnell expressed some of labor's common reservations towards war. In early March, for example, he observed that "the men who are most anxious to see war declared are never the most anxious to fight."⁴⁸ McDonnell also questioned the uproar regarding Cuba and the silence regarding domestic problems,

⁴⁶ The Naval Board of Inquiry refused to implicate anyone in particular for the supposed placement of the mine, yet both inside and outside of the federal government Spanish forces were blamed with little hesitation.

⁴⁷ Mason Warner, "Let War Come," *Toledo Union*, April 2, 1898.

⁴⁸ J.P. McDonnell, "Editorial Notes," *Paterson Labor Standard*, March 3, 1898.

noting dryly, “With 100,000 idle men, New York is not a great deal better off than Cuba.”⁴⁹ McDonnell’s line of thought, however, began to change in late March after the release of the Naval Court’s findings. Now fully aware of the possibility of war, he seemed anxious to shift the justification for intervention away from the *Maine* and place it back on the firmer moral ground of Spain’s treatment of Cuba. “The sinking of the *Maine* is one thing, the cry of the starving Cuban non-combatants is another and quite different one,” remarked McDonnell on March 31. “Even if the destruction of the battleship was due to causes beyond the control of Spanish authorities, the herding of the poor peasantry in the fortified camps is not.”⁵⁰ A week later he officially endorsed war. Far from letting his newfound advocacy interfere with his role in the labor movement, McDonnell combined them: “We are for the independence of Cuba, even if war has to be resorted to, but we are also for the economic freedom of the American workmen, millions of whom are in constant poverty or on the verge of it.”⁵¹

Though it was the Naval Court’s findings that triggered the migration of many labor leaders from the anti- to the pro-war camp, the plight of the Cuban revolutionaries – which had drawn labor’s sympathy beginning in the fall of 1895 – retained its allegorical significance to much of the working class. A. R. Hamilton tried to explain “why the working people are the strongest supporters of ‘Free Cuba.’” Commenting in the *National Labor Tribune*, he pointed out, “It needs no citations from history to prove that the ‘masses’ of all classes of society are the most sympathetic with human suffering wherever it may be.” According to Hamilton, “the working people” mobilized behind the

⁴⁹ J.P. McDonnell, “Editorial Notes,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, March, 24, 1898.

⁵⁰ J.P. McDonnell, “Editorial Notes,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, March, 31, 1898.

⁵¹ J.P. McDonnell, “Editorial Notes,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, April 7, 1898.

Cuba revolution because they “know more about hunger and privation from personal experience than people of wealth, and their hearts are more quickly moved by stories of distress.” Hamilton made explicit the symbolic connection between labor’s producerist vision of America and workers’ sympathetic conception of the Cuban revolution. “If, then, it is true that the cry for intervention in Cuba comes the more strongly from the wage-earners of the country, it is because they have been more profoundly stirred by the sufferings of the Cuban people; it is because their sympathies are keener and their impulse to action at whatever cost the more alive and powerful.”⁵² America’s workers – with their livelihoods constantly threatened and their values and ideologies regularly impugned – empathized with the Cubans. In other words, as U.S. military intervention into Cuba seemingly approached, many workers viewed the insurgents’ fight as a metaphor of their own.

Gompers’ Concession

AFL president Samuel Gompers, however, was less sanguine about the implications of war for the U.S. labor movement. He had been, of course, long counted as a friend of *Cuba Libre*, with his organization of the Cuban sympathy meeting in New York’s Coopers’ Union Hall in November 1895 and strong endorsement of the Cuban’s cause both in the pages of the *Federationist* and on the floors of the AFL convention. His activism on behalf of the Cuban insurgency, however, had cooled considerably in recent months. In the spring of 1897, for instance, Gompers met privately with William McKinley, but there is no indication that he appealed for Cuban independence to the

⁵² A.R. Hamilton, “Working People and War,” *National Labor Tribune*, April 21, 1898, 1.

President.⁵³ Furthermore, Gompers' voice was conspicuously absent during the most recent AFL convention debate over a resolution calling for belligerency recognition for the insurgents. In a private correspondence with AFL secretary Frank Morrison during summer of 1897, Gompers insisted that while "the sympathy of our movement with Cuba is genuine, earnest and sincere . . . [it] does not for a moment imply that we are committed to certain adventurers who are apparently suffering from Hysteria [and] who simply assume the role to attract attention to their unworthy selves."⁵⁴ Gompers' sympathy for Cuba, as well as his direction of the American Federation of Labor, was challenged even more by the war question a few months later with the sinking of the *Maine* in mid-February 1898.

After the *Maine* explosion, Gompers steadfastly refused to comment publicly on it, or on a proposed war with Spain, until the first weeks of April. In so doing, he seemingly verified his critics' accusations that he was a permanent "fence-sitter." By this time in early 1898, he had become more conservative in his unionism. He had been seeking to align the interests of capital with the upper-stratum of union workers, meanwhile gaining assurances that the AFL would retain collective bargaining rights under the practice of pure-and-simple unionism. His failure to make a timely public appeal, and the ensuing vacuum of a recognized authority to speak on behalf of the Federation, contributed considerably to the dissonance within labor in the months leading up to war. Gompers' only official pronouncement about Cuba in the immediate weeks after *Maine* was to note the great disparity between the American public's sympathetic

⁵³ Minutes of Meetings, Executive Council, American Federation of Labor, April 19, 1897, *AFL Records*; "Seek Relief," *Boston Globe*, April 23, 1897, 5; "Labor Asks Reed's Aid," *Washington Post*, April 22, 1897, 3.

⁵⁴ Samuel Gompers to Frank Morrison, June 2, 1897; Frank Morrison to Gompers, May 28, August 11, 1897, *AFL Correspondence*.

reactions to the events on the island of Cuba and the exceedingly cold reception given the miners who died during the previous fall's Lattimer massacre.⁵⁵

Privately, the AFL president bemoaned the possible effects of war upon the labor movement. In a March 25 letter to the reformer Henry Demarest Lloyd, Gompers noted that if military intervention occurred, "Calm thought and discussion on economic questions will, I regret to say, be forced to the background."⁵⁶ Three days later, writing to Peter J. McGuire, he cautioned that in the event of war with Spain, "legislation in the interest of labor will be forced to the rear and deferred for a very indefinite period."⁵⁷ Such concerns were evidence of both Gompers' long-held opposition to militarism and his overwhelming focus upon the practical (in contrast to the ideological) maxims of the labor movement. Yet, by the time Samuel Gompers spoke publicly on the war question the country had received the findings of the Naval Court of Inquiry, and numerous labor leaders and much of the rank-and-file had already come out in support of war. Thus, during March and April of 1898, the fateful months when Americans debated whether or not to declare war against Spain, the most important individual in the U.S. labor movement found himself falling behind – as opposed to leading – the tide of labor opinion.

The AFL president finally presented his opinion on the potential war with Spain in a series of interviews and speeches in April while traveling in the Midwest. Samuel Gompers – cautious and calculating by rule, often circuitous and conditional in speech –

⁵⁵ Samuel Gompers, "Lattimer Tragedy – Wilkes-Barre Farce," *American Federationist*, March 1898, 12.

⁵⁶ Samuel Gompers to Henry Demarest Lloyd, March 25, 1898, Samuel Gompers Letter-Books, American Federation of Labor.

⁵⁷ Samuel Gompers to Peter J. McGuire, March 28, 1898, Samuel Gompers Letter-Books, American Federation of Labor.

lamented the effects of war upon the working class while managing to stress workers' patriotic willingness to serve their country. He also reminded audiences that organized labor had sympathized with Cuba from the beginning, but at the same time, he contended that workers had never been swayed by the jingoistic rabble. Gompers decried war in general, in other words, while accepting the possible necessity of this particular one. Gompers first made public his feelings about the war scare on April 7, while in Kansas City to mediate a dispute between the Armour Packing Company and the city's labor unions. In the lobby of the Savoy Hotel, he answered a reporter: "You ask me how war would affect my people – the laboring people. It would make corpses of the men, widows of the women, and orphans of the children, for it is the laboring man who must defend his country's flag and it is the laboring man – the common man, you say – who must die for the honor. " "And yet," Gompers added, exposing the equivocating course he would follow, "I would have war rather than retreat from the wise, firm and honorable position which this country has taken in regard to Cuba."⁵⁸ Although he decried the brutality of war, Gompers could see that United States was headed towards war. Unlike some reformers, Gompers held no illusions that war would help solve the nation's social problems: "War cannot extinguish for all time the problem of employer and employed; war cannot make us forget forever the problem of machinery, of child labor, of closer human relations and of sanitary conditions. War can only displace them for a time with bloodier thoughts."⁵⁹

Gompers was acutely aware that workers and union leaders had increasingly come to endorse military intervention in recent weeks and that his anti-war position

⁵⁸ "War and the Laborers," *Kansas City Star*, April 8, 1898, 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

would weaken his grip on AFL leadership. He was present at the April 17 meeting of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) when the city's workers unanimously passed a resolution promising support for the government in the "controversy and probable hostilities with Spain."⁶⁰ After the resolution's passage, William T. Dunn, a member of the International Union of Journeymen Horseshoers and the current president of the CFL, caught a glimpse of the AFL president in the rear of the hall and invited him on to the stage. Greeted by an ovation, Gompers then presented himself as forever united with the rank-and-file of his labor federation. He assured the Chicago audience, some of whom likely attended America's first Cuban sympathy meeting two-and-a-half years earlier, that he "was not an eleventh-hour convert to war with Spain." He claimed that he had "advocated a free Cuba and a war for that purpose, if necessary" as long ago as the Cincinnati convention in 1896.⁶¹ He pointed out that in New York he helped the Cuban Junta, who often sought his advice. Trying to refurbish his image, Gompers declared, "[A]s a representative of the laboring men and women of this country I have assured the Cubans of our support."⁶² Still, Gompers could not help emphasizing, "A war would be a great evil to the workingmen, who would bear the most of the hardships and suffering."⁶³ At the end of his speech, the AFL president reaffirmed the support for Cuban freedom and justice for the dead U.S. sailors, but gave a qualified support for war: "If we can

⁶⁰ "Workingmen's War Scheme," *Kansas City Journal*, April 19, 1898, 3.

⁶¹ "A Boycott Agree On," *Tacoma News*, April 18, 1898. The "Cincinnati convention" is a reference to the 1896 AFL Convention which was held in Cincinnati; The Chicago Federation of Labor was not created until November 1896, but it was formed from a combination of the Chicago Trades & Labor Assembly and the Chicago Trade and Labor Congress, both of which were present at Chicago's initial sympathy in October 1895.

⁶² "Gompers in the West," *Chicago Federationist*, April 20, 1898.

⁶³ "Workingmen's War Scheme," *Kansas City Journal*, April 19, 1898, 3.

accomplish our purposes peaceably I say there should be no war. But if war be necessary to Cuban independence and to the righting of the wrong done this nation, then I believe in war.”⁶⁴ By May, after war had been declared, he sounded resigned: “If war must be, then labor will be in the front van.”⁶⁵

More than anything, Gompers was a “practical” unionist, and he later acknowledged that he felt pressured by the groundswell of patriotism to support the war. In July 1898, he complained that “because there were some who hoped that this rightful and humane purpose [Cuban freedom] should be secured without the necessity of our country entering upon war, with all that war entails, men have been unjustly and unfairly criticized, their motives impugned, their Americanism questioned.”⁶⁶ In late April, just after war was declared, Gompers had received a private letter from Peter J. McGuire, who explicitly told the AFL president that the federation’s leadership needed to “rally to the flag.” McGuire intimated that the leaders of the AFL should immediately abandon their former opposition to war, or risk being shut out of the nation’s decision-making processes. All spokesmen for labor, McGuire argued, “should be men who favor loyal and unstinted support to our Government against Spain in the present War.”⁶⁷ Gompers’ close friend George Perkins pressed the message that “real trade unionists have nothing in common with, nor do they lend endorsement to, the prattle of the cowardly whelps who

⁶⁴ “Labor Takes Its Stand,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1898, 7.

⁶⁵ “As Labor Sees War,” *Enquirer-Sun*, May 12, 1898, 7.

⁶⁶ Samuel Gompers, “To Free Cuba, Not to Chineize America, Was the War Begun,” *American Federationist*, July 1898, 92.

⁶⁷ Peter J. McGuire to Samuel Gompers, April 28, 1898, *AFL Correspondence*.

give voice to sentiment not in accord with patriotic duty.”⁶⁸ The AFL president agreed, asserting in the May issue of the *American Federationist*, “In this struggle, no American, no sympathizer with liberty, no lover of humanity can do aught but give his undivided sympathy and co-operation to the cause in which our people are engaged.”⁶⁹

Labor and Patriotism

Gompers’ concession can be read as an example of how the activism of the rank-and-file determined organized labor’s stance towards military intervention into Cuba. Labor editors and union leaders disagreed over the righteousness and ramifications of a U.S. military conflict throughout much of March and April 1898, but representatives of the rank-and-file constructed a relative consensus of support, or even encouragement, for war against Spain. America’s union workers, assembled in central labor union halls or the monthly meetings of their union locals, asserted their loyalty to the flag and their willingness to defend it. In doing so, they formulated a working-class interpretation of the events unfolding at home and in Cuba and developed a sense of what a possible U.S. war would mean for American workers. The rank-and-file positioned war against Spain as not only a people’s fight righteous in motive, but as a fulfillment of labor’s vision for America and an important step in reclaiming the nation’s republican purpose. Workers hoped their participation in the war-effort would bring American policy more in line with their ideology and demonstrate the movement’s “American-ness” to a U.S. public more skeptical than ever due to the violent social clashes of the last decade.

As a general proposition,” influential labor commentator Joseph R. Buchanan

⁶⁸ George W. Perkins, Editorial, *Cigar Makers Journal*, May 1898, 9.

⁶⁹ Samuel Gompers, “American Manhood For Cuba Libre,” *American Federationist*, May 1898, 53.

wrote in early May, “the percentage of patriots is higher among the wageworkers than can be shown by the business professional or leisure class.” Buchanan anticipated that the virtuous war would remind the nation that it is “the workingman who always comes to the rescue of the nation when it is threatened by a foreign foe; it is the workingman who stands in the trenches to be slaughtered for the honor and glory of his country.” The organized working class would, in fact, lead the moral charge of this “conflict between the United States and Spain,” which is “conceded to be, so far as we are concerned, upon higher ground than the customary *casus belli*.” The “rank-and-file of American manhood are arrayed against the cruel domination of Spain over Cuba,” Buchanan noted, listing labor’s reasons for defying its traditional anti-militarism. “Add to this the anger inspired by the treacherous destruction of the *Maine*,” he maintained, “and you will find why intelligent, progressive workingmen are found on this side of war at this time.”⁷⁰

Union members in Los Angeles shared the same sentiment. The Los Angeles County Council of Labor – the city’s rank-and-file union organization – passed a resolution in mid-April claiming, “organized labor had always been the bulwark of free institutions in this country, and that as it had never been backward in coming to the defense of the nation, the patriotism of members of various trade organizations would never be questioned in the event that their services were needed in the impending war.” During the discussion about a possible war with Spain, Los Angeles worker Richard J. Colver actually argued that skilled labor was especially positioned to help the war cause. He noted that should war come, “the services of skilled mechanics would be in great demand by the United States.” He did not mean to ignore the fact that “labor had its

⁷⁰ Joseph R. Buchanan, “Labor and the War,” *Cleveland Citizen*, May 7, 1898, 2.

grievances,” but maintained that “they could not be settled at a time” of war. In his opinion, therefore, “patriotic, liberty-loving trades unionists should not wait to be called upon, but should offer their services before any call was made for troops.”⁷¹

Meanwhile, members of the Chicago Federation of Labor tried to “lead the moral charge” by pledging their dedication to the U.S. government in case of war in a manner particularly meaningful to the labor movement: the boycott. CFL unionists endorsed a resolution introduced by E. A. Davis, a worker from the hoisting engineers’ union, to support a boycott against Spain should war occur. They reasoned that war meant it was “the individual duty of each citizen of the United States to abstain from the use of or traffic in any article or commodity, either natural or manufactured, which is produced by such people or nation.” And the CFL took it a step further, asserting “that any person within the limits of the United States who, with full knowledge of the fact, does, for the purpose of profit, deal in such articles, should not receive the patronage of any patriotic American citizen.”⁷² With the nation seemingly set to engage Spain in warfare, Chicago’s union workers symbolically fused the activism and methods of the labor movement with the ideals and duties of a patriotic citizenry.

The boycott was an essential, and powerful, weapon in labor’s protest arsenal. The boycott’s foundation lay in the central tenets of “organize, educate and agitate,” and its purpose was to punish non-union companies, as well as stores that carried non-union goods, with workers’ pledges of “We Do Not Patronize.” Boycotts (ideally, at least) placed pressure on companies to bargain with unions while simultaneously displaying the strength of labor’s organizational unity. Even more importantly, workers’ collective

⁷¹ “Labor’s Voice Is Patriotic,” *San Francisco Call*, April 21, 1898, 8.

⁷² “Labor Takes Its Stand,” *Chicago Tribune*, April 18, 1898, 7.

enforcement of boycotts provided them with a tangible sense of power, or agency, which acted as a bulwark in their struggle against capital – a struggle that too often instilled a sense of powerlessness among working-class Americans. A collective pledge to boycott the goods and materials of any nation that aided Spain accomplished two significant goals of the labor movement: exhibiting labor’s patriotism to all those who doubted it and furnishing workers with self-evident validation that their movement’s vision for the nation was potent, realizable and thoroughly “American.”

Rank-and-file declarations meant to assure the rest of the country that workers were loyal to the flag and supported a war with Spain reflected the labor movement’s long-term aspiration for acceptance into mainstream American society. A patriotic resolution from members of the United Mine Workers of America in the mining districts of Pennsylvania and West Virginia in March 1898, on the other hand, revealed that labor’s distinctive war narrative was also a reaction to the immediate challenges facing the working-class. The predominantly Catholic and immigrant miners of that region had encountered an elevated tenor of anti-unionism, nativism, and anti-Catholicism from the surrounding population during the 1890s – a tenuous situation only exacerbated by the recent mining strike and the 1897 Lattimer massacre.⁷³ When a local Catholic priest was quoted by regional newspapers pronouncing it the duty of all Catholics to assist Spain against the United States in case of war between the two nations, the local mining union quickly denounced the priest and proclaimed the miners’ unfettered loyalty to America.

The miners referenced the destruction of the *Maine* and maintained, “We hold ourselves

⁷³ The United Mine Workers of America-led strike began in July 1897 and eventually grew to include upwards of 150,000 miners across the Midwest and Appalachian regions. The strike was ultimately successful – by March 1898, most miners had returned to work after having negotiated raised wages, an arbitration system to resolve differences, and continual union-management consultation. Union conflict continued, however, in western Pennsylvania and in West Virginia coal mines – ultimately leading to a UMWA boycott on all West Virginia coal in the summer of 1898.

in readiness to demand that justice be done to all concerned, or we will defend the honor of our country by force.” “In case of war breaking out between Spain and the United States,” read the resolution introduced by miner P.F. Dunlevy, “our duty as citizens and patriots irrespective of our religious opinions will be found fighting side by side with our patriotic citizens, irrespective of the nation that gave them birth or adoption.” Finally, the miners promised, “If duty calls us to defend our beloved America, [we] will if necessary occupy the same grave or ditch in defending our nation as our glorious flag, the emblem of liberty” – evidence of the degree to which immigrant workers had appropriated the language of republicanism.⁷⁴ For Appalachian miners, one constant “movement narrative” – their trepidation towards militarism – was superseded by another – their belief that organized laborers represented the true patriotic republican spirit of America.

Leaders of the labor movement – a movement desperate for inward cohesion and outward acceptance – desired a *social* reconciliation.⁷⁵ “The people will stand as one man,” maintained D.L. Cease, “to enforce every demand that is fair, reasonable, and in protection of the honor of country.” National unity, moreover, could be achieved within labor’s own value-system. “Questions that involve the honor and integrity of the nation,” hoped Cease, “are not to be considered from either the standpoint of the party or the dollar, but from the platform ‘We are the people.’”⁷⁶ Mason Warner, editor of the *Toledo*

⁷⁴ *United Mine Workers’ Journal*, March 17, 1898, 2.

⁷⁵ Numerous scholars have recognized the popular discourse of “sectional reconciliation” during the Spanish-American War. Thirty-three years after the conclusion of the Civil War, many Americans hailed the war against Spain for finally solidifying the reunion of the “Blue” and the “Gray.” Scholars have also noted that the “reunion” of the North and South was, in reality, a “reunion” of the white North and the white South, to the detriment of African-Americans and the legacy of Reconstruction. See: David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001); Cecilia O’Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

⁷⁶ D.L. Cease, “Political Reasons Paramount,” *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*, May 1898, 428.

Union, promised his fellow workers that war would actually help create their vision for America: “The awakened spirit of industrial progress will not be lost sight of amid the clash of nations. Far from that, the final result will be the world-wide revival of the respect for manly qualities and virtues aside from the possession of wealth. So let war come. The working classes have little to lose.”⁷⁷

Organized labor, according to J.H.F. Mosley, actually had much to gain. “The war,” Mosley assured his readers, “will be conducive to strong bonds of sympathy and a state of unity that is comparatively unknown today.” “For more than a quarter of a century,” ruminated Mosley, “the toilers of the United States have been contending for liberty and the abolition of industrial slavery.” He pondered, “Will they now understand that the avenue to their goal is via the down-trodden patriots on the island of Cuba?” “War is no respecter of persons,” reminded Mosley, “The rich man’s son, as well as the poor man’s boy, is forced to experience the hardships incident to a soldier’s life.” Men of wealth could be “taught an object lesson” through military intervention in Cuba. They would be “educated up to a higher appreciation of the man who produces the luxuries of the world but who enjoys them not.” War with Spain would unite the nation – no sections, no classes:

Sectionalism will be wiped out and we will become one united people to the betterment of labor everywhere, and the United States in particular, and the workingman must play a leading role in our contest with Spain for Liberty if he

⁷⁷ Mason Warner, “Let War Come,” *Toledo Union*, April 2, 1898; For scholarship on “manliness” and the Spanish-American War, see: Kristen L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998); Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). Late-nineteenth-century working-class notions of “manliness,” however, had specific “producerist” connotations. Warner’s contention was that a “virtuous” war could help dispel the cloud of materialism that had, according to labor, paralyzed American culture. Warner expresses the hope that war could return America to the “artisan’s” vision for manliness – hard work, craftsmanship, personal independence, and the ability to “provide” for one’s family.

expects to be in at the feast that will follow the victory of American arms. This war will point out to us the supercilious and unfriendly to our government and show us who is the true American patriot...The cost of the war will be great, but it will be cheap at any price if it will unite our friends and brand our enemies.⁷⁸

Mosley's optimism, however, was more overstated than most, but his passions were shared by others in the labor movement.

Mason Warner, an important figure in the Ohio Federation of Labor, promulgated a more tenuous, yet still ardent, belief in the future advancement of labor in America. His writings, however, also included deep criticisms of the nation's current social conditions – epitomizing workers' ambivalent mindset upon endorsing the Spanish-American War. Warner realized that “the poor man and the poor man's children have always borne the brunt of patriotism. The first fight the battles, the second pay the debts.” “Labor, holy, just, the law of creation,” continued Warner, “must carry the heat and burden of the day.” The labor writer stressed, however, that the working class would actually be *responsible* for national reconciliation. “The question of capital and labor – the question of the ages,” detailed Warner, “finds a new interpretation when patriotism is up for discussion.” With war, labor “tosses aside its shop cap and dons the uniform of the soldier, while capital, the coy creature, hides behind an interest-bearing bond and refuses to be comforted except ‘national honor’ is sustained by its fullest protection.” “But labor will not pause to consider all this when the call to duty sounds,” he determined, contending workers were prepared to embrace the rest of the country – even their adversaries – in a declaration of social and national unity. Warner recalled the previous decade of U.S. class relations and sensed the cathartic potential of the Spanish-American War for America's workers:

Sneers at labor will vanish, to be replaced by smiles of approval. The poor man

⁷⁸ J.H.F. Mosley, “Labor and the United States Will Profit by the War,” *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, May 21, 1898.

must fight. He must give all that he has. He must suffer and die for country... War is ever a poor man's fight. It is the rank and file that does the work. It is the men who dig and delve and toil who sustain the glories of national honor... Homestead, Coeur d'Alene, Pullman, Hazelton, will be forgotten. The miners of Pennsylvania stand ready to defend the flag which a few short weeks ago failed to protect them when they were peaceably marching, unarmed, upon a public highway. Striking miner and deputy sheriff, contrary productions of a long period of peace, will be shoulder to shoulder under the same banner – one forgiving, the other forgetting.⁷⁹

Labor leaders were quick to emphasize unity among Americans in the late spring of 1898, hoping that the Spanish-American War would serve as a catalyst for social reconciliation. When “the first gun is fired,” argued labor luminary J.P. McDonnell, “then the time for caviling has passed, and it will be the paramount duty of good citizens to contribute in all possible ways to the support of the flag.”⁸⁰ E.E. Clark, a powerful union leader in the railroad brotherhoods, called “intervention” into Cuba “imperative” for “the interest of humanity and civilization, and for the upholding of our dignity as a nation.” Fired by (or, perhaps, succumbed to) the popular surge in nationalist feeling, Clark deemed the decision for war “the calm and well considered decision of the greatest and most patient people on the globe, confident of their strength and the justice of their cause.” Clark hoped the war would bring social unity to the United States: “We must be either American or Spanish from this point. Let the people of this country be a unit in supporting this righteous cause, and we shall not only win a new fight for American freedom, but shall come out of the conflict stronger and higher in the ranks of nations than ever before.”⁸¹

It is also important to understand that the manner in which much of the rank-and-

⁷⁹ Mason Warner, “Patriotism and Labor,” *Toledo Union*, April 9, 1898, 2.

⁸⁰ J.P. McDonnell, “The Spanish-American War,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, April 28, 1898.

⁸¹ E.E. Clark, “Once More We Fight In Freedom's Cause,” *Railway Conductor*, May 1898, 339-340.

file understood the war question was intimately connected to their identification with or empathy for members of an oppressed class. Minneapolis' Typographical Union no. 30, holding their monthly meeting on April 3, agreed that "the destruction of the *Maine* and the death of 264 of her noble seamen were due to Spanish treachery, and that without the intervention of the United States the condition of the Cubans will daily become more serious." They had long been opposed to war, but nevertheless they called upon Congress "to declare the independence of Cuba, and...if necessary to secure such a result...war [should] be immediately declared." The Minneapolis printers arrived at their decision because "the sympathies of organized labor have at all times been with the downtrodden and oppressed, with the weak and the defenseless."⁸²

Such were sentiments for solidarity with Cubans that when they were furnished with class-based rationales for opposing war, the rank-and-file nevertheless chose to support military intervention into Cuba. A meeting of the New York Central Labor Union where this occurred is worth examining closely. At the April 17 meeting in Manhattan's Clarendon Hall, the treasurer of the American Longshoremen's Union, presented a set of anti-war resolutions. Bolton Hall read a statement that was written by Ernest H. Crosby and co-signed by Hall, William Dean Howells, Charles Frederick Adams, and Bishop Henry Potter, among others. It called the attention of "the Workers of America" to the "manifest folly of contributing even in the slightest degree to the warlike feeling so prevalent in the country."⁸³ The statement drew upon traditional pacifist arguments and, more importantly, pressed workers to acknowledge that "the cruelty exhibited in Cuba is

⁸² "Typos Want War," *Minnesota Union Advocate*, April 8, 1898, 5.

⁸³ "A Peace Appeal to Labor," *New York Tribune*, April 18, 1898, 2. Hall, Crosby, Howells, Adams and Potter were all original members of the American Anti-Imperialist League.

no peculiarity of the Spanish race,” especially considering “we see everyday the vast injustice prevailing in our own land, the hopeless toil, the wretched poverty, [and] the armies of unemployed.” Recalling the traditional mantra of a “rich man’s war, poor man’s fight,” Hall asked union workers: “If it is true that some thousands of Spanish speculators and office-holders have oppressed the Cubans, how in the name of common-sense can that justify American workmen in shooting down Spanish workmen?” He also reminded them, “If there is war, you will furnish the corpses and the taxes, and others will get all the glory.” He ended sarcastically, declaring that if labor supported military intervention, “they might as well give up their movement. If might be right, long live the strong monopolist! Let us bow down before him.”⁸⁴

Despite the similarities between this anti-war appeal and organized labor’s long-maintained narrative of anti-militarism, many of the delegates impatiently listened to the address.⁸⁵ During the winter of 1895, there was more patience. This same New York Central Labor Union, of course, was the audience for Samuel Gompers’ vehement anti-war speech in the midst of the Venezuela border dispute. During that diplomatic crisis, NY CLU delegates debated Gompers’ position and, though some workers disagreed with the AFL president, eventually endorsed his speech opposing war.⁸⁶ Two years and four months later, however, Bolton Hall found his anti-militarism address shouted down by New York’s union workers. Delegate Kelly of the Theatrical Protective Union, for example, emphasized the destruction of the *Maine*. He pointedly asked, “Why should we talk of peace when 260 of our countrymen were murdered by Spaniards in Havana

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ “Labor Men on the War Cloud,” *New York Sun*, Dec. 30, 1895, 2.

Harbor?” Delegate Smith, a lithographer, and Delegate Prince, a cigar packer, supported Kelly and spoke of their patriotism and their belief that workers should rally to the flag. In a speech that received resounding and sustained applause, Matthew Barr of the Tin and Sheet Iron Workers Union not only impugned Hall’s patriotism, but also accused him of colluding with the “money powers.” He demanded, “Where did this [anti-war] movement emanate from? Was it Wall Street?” Contemptuously dismissing Hall’s protests, Barr turned to the other delegates: “He has brought his pigs to the wrong market.” Barr urged his fellow CLU members not to “be trapped into endorsing the address because it contains a few catch words praising labor.” Barr concluded his harangue with a rationale commonly provided by laborers regarding the likely war with Spain: “We certainly have troubles of our own, but that should not blind us to the terrible sufferings in Cuba.”⁸⁷ There were some workers who disagreed with Barr and joined Hall in disavowing war. A cry of “Peace at any price!” was met by some applause (as well as loud hisses), but the motion to support Hall’s address was defeated by a margin of two-to-one.⁸⁸ Whether in New York, Chicago, Toledo, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, the mining districts of Pennsylvania or elsewhere, union workers – especially the rank-and-file, but including many labor leaders – implicitly linked their endorsement of a war against Spain with the core ideologies of the American labor movement.

Wall Street Conspiracy

There has long been a divide within the historiography of the Spanish-American

⁸⁷ “Workmen Discuss War,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1898, 4; “Not Peace-At-Any-Price Men,” *New York Sun*, April 18, 1898, 2; “A Peace Appeal to Labor,” *New York Tribune*, April 18, 1898, 2.

⁸⁸ “Workmen Discuss War,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1898, 4; “Not Peace-At-Any-Price Men,” *New York Sun*, April 18, 1898, 2; “A Peace Appeal to Labor,” *New York Tribune*, April 18, 1898, 2.

War concerning the role “big business” played in the war-making process. Scholars ranging from Julius W. Pratt to John Offner have analyzed commercial and business publications as well as the private correspondence of numerous business leaders, determining that throughout the Cuban revolution the representatives of “big business” urged caution and largely disagreed with popular calls for belligerency recognition or intervention. According to these scholars, business leaders were some of the last Americans to accede to war with Spain in the spring of 1898.⁸⁹ Revisionist historians such as Walter LaFeber and Thomas D. Schoonover, on the other hand, have focused upon commercial journals’ and business leaders’ long-term support for a “large policy” (a term describing the late-nineteenth-century strategy for expanding U.S. interests abroad, particularly into Latin America and Asia), arguing that representatives of “big business” – inside and outside of the federal government – heavily influenced American decision-making before, during, and after the War of 1898.⁹⁰ In this interpretation, any reticence towards war among American business leaders existed only regarding a narrowly-defined war to liberate Cuba. Once presented with the possibility of Empire, notes Walter LaFeber, “the American business community and policy makers” quickly fell back upon “the general consensus” they had reached “in the 1890s that additional foreign markets would solve the economic, social, and political problems created by the industrial

⁸⁹ Julius W. Pratt, “American Business and the Spanish-American War,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, vol. 14, no. 2 (May, 1934); 163-201; John L. Offner, *An Unwanted War: The Diplomacy of the United States and Spain over Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 134.

⁹⁰ Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion, 1860-1898* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1963); Thomas D. Schoonover, *War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization* (Lexington, KY.: University Press of Kentucky, 2003).

revolution.”⁹¹

Regardless of the actual intentions of American business leaders, by late spring 1898, American workers were convinced that the “money powers” – the somewhat amorphous personification they assigned, in general, to their capitalist oppressors – were actively betraying both Cuban freedom and idealized American virtues. Organized labor rallied behind accusations in the spring of 1898 that “Wall Street” conspired to prevent both war against Spain and Cuban independence due to commercial timidity and ownership of Spanish interest-bearing bonds – which, such reasoning held, would be invalidated by Cuban independence or an American war victory.⁹² These explicit charges were given credence outside the labor movement as well. Historian Paul S. Holbo describes how in the spring of 1898 a substantial coalition of Populist, Silver-Republican, and Democrat activists pressed a theory that “McKinley and the holders of the ‘Cuban bonds’ issued by the Spanish government were conspiring to prevent war or to transfer the debt to Cuba or to the United States.” According to Holbo, “it seemed evident to frustrated agrarian radicals and silverites, to congressmen seeking an issue, and to other impatient advocates of war that McKinley must have possessed some ulterior motive in delaying so long to report to Congress on the sinking of the *Maine*, and then resuming negotiations with Spain over Cuba.”⁹³ These accusations gained such traction throughout

⁹¹ LaFeber, *The New Empire*, 412.

⁹² For more on Spanish bonds and their influence (real and perceived) on the diplomacy between the United States, Spain, and Cuban officials, see: Horatio S. Rubens, *Liberty: The Story of Cuba*, (1932; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1970), 105-106; Offner, *An Unwanted War*, 62-63; David M. Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment: American Economic Expansion in the Hemisphere, 1865-1900* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 343; Paul S. Holbo, “The Convergence of Moods and the Cuban-Bond ‘Conspiracy’ of 1898,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 55, no. 1 (June 1968); 54-72.

⁹³ Holbo, “Convergence of Moods,” 61.

the United States that they were reported upon frequently by major newspapers, invoked by congressmen on the floor of the House of Representatives, and seen as influential in the development and passage of the Teller Amendment.⁹⁴

Indictments against the perfidy of the “money powers” appealed to union workers entrenched in the producerist “idiom” of conspiracy. Even more significantly, the charges conformed perfectly to laborers’ influential anti-Wall Street “movement narrative” and long-running criticism of the “money powers”’ deceitful policy towards the Cuban insurgents. Union workers, in fact, began impugning the motivations, as well as patriotism, of America’s prominent capitalists and political leaders not long after the *Maine* explosion. Even if war was necessary, Mason Warner, editor of the *Toledo Union*, estimated, “it is hardly probable that the United States will be guilty of any act of hostility, for president and congress are muzzled by...our ‘commercial interests.’” “The interests of our masters,” he noted bitterly, “forbid that we should do anything to affect the current quotations of Spanish bonds.” As always, it was “the deadly power of the metallic dollar.”⁹⁵ Lizzie Holmes, who actually objected to a war against Spain, still derided the loyalty of the “money powers,” noting “there will be no war if there are greater values at stake than those involved already, for with the great capitalists of the world there are no national boundaries, no national interests.”⁹⁶

Organized labor’s conviction that American “commercial interests” were subverting Cuban independence and betraying the nation’s republican heritage strengthened throughout March 1898. A correspondent for the *Labor Leader* noted,

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59-62, 68-69.

⁹⁵ Mason Warner, “The Methods of Spain,” *Toledo Union*, Feb. 19, 1898, 2.

⁹⁶ Lizzie Holmes, “The Laborer’s War,” *Paterson Labor Standard*, March 31, 1898.

“Rumors of war test the soundness of the gold-based securities of Wall Street.” “His golden majesty as usual took fright at once,” remarked the union worker, “and the stability of the yellow standard is shaken.”⁹⁷ Percy Carpenter, editor of the official journal of the Lancaster (Pa.) Central Labor Union, published a report that “nine out of ten American citizens have long ago stood ready to declare for Cuba’s freedom.” “The tenth man to move,” read the charge, “is the holder of the \$400,000,000 worth of bonds.”⁹⁸ The number “\$400 million” appeared everywhere in the labor press. “There is reported a project on foot to buy Cuba from Spain for \$400,000,000,” detailed D.L. Cease, editor of the *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*; “American capital is to furnish the means, and the United States is to stand good for the payment of the bonds.”⁹⁹

Labor’s charges were further emboldened in the final days of March by newspaper reports of events in the nation’s capital that supposedly proved there was, indeed, conspiracy in Washington. Paul S. Holbo describes three widely distributed news reports that spread throughout the country in the last week of March and first week of April. The first news story described late-night meetings at the White House as President McKinley and his cabinet purportedly conferred with Wall Street luminaries over his foreign policy.¹⁰⁰ The second “hint” of conspiracy lay in the stock-market fluctuations of

⁹⁷ “Liberate Cuba,” *Labor Leader*, March 5, 1898, 1.

⁹⁸ “Patriotism,” *Labor Leader*, March 5, 1898, 2. For more on the number \$400 million, see Holbo, “Convergence of Moods,” 60.

⁹⁹ D.L. Cease, “Notes and Criticisms,” *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*, March 1898, 272.

¹⁰⁰ Holbo, “Convergence of Moods,” 61-62. The *Washington Times*, for example, reported: “It is asserted, on the highest authority[,] that on Sunday at midnight the President left the White House with Senator [Marcus] Hanna and proceeded to the residence of Vice-President Hobart, where he had a conference with such eminent financiers as [Cornelius] Bliss, [Lyman] Gage, (both members of his cabinet), John G. Moore, of the firm Moore and Schley, of this city, Col. Paine and Henry W. Cannon, president of the Chase National Bank.” *Washington Times*, March 29, 1898, located in Holbo, “Convergence of Moods,” 62.

March 28, one of the most active trading days in the history of the exchange to that point. The American Sugar Refining Company – with large land holdings in Cuba – dipped slightly that Monday morning, only to surge almost eleven dollars-per-share in the matter of a few hours.¹⁰¹ Other leading speculative stocks showed similar volatility and gains, leading to rumors of backroom dealing.¹⁰² Finally, daily newspapers printed a variety of accounts implicating capitalist financiers in both Europe and the U.S. in a scheme to purchase the freedom of Cuba with American-backed interest-bearing bonds. Many stories explicitly named New York capitalist John J. McCook, a noted friend of the President, as the leader of a cabal of financiers from “Wall Street, Lombard Street, Paris and Berlin” hoping to purchase the island.¹⁰³

With mounting “evidence,” and labor’s considerable willingness to believe, accusations of intrigue and conspiracy swirled throughout the labor movement in the first weeks of April. J.H.F. Mosley, editor of the *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, contended, “The Wall Street opposition to a Spanish War...is based upon the condition of our financial system.” “It is this Wall Street influence,” he continued with enmity, “that may throw us into the arms of some arbitration commission or other at the last moment and put the Cuban question on the diplomatic shelf for another six months.”¹⁰⁴ The *National Labor Tribune*, for one, tended to indict Ohio Senator (and McKinley adviser) Marcus Hanna as the leading culprit in the capitalistic treason. A.R. Hamilton editorialized:

Disgust and wrath follow everywhere in the wake of the news that Mark Hanna is

¹⁰¹ Holbo, “Convergence of Moods,” 62.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Washington Times*, March 30, 1898; located in Holbo, “Convergence of Moods,” 63.

¹⁰⁴ J.H.F. Mosley, “Wall Street’s Attitude,” *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, April 9, 1898.

breaking his back to avert war with Spain, for the sake of “our best business interests,” and that he has clapped his hands over the President’s mouth to prevent any answer to the impatient nation’s demand for some definite information about the administration’s proposed policy. Such a spectacle as our Hanna-throttled President presents in the present crisis was never before known in all our history.¹⁰⁵

Labor’s anti-Wall Street narrative – long part of anti-militaristic arguments – merged with popular denunciations of the “money powers” actions during the Cuban crisis, actually *inducing* union workers to accept war.

Rail conductor Edward J. Shriver lashed out at a “deliberate plan” to “sanction the placing of an enormous tribute on Cuba to let Spain out of the difficulty into which she has obstinately thrust herself, and incidentally, for the profit of a gang of moneyed harpies.” “War is a bad thing, beyond question,” the railworker admitted. “War without any good excuse, over a dispute with which we have no legitimate concern, such as threatened us in the Venezuelan affair, is an inexcusable thing,” furthered Shriver. Yet, he determined, this situation was different, and he urged Americans not to “shut our eyes to the besotted cruelty with which Spain insists upon retaining her grasp upon Cuba.” There were “worse things than war,” concluded Shriver in his endorsement of military intervention against Spain, “and one of them is a national policy which has no purpose or courage.”¹⁰⁶

A true American “class” of industrial laborers had only formed within the previous generation – this was, in other words, the first time *industrial* workers’ analysis of the American social and political system had been tested by war. Organized labor developed a definitive interpretation of America’s political and economic history in the

¹⁰⁵ A.R. Hamilton, “Notes and Comments,” *National Labor Tribune*, April 7, 1898, 1. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁶ Edward J. Shriver, “Our New York Letter,” *Railway Conductor*, April 1898, 261-62.

thirty-odd years since the Civil War, ultimately blaming industrial-capitalists and their allies in federal and state governments for the destruction of the (somewhat mythical) “Artisan’s Republic.” For labor in 1898, accusations that a “Wall Street conspiracy” prevented war certainly implied specific clandestine acts of capitalist subversion in the Cuban situation. But perhaps more significantly, it merged the “betrayal” of Cuba with the foundational working-class narrative opposing the “money powers.” The conspiracy theory, in effect, served not only as a legitimate attempt to understand the means by which the policy of the government seemed to deviate so much from the “will of the people,” but it also fused the Cuban situation with the labor movement’s broader struggle over the future of America. Workers’ large-scale support for military intervention in the first weeks of April signified that, in their first war as “industrial-citizens,” as proletarians rather than artisans, union workers drew upon one of their core narratives – that “the money powers” had betrayed the American Republic – to collectively ratify war with Spain.

The populist and anti-materialistic nature of the Cuban sympathy movement further justified labor’s war support. Unionists’ descriptions of sympathy for the downtrodden Cuban insurgents as a “republican duty” transitioned into a call for war to liberate the island out of “republican duty.” Both arguments traded upon labor’s *distinct* patriotic vision for America while simultaneously condemning their opponent – the “money powers” – as exceedingly unpatriotic. Working-class patriotism could be proven, and working-class directives could be furthered, through support of America’s war against Spain. The first weeks of war were, in fact, interpreted as proof of labor’s triumph over capital. A.R. Hamilton’s editorial in the *National Labor Tribune* in the

afterglow of Admiral Dewey's naval victory in Manila (conspicuously positioned on the page beneath the image of a fluttering American flag) surveyed what the war had proven about labor:

[T]he workingmen of America are to-day a unit in upholding the government in every belligerent measure; they are such, not because they think they have anything to gain from a material standpoint, but simply because they are loyal American citizens, willing to make any sacrifice that the national honor and destiny requires... It is not amiss, nevertheless, to call attention to the fact that, while it is the Wall Street 'business interests' which bewail war with the greatest want of moderation and with the most indecent indifference to every consideration of patriotism, they really have less at stake, and sacrifice less in the end, than the silent labor masses...¹⁰⁷

Railroad trainman D.L. Cease offered a similar interpretation, condemning, meanwhile, those in government and business "who demanded peace at any price; who know of no such factor as national honor; [and] who saw only the soothing balm of the dollar for everything."¹⁰⁸ J.H.F. Mosley, editor of the *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, described labor's initial understanding of the Spanish-American War most succinctly: "This fight for the freedom of Cuba is a people's fight. The interest-eating bondholding class opposed it because they care nothing for human liberty and because their pecuniary interests are on the side of plutocratic government in Cuba and elsewhere."¹⁰⁹ Labor's anti-Wall Street "movement narrative" conditioned workers to see war with Spain as an expression of their vision for America.

Four key factors drove union workers into the war-camp by the middle of April 1898. First, the 1895-1896 Cuban sympathy movement formed union workers' interpretation of the "Cuban Question," allowing workers to both criticize the callousness

¹⁰⁷ A.R. Hamilton, "War and Labor," *National Labor Tribune*, May 5, 1898, 1.

¹⁰⁸ D.L. Cease, "Political Reasons Paramount," *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, May 1898, 428.

¹⁰⁹ J.H.F. Mosley, "Labor and the United States Will Profit by the War," *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, May 21, 1898.

of the “money powers” and empathize with Cuban insurgents as fellow members of an oppressed class. Second, the explosion of the *Maine* (attributed to Spanish malevolence) permanently altered the parameters of labor’s Cuban discourse. The American deaths meant the Cuban revolution was no longer an abstract, a metaphor; it became tangible and real. Third, organized labor’s experience and ideology already predisposed them to believe conspiracy theories about the “money powers” (particularly with regards to Cuba and the general betrayal of American ideals), and they seized upon a popular narrative that implicated “Wall Street” in various ill-gotten schemes to either prevent war or acquire Cuba. The widespread accusations that the “money powers” conspired against both the honor of the United States and the freedom of Cuba – a contention held inside as well as outside of the labor movement in March and April 1898 – proved a powerful (and contingent) catalyst to workers’ eventual support of war. Fourth, as the “war question” consumed the “Cuban question,” workers’ preeminent desire to be accepted by the rest of the nation as patriotic – along with workers’ desire for their own version of patriotism to be accepted into mainstream America – overrode any remaining hesitation towards the Spanish-American War. Indeed, pro-war workers could answer the class analyses of the anti-war labor leaders with an analysis of their own that emphasized international solidarity with oppressed brethren. Each side, then, could accuse the other of betraying class interests, but only the pro-war side claimed to be upholding American values. The support for war, then, reaffirmed their pride as workers, while bolstering their status as Americans. This was particularly important for the foreign-born, or the first-generation American-born. They, too, claimed their right to be part of America.

Patriotic Flag Raising Ceremonies and Class Reconciliation

Few have doubted the popularity of the Spanish-American War among Americans. Contemporary commentators dwelled upon a perceived unanimity of purpose throughout the country. According to most observers, it seemed as if the entire nation had immediately mobilized behind the war-effort. Historians have by-and-large ratified such contentions, agreeing that, whatever the underlying rationale, the majority of Americans eventually endorsed military intervention against Spain.¹¹⁰ Americans' widespread approbation of the war, in fact, proceeded largely as displays of community-centered nationalism. In the weeks after war was declared, Americans gravitated towards popular civic symbols – such as town halls, schools, and government buildings, but also factories, rail-yards, and neighborhood street-corners – to take part in public rites sanctifying the nation's "purpose" in the war. These ceremonies in the late spring of 1898 chiefly consisted of patriotic oratory by local leaders, communal renditions of nationalistic songs, and celebrations of all-things generically "American" – usually culminating with the symbolic performance of a "flag-raising."

The stars-and-stripes appeared to be everywhere in May 1898. In towns and cities across the country seemingly every street-corner had a real (or improvised) flag pole, newspapers printed advertisements for weeks hawking American flags, and stores frequently ran out of their stock of flags. Flag-raising ceremonies were part of a broader cultural shift towards public flag veneration. "In the 1890s," explains historian Stuart McConnell, "a new patriotic language began to take shape, in which the flag emerged as

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the popularity of the Spanish-American War among contemporary Americans as well as historians' general acceptance of the war's popularity, see: Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 23-56.

a symbol of abstract nationalism.” The American flag “was not only spoken of more abstractly,” claims McConnell, “but it also began to be treated ritually as an object of transcendent significance.”¹¹¹ The popularity, frequency, and suggestiveness of flag-raising, moreover, quickly established public veneration of the flag as the most common “collective” display of patriotism by Americans during the early weeks of the Spanish-American War. There were literally dozens of ceremonial flag-raising in some large U.S. cities, while entire small-town communities were drawn together under the auspices of the flag. Spanish-American War flag-raising, even more than the 1895-1896 Cuban sympathy meetings, were allegorical by intention; using public, overt and simplistic displays of patriotic unity as a means to combat social divisiveness and reinforce an imagined consensus.

Flag-raising were, among other things, the physical settings for much of the early public paeans to “sectional reconciliation.” For the greater part of two decades white Northerners and white Southerners had made tentative steps towards “reunion” by forging a shared “memory” of the Civil War that emphasized the valor of both Confederate and Union soldiers while increasingly dismissing African-Americans’ calls for racial justice. The Spanish-American War, historian David Blight has shown, “served the ends of reunion by uniting North and South against a common external foe.”¹¹² The patriotic bluster surrounding the war-time reconciliation of the Blue and the Gray, Blight notes, also “exposed the racial paradoxes of that American reunion.”¹¹³ Indeed, if the

¹¹¹ Stuart McConnell, “Reading the Flag: A Reconsideration of the Patriotic Cults of the 1890s,” in *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define their Patriotism*, ed. John Bodnar (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 110.

¹¹² David Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 351.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 347.

North and South became “whole” again, it did so through a mutual re-dedication to white supremacy and an abandonment of Reconstruction.¹¹⁴ Sectional reconciliation also occurred to the detriment of the Cuban revolutionaries. Americans' engagement with the Cuban revolution had always been self-serving and allegorical in nature – celebrating U.S. intervention for its ability to cement white racial unity in America portended ominous consequences for Cuba.

In small towns and working-class urban neighborhoods, those locales that felt deepest the dislocation of late-nineteenth-century industrial capitalism, flag-raising often operated, to borrow a phrase from historian Gerald Linderman, as “twilight expressions of a disappearing nineteenth-century social structure.”¹¹⁵ These blissful celebrations of town and neighborhood cohesion – done while floating the stars-and-stripes and singing patriotic anthems – garbled the real effects of three decades worth of urbanization and industrialization. Flag-raising allowed these Americans to forget momentarily, as Linderman has shown elsewhere, that “the older sense of belonging in totality within the local community was rapidly slipping away as 1900 approached.”¹¹⁶ Yet, the flag-raising in the first weeks of the War of 1898 were also part of the dawning of twentieth-century constructions of abstract American “nationalism.” The 1890s “cult of the flag,” finds Stuart McConnell, “allowed people to ‘see’ what...had been only a vague abstraction, namely ‘the nation.’”¹¹⁷ The early twentieth century would witness the

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 346-354; O’Leary, *To Die For*, 129-149.

¹¹⁵ Gerald Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish-American War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), 8.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁷ McConnell, “Reading the Flag,” 111.

formation of a less ambiguous and less diverse definition of “American patriotism,” in which “statist” and “nativist” elements began dictating what McConnell calls a “simplified notion of patriotism” that usually entailed “either unswerving state loyalty or a kind of crude ethnocentrism.”¹¹⁸ If the Spanish-American War (and, perhaps more importantly, its mindful celebration) brought reconciliation and unity (sectional, ethnocentric and/or class), it did so by contributing to the erosion of a more heterogeneous patriotic vision, oftentimes at the exclusion of ideological and racial “outsiders” and at the expense of the victims of imperial warfare.

When Americans “rallied to the flag” in May 1898 they often did so at a ceremony created by (or, at the very least, including a large presence of) workers. Many of the largest and most heavily-attended flag-raising, in fact, along with some of the most intimate and community-centric ceremonies, were initiated by American workers. Workers played such a vital role in these exuberant expressions of nationalism for a variety of reasons. By the middle of the 1890s, notes historian Andrew Neather, “American flags and other patriotic trappings” had become key symbols at working-class “marches, meetings and social events.”¹¹⁹ As with patriotic organizations, workers were able to utilize already established organizations for collectively raising funds and planning the events. Nearly all workers considered the workplace an essential civic institution, moreover, fusing their role as “producer” to the health of the community, state, and nation – for many, it surely seemed natural that such patriotic celebrations would occur at the factory. Furthermore, much of the organized working class no doubt

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹¹⁹ Andrew Neather, “Labor Republicanism, Race, and Popular Patriotism in the Era of Empire, 1890-1914,” in *Bonds of Affection*, ed. Bodnar, 92-93.

drew upon a shared memory of “Cuban sympathy,” viewing the war in its early stages as a humanitarian endeavor actually *led* by “the masses.” They believed in a “people’s fight” for Cuban liberty against the tyranny of Spain – imagining the declaration of war a victory for republican “Americanism” set in opposition to the greed and materialism of Wall Street. Finally, the purchase and flying of American flags, funded through voluntary contributions in the mills, factories, and rail-yards of the country, signified that workers sought to reconcile social differences through accommodating acts of patriotism.

The symbolism and rhetoric of flag-raising ceremonies across the nation focused upon the necessity of class reconciliation to offset past differences, support the present war-effort and assure the future strength of workers and their nation. Disputes over pay-rates and the length of the workday were the most basic, and most common, conflicts between labor and capital. On the days of flag-raising, however, factory managers and owners often cut the workday short while still paying workers a full days’ wages. In Sedalia, Missouri, for instance, “factories and shops clos[ed] down” in a “general holiday” so “thousands of people” – including GAR and Confederate veterans associations – could watch the shopmen raise “a regulation silk flag to the top of a 120-foot flagstaff” in “one of the most patriotic demonstrations ever witnessed in Sedalia.”¹²⁰ In the first week of June employees of the “Standard Oil works” in Cambridge, Massachusetts left work early for a flag-raising and “a patriotic concert.”¹²¹ Meanwhile, suburban Philadelphia workers from “the firm of Honegger & Genth, of the Philadelphia

¹²⁰ “Novel Flag Raising,” *Hutchinson Daily News*, May 26, 1898, 2.

¹²¹ “All Joined In,” *Boston Globe*, June 12, 1898, 2.

silk mills...were given a half-holiday” to celebrate the factory’s flag-raising.¹²²

Many flag-raising ceremonies extended these allegorical rites of class reconciliation even further, as factory workers conducted heavily symbolic flag presentations with factory owners and managers. Performances such as these were particularly common in Philadelphia, a city where workers in small-to-medium sized factories and mills still dominated the industrial economy. Even as late as 1898, Philadelphia laborers remained immersed in a strong tradition of producerism (the Knights of Labor were founded here in 1869), an idiom that interpreted extreme class divisions as antithetical to American republicanism. At the Wolfender Shore Mills in the twenty-seventh ward, for example, the stars-and-stripes “were presented on behalf of the employees [by] James McLaughlin” and “received on behalf of the firm by John Taylor Woflender, who made an address thanking the employees for their patriotism.”¹²³ Likewise, at the William Wharton Jr. & Company steel mill, “following the singing of ‘Red, White and Blue’ by a chorus of the employees,” the flag for the ceremony “was presented by Frank McFarland,” a foundry worker who was “one of the oldest employees of the firm in point of service,” to “William Wharton Jr., president of the company” who happily “accepted the handsome ensign.”¹²⁴ Symbolic scenes such as those in Philadelphia factories were reproduced or reformulated throughout the United States, such as the flag-raising ceremony at a North Adams, Massachusetts shoe factory where “the employees...purchased the flag, and the company furnished the staff.”¹²⁵ For

¹²² “Flags Floating in All Sections,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 15, 1898, 3.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ “The Flag Floats Triumphantly,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 22, 1898, 4.

¹²⁵ “Flag Raising Saturday,” *North Adams Transcript*, May 16, 1898.

workers in the City of Brotherly Love and elsewhere, Spanish-American War flag-raising were ritualized public acts of a yearned-for social harmony.

Flag-raising ceremonies that were rife with metaphors of class unity often included ostentatious displays of sectional reconciliation as well – combining class and national reunions in a grand display of shared “Americanism.” Workers in Boston were especially active in initiating and attending flag-raising.¹²⁶ The city’s largest flag-raising – with a crowd of over twenty-thousand taking over the “Church green, at the junction of Bedford, Lincoln and Summer” streets – involved Bostonians from all social classes, including hundreds of workers from the neighboring shoe and leather factories. During this particular bit of street theater, local leaders sang the praises of the sectional and class reconciliation brought by the war against Spain. At one point during the ceremony, Colonel Thomas Hickey, a Union veteran, read aloud a poem titled “Our Flag” written by Colonel J.K. Orr, a Confederate veteran from Macon, Georgia:

It floats in the breeze
Of far away seas,
And back of the guns,
Are standing the sons
Whose fathers were true
To the Gray and to the Blue.

The Mayor of Boston, Josiah Quincy III, followed Hickey on stage and promptly emphasized “the fact that the business men of Boston are standing behind the government in the present trouble” and noted that the large turnout of workers “proved that the men of the shoe and leather district are determined that the present struggle shall be a success.” “It is important to the country,” Quincy concluded, “that all classes shall support the government” in its war against Spain. “Every street leading to the square was choked

¹²⁶ “Every Head Uncovered,” May 12, 1898, 7; “Bar Tenders’ Flag Raising,” May 16, 1898, 12; “Lots of Enthusiasm,” *Boston Globe*, May 27, 1898, 4.

with people,” reported the *Boston Globe*, “and every doorway and window in every building in the vicinity was crowded” – all social classes there to affirm, in the words of Reverend R.L. Green that day, that “there are no differences now – the nation is as one man in this struggle.”¹²⁷

The flag-raising ceremony in Birmingham, Alabama, as in Boston, simultaneously glorified the relationship between workers, capitalists, and the nation. The workers' band “played America, followed by Yankee Doodle and...Dixie,” while the massive flag, according to the *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, “filled the hearts of all who beheld it with that patriotism which only the sight of the Stars and Stripes can provoke in every true American citizen.”¹²⁸ James G. Caldwell, the president of the steel mill, utilized the flag-raising to praise his workers, claiming “that the Birmingham Rolling Mill was equipped with better men than any rolling mill in America.” Caldwell directly connected the success of the early war-effort to industrial peace, admonishing his workers to “like Dewey...steam ahead and always answer to the whistle of the Birmingham Rolling Mill.” Caldwell was then joined on the platform by an employee of the company, Antone Jeanette – the two, owner and worker, had ceremonially raised the flag together, hand over hand, only minutes before. Jeanette acknowledged the harmony now in existence between the workers and all those in attendance and told in “glowing language” of the trials and tribulations of a workers' hard life, all made worthwhile, he mused, because now “he could live under the shadow of the dear old flag he loved.”¹²⁹ In Boston and Birmingham, and numerous other locales on both sides of the Mason-Dixon, sectional

¹²⁷ “20,000 People Witnessed Flag Raising in Church Green,” *Boston Globe*, May 21, 1898, 5.

¹²⁸ “A Grand Flag Raising,” *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, June 4, 1898.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

and class reconciliation developed as mutually reinforcing narratives during patriotic flag-raising, impressing a much-desired national unity on Americans rallying behind the nation's first foreign war in fifty years.

Working-class Americans understandably focused much more of their attention upon the potential windfalls the Spanish-American War held for social-class harmony. Many workers, moreover, were certain that the nation's "war for humanity" could, in fact, help bring about an American society more in line with their own working-class vision. Such (realistically unfounded) optimism for the war's impact on U.S. workers' future manifested itself at numerous flag-raising, including that of the Houston and Texas Central rail-yards on May 21, 1898. Labor advocate and local luminary Norman G. Kittrell addressed, in his words, "this citadel of labor, this scene of honest and profitable industry" on a day when a half-dozen flag-raising occurred in and around Houston factories and rail-yards. The flag to be raised that day was to be "placed there in obedience to the impulses of patriotic hearts and by the strength of the brawny arms of those who edify and ennoble the cause of labor." Eschewing the common prattling of national accord, he felt the need to remind his audience that there had been those who had advocated "peace at any price" – "a conspicuous few...who have displayed a degree of greed and selfishness...which has outraged the patriotic and liberty-loving people of America." These were the same "unscrupulous boodlers," maintained Kittrell, "who are responsible for conditions which bring depression, poverty and idleness in their train and strike hard and deep at the interest of labor."¹³⁰ Workers needed to remember, in other words, that the same "money powers" which oppressed them daily were the only Americans who opposed the nation's "glorious purpose" in war.

¹³⁰ "Nation's Banner," *Houston Daily Post*, May 22, 1898, 3.

Kittrell, however, was far from a radical – his ideals conformed to labor’s producerist tradition. He contended the “unscrupulous boodlers” had betrayed America in peace as well as in war – believing that current economic conditions meant “something is wrong somewhere and must be corrected and made right.” For Kittrell – and hundreds of thousands of American workers – there was “no real antagonism between capital and labor, but, on the contrary, each is essential to the other.” This essential tenet of labor republicanism – that the harsh and unequal conditions of permanent wage labor (not to mention the cyclical depressions, pauperism, and state-driven violence that defined labors’ world in the last quarter of the nineteenth century) were in actuality a *perversion* of American democracy that could be rectified – remained a bedrock of hope for end-of-the-century industrial workers. “Such conditions” as now exist, proclaimed Kittrell, “can be changed and corrected.”¹³¹

Kittrell stood beneath the stars-and-stripes and gazed upon the mass of workers and their families. He predicted that the war meant “far more than the mere division of Spain from Cuba and the independence of that fair isle.” The Spanish-American War, he declared, finally reaching the crux of his flag-raising-day speech, “will result in the betterment of human conditions not only in other nations, but in our own.” “There are evils here which need correction,” Kittrell persisted, “and when a people have been once aroused in behalf of the care of others, they will be the more likely to respond to demands made upon them for the correction of evils at home.” The American people’s idealistic war, dreamed Kittrell, could help do away with “sweat-shops, idleness and hunger.” “The spirit of justice and humanity may long sleep,” he admitted, “but, when once aroused, slumbers not again until it has fraught its perfect work.” “With quickened

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

sympathies and softened hearts and expanded ideas,” Kittrell assured his audience, Americans will “turn again to the concentration of domestic concerns” and they “will ascertain where lies the root of that economic disease which affects this republic.” At long last, he determined triumphantly, the people “will correct evils and suppress enemies here of which millions are victim.” American workers should memorialize the war to free Cuba, implored Kittrell, since it would assist in the “realization of that ideal republic of which the fathers dreamed and which they sought to found, and which it is our duty to perpetuate.”¹³²

Many workers believed, however mistakenly, that the Spanish-American War was a “people’s contest” being waged for the betterment of humanity and they fantasized about what such an endeavor would mean for America. Their willingness to embrace a foreign war – more specifically, *this* foreign war – as part of the antidote for the ills of industrial capitalism stemmed from the perseverance of labor republicanism as a guiding spirit and interpretive framework for workers’ lives. There was, it must be acknowledged, little unanimity in workers’ worldview by the time the Spanish-American War was declared, and even less chance of ever returning to some fabled “Artisan’s Republic.” The death knells for producerism had been tolled during the final decade of the nineteenth century – mass immigration, urbanization, and the “trustification” of industry had permanently altered laborers’ lived experience, while the crushing poverty of repeated economic depressions and the staggering violence of class conflict had finally erased many of workers’ illusions about their place in modern society. Yet, ideologies die hard, particularly those woven so tightly into the everyday existence of men and women struggling to grasp some semblance of normalcy from a world rapidly receding from that

¹³² *Ibid.*

which they had long known and envisioned. Labor republicanism had become muddled, eroded by the importunate realities of the urban-industrial milieu, but it survived as a cogent yearning for *change*. Workers retained hope that their vision for America might become, at the very least, an accepted component of the nation's birthright. Rallying to the flag – defending Cuban liberty and proving American righteousness – became part of that vision after the U.S. declaration of war against Spain.

Such far-reaching and quixotic aspirations, however, went above and beyond those of many workers in the spring of 1898. The Spanish-American War simply promised employees at the Armour Packing Company in Kansas City, Missouri a welcomed respite from class tension and a chance to accommodate labor to the institutions of capital. The Kansas City packinghouse workforce – a massive contingent of skilled and unskilled workers employed by one of the wealthiest corporations in the U.S. – had spent the previous two years in a constant state of “labor warfare.” Walkouts, lockouts, boycotts, mass firings, attempts at union-busting, and contentious labor negotiations characterized the relationship between the workers and their employers since May 1896. The controversy had only been settled in April 1898 – during the midst of a nationwide debate over whether to declare war against Spain, AFL president Samuel Gompers arrived in Kansas City and negotiated a labor peace between the two sides.¹³³ The settlement lifted organized labor's boycott of Armour products, provided for the recognition of the workers' unions, and set the parameters for future mediation of labor disputes. *One month later* – following the United States' declaration of war against Spain, the mobilization of American troops, and Admiral Dewey's victory in Manila –

¹³³ Samuel Gompers was in Kansas City to begin mediation of the Armour Packing Company dispute when he made his first public comments regarding a potential U.S. war with Spain.

employers and employees came together again, this time at a patriotic ceremony to raise, according to the *Kansas City Journal*, “the largest flag west of the Mississippi.”¹³⁴

“The flag pole, the flag and the ceremony attending its unfurling,” related the *Kansas City Star* the day after, “were expressions of the patriotism of the Armour Packing company and its 3,000 employees, as well as of the people of Kansas City.”¹³⁵ The impressive flag-raising ceremony, coming just weeks after the Armour factory buildings buzzed with the all-too-common bitterness of labor strife, combined ritualized acts of patriotism with solemn panegyrics to class reconciliation. Armour employees marched out of the packinghouse at five o’clock in the early evening on May 14 to the tune of the “Stars and Stripes Forever.”¹³⁶ “Four stalwart workmen” carried the massive red, white and blue banner to the foot of the flag pole, where “with simple but appropriate” formality, they presented the ensign to L.C. James, “the company’s general attorney,” before a “surging mass of humanity.”¹³⁷ “The Armour employees on the dock sang ‘America’ and the crowd in the streets joined in,” as the flag was raised and its folds unfurled.¹³⁸

The Armour Packing Company festivities showed – perhaps more than most – how tributes to class harmony fused decisively with nationalistic vows during the popular celebration of the Spanish-American War. Local orator J.K. Cubbison addressed the

¹³⁴ “Flag Raising at Armour’s,” *Kansas City Journal*, May 15, 1898, 9.

¹³⁵ “The Armour Flag Raising,” *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1898, 3.

¹³⁶ “The Armour Flag Raising,” *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1898, 3; “Flag Raising at Armour’s,” *Kansas City Journal*, May 15, 1898, 9.

¹³⁷ “The Armour Flag Raising,” *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1898, 3; “Flag Raising at Armour’s,” *Kansas City Journal*, May 15, 1898, 9.

¹³⁸ “The Armour Flag Raising,” *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1898, 3.

audience following the flag-raising services, extolling the meaning of the war in terms particularly significant to the Armour workers. Cubbison spoke of the “good the present trouble was doing this country in unifying it, in obliterating party and sectional lines and kindling anew the fires of patriotism which...are at least always smoldering in the breasts of free people.”¹³⁹ He praised “the ranks of American labor” for raising “aloft that glorious banner” and denounced base materialism, contending “that the past few weeks had taught us what we would not have learned in years of money getting and losing.”¹⁴⁰ This war, proclaimed Cubbison, “has been good for the corporations and good for the people.”¹⁴¹ After years of class antagonism, he punctuated, the war “has brought labor and capital into a holy communion.”¹⁴² Class conflict, so fresh in the memories of all those in attendance, dissolved by way of idealized declarations of patriotic accord. In the celebratory revelry of American flag-raising, even class differences disappeared: “We have the most glorious of all countries,” Cubbison mawkishly assured the crowd, and “we are all common people in that country.”¹⁴³

The American flag became *the* symbol of class unity and reconciliation in the aftermath of America’s declaration of war against Spain. The stars-and-stripes swayed from seemingly every street lamp, government office, home, and factory window. It featured prominently in newspaper headlines, letterheads, federal stamps, campaign buttons, and the faces of war-bonds. The image of the flag was also used to consecrate

¹³⁹ “Flag Raising at Armour’s,” *Kansas City Journal*, May 15, 1898, 9.

¹⁴⁰ “The Armour Flag Raising,” *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1898, 3; “Flag Raising at Armour’s,” *Kansas City Journal*, May 15, 1898, 9.

¹⁴¹ “Flag Raising at Armour’s,” *Kansas City Journal*, May 15, 1898, 9.

¹⁴² “The Armour Flag Raising,” *Kansas City Star*, May 15, 1898, 3.

¹⁴³ “Flag Raising at Armour’s,” *Kansas City Journal*, May 15, 1898, 9.

storefronts, draw attention to sale advertisements, and promote a host of commemorative war-time memorabilia, merging – really for the first time in American history – popular patriotic militarism with the nation’s industrial-consumer marketplace. In a war that quickly took on overtones of unity and reconciliation, carrying, purchasing, or displaying the flag served as a signal to other Americans that they, too, supported the purpose and directives of U.S. foreign policy. The fetish-ization of the American flag, however, was not a *brand new* development. It was actually part of a broader surge in nationalistic zeal led by grassroots patriotic organizations that had arisen in the final two decades of the nineteenth century. “Beginning in the 1880s,” notes historian Cecilia O’Leary,

Organized patriots initiated campaigns to establish new national anniversaries; lobbied for additions to the nation’s pantheon of heroes; urged the teaching of U.S. history and civics in the public schools; agitated for flag reverence and the daily pledge of allegiance; ushered in the greatest era in monument building, established national shrines and mapped out historical pilgrimages; and organized petition drives and congressional hearings to legislate patriotism.¹⁴⁴

The iconography of the American flag achieved a “cult-like” status during the 1890s, culminating in the patriotic fervor surrounding the War of 1898. The American flag, venerated with national anti-flag-desecration laws and flag-centric patriotic ceremonies, was simultaneously brandished to peddle the materials and materialism of the nation’s industrial economy.

Spanish-American War flag-raising operations operated as allegorical representations of a wistful national unity. Sectional antipathies, political differences, racial conflicts, and class antagonisms symbolically disappeared in the fluttering folds of the American flag, replaced by an end-of-the-century telltale jumble of traditional community-based American nationalism, declarations of class and sectional (and, therefore, white racial)

¹⁴⁴ O’Leary, *To Die For*, 49.

unity, and newfound consumer-driven displays of patriotism. The flag, however, remained a contested symbol. When working-class Americans flocked to flag-raising in the spring of 1898, they did so with motivations that differed greatly from other social groups. Workers interpreted the beginning of the Spanish-American War through their own ideological lens – as they had throughout the Cuban revolution, the development of the U.S. sympathy movement, and the national debate that followed the sinking of the *Maine*. Workers, confronted with a war, searched for cultural sustenance that fit both their immediate and long-term aspirations.

Flag-raising was particularly important to the shared conscience of the mass of American workers. The ceremonies were steeped in the idiom of republicanism, utilizing a common American mythology to appeal to a diverse and disjointed populace in the midst of immense social and cultural upheaval. For workers, the public performance of flag-raising satisfied two essential aspects of their collective “movement narratives” – of the stories they told themselves to try to comprehend the world in which they lived. Workers long believed they exemplified the values of true American patriotism, and they hoped that their patriotic displays would ingratiate them to all those who questioned their dedication to the stars-and-stripes. Working-class Americans, therefore, embraced the idea of class reconciliation that swirled around flag-raising, finding in the language of national unity a prospect for alleviating decades of social conflict. Such yearnings were indicative of workers’ now-characteristic “hopeful discontent” – an all-encompassing ambivalence that precluded their ideological radicalization and encouraged any attempts at social change to be made within the parameters of age-old American republicanism.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ For previous reference to “hopeful discontent,” see Chapter II. Charles Spahr, *America's Working People* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900), vii.

Labor's support for the Spanish-American War was firmly, if circuitously, tied to the slow waning of their producerist values. Sympathy for Cuba – transformed into a war of liberation – conformed loosely to a generic conception of American righteousness. That the war was declared, according to the popular rendering, despite the wishes of the “money powers” even further sanctified the battle against Spanish despotism as a cause to restore the nation “back” to its mythical founding “purpose.”

Flag-raising – and labor's support for war – were not, however, simply a reaction to decades of conflict. Spanish-American War flag-raising, occurring as they did during a period of acute transition for both labor and American society as a whole, gazed both backwards and forwards. Popular celebrations of “America” during the first weeks of the War of 1898 became essential components of the formation of a new “national” culture – one that, in the near future, would become increasingly circumscribed by an ethno-centric and state-reifying definition of American patriotism. That this shift occurred in support of the United States' first foreign war in a half-century – which quickly turned into a war of imperial conquest – signified that the narrowing demarcation of American nationalism would be tinged with militarism and Empire. Flag-raising – as symbols of their support for war – were a publicly enacted bridge between workers' past and future. Workers may have had little to do with “causing” the Spanish-American War, but they certainly hoped to benefit from it. In their desire to be accepted into “mainstream” America, workers – particularly union workers – increasingly conformed their ideologies and demands to the dominating influence of consumer-capitalism. Pure-and-simple unionism, red-baiting anti-radicalism, support for U.S. imperialism, racial discrimination and exclusion in the workforce – all soon threatened, and tempted, America's working-class because they all

promised economic gain and social acceptance. The millions of American workers caught up in the whirlwind of patriotic self-congratulation in May 1898 became convinced that they would profit – socially, culturally, and economically – from the wages of war.

Chapter IV

Protecting the White Workers' Republic: Organized Labor and America's Empire

The war between the United States and Spain lasted roughly three-and-a-half months, ending on August 12, 1898. The final determination concerning the future of Spain's colonial possessions was not determined until the Treaty of Paris was signed in December 1898, but Spain was utterly defeated and it had become clear that the United States planned to retain (at the very least temporarily) its military forces on the islands. A national debate regarding the retention of the Spanish islands – provoked, in part, by U.S. annexation of Hawaii in July 1898 – developed during the war, as Americans from all walks of life considered what victory against Spain should actually entail. President William McKinley originally dismissed the idea of “forcible annexation” as “criminal aggression,” but in December 1898 he appointed a majority of pro-annexationists to the treaty commission and determined that the United States would seize the Spanish possessions.¹

The ostensible “purpose” of the war – the realization of Cuban independence – had undergone a series of setbacks during American intervention, despite a U.S. victory in Cuba in which the revolutionaries played an essential (one might even say determinant) role.² U.S. President William McKinley refused to recognize the governing authority of the Cuban Junta at the outset of America's incursion, even going as far to

¹ William McKinley: "First Annual Message," Dec. 6, 1897. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29538>

² Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 81-107; John Lawrence Tome, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

demand that the Cuban army accept a subordinate role to that of the invading U.S. forces.³ At ground-level in Cuba, the interaction between the U.S. army and the Cuban revolutionaries unfolded in a similar fashion. U.S. commanders ignored the opinions of their Cuban counterparts and often ordered Cuban troops to undertake menial tasks such as ditch-digging and the transportation of goods. U.S. troops, meanwhile, were disappointed that the revolutionaries they encountered on the island did not meet their romanticized visions from before the war. They expected to see well-dressed, well-fed, and well-armed troops in traditional battalions, and were thus surprised to encounter the Cuban guerillas who were fighting for independence. U.S. soldiers also expressed consternation that they were not welcomed as heroes and that Cuban soldiers refused to act obsequiously toward their American “benefactors.” Finally face-to-face with the revolutionaries they had been lionizing for years, they found them wanting and racially inferior. They hurled racial epithets at the Cuban troops and constantly complained of their “haughtiness,” unceasing hunger for U.S. rations, and seeming unwillingness to do the servile tasks they had been assigned.⁴ Government and military derision of the Cuban forces seeped into American popular discourse by the end of June 1898 as American newspapers began carrying a barrage of complaints against the revolutionaries.⁵ These negative reports – often couched in the familiar terms of late-nineteenth-century racism – played into the hands of the growing contingent of American expansionists. By the time Spanish and American representatives met in Paris, Cuban independence was far from assured.

³ Pérez Jr., *War of 1898*, 81-107; Tome, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 273-287.

⁴ Pérez Jr., *War of 1898*, 81-107; Tome, *War and Genocide in Cuba*, 273-287.

⁵ Pérez Jr., *War of 1898*, 94-98.

The United States launched an aggressive foreign policy initiative following the Spanish-American War bent on wielding military, economic, and political power in Asia and the Americas.⁶ The Treaty of Paris ceded control of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam to the United States. During the subsequent half-dozen years, the U.S. government violently suppressed an independence movement in the Philippines, established a coercive protectorate over Cuba, solidified colonial control over Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Guam, intervened in China during the Boxer Rebellion, invaded Colombia in support of a Panamanian revolution favorable to an American canal treaty, and initiated construction of the Panama Canal. Following the Spanish-American War, U.S. officials sought to increase American power on the world scene and expand U.S. trade into foreign markets.

Numerous union leaders offered their support for the nation's new imperial ambitions. At one point or another, representatives of some of the United States' most noteworthy craft unions – several of the Railroad Brotherhoods, the United Mine Workers, the Typographical Union, the Flint Glass Workers' Union, and the Woodworkers' Union – spoke out in favor of America's aggressive foreign policy initiatives in the Caribbean and Pacific. Union officials who endorsed territorial expansion did so because they were mindful of the nationalistic tenor of American discourse and hopeful that the expansion of U.S. power globally would bring social and

⁶ See, for instance: Walter LaFeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Thomas D. Schoonover, *War of 1898 and the Origins of Globalization* (Lexington, KY.: University Press of Kentucky, 2003); Philip S. Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895-1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); David J. Silbey, *A War of Frontier and Empire: The Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

economic gains for the nation at-large (especially organized labor).⁷ Significantly, labor spokesmen rarely referenced the “white man’s burden” as a justification for imperialism; they were predominantly concerned with their own material advancement as well as their acceptance into the wider realm of American social, cultural, and political decision-makers, not in “uplifting” Filipino natives. This does not mean that they did not believe the Filipinos and others were racially inferior – just that they were not invested in their uplift. Outright supporters of empire within the ranks of labor represented an important contingent of America’s working class, but they were hardly the dominant voice among union workers in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. The majority of labor voices, in fact, invoked worker’s patriotic vision of America and the protection of their self-interest as a means to oppose specific imperial policies.

Organized labor’s opposition to imperialism was largely independent of the nationwide “anti-imperialism movement” among middle-class and elite Americans.⁸ Virulently racist Southern Democrats, dissident Republican “mugwumps,” New England social and intellectual elites, and middle-class Chicago “progressives” united behind related, but not necessarily identical objectives to forge the American Anti-Imperialist League. Labor certainly had connections to the wider crusade against an American Empire, as union luminaries Samuel Gompers, John W. Hayes, George E. McNeill,

⁷ During the national imperialism debate, of course, the United States was engaged in a brutal war to suppress the movement for Philippine independence.

⁸ For scholarship on the Anti-Imperialist movement, see: Robert Beisner, *Twelve Against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898-1900* (1968; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman Pub. Co., 1972); E. Berkeley Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970); Richard E. Welch Jr., *Response to Imperialism: The United States and the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); James A. Zimmerman, “Who Were the Anti-Imperialists of 1898 and 1899? A Chicago Perspective,” *Pacific Historical Review*, vol. 46, no. 4 (Nov., 1977); 589-601.

Patrick A. Collins, and Patrick Ford served in the American Anti-Imperialist League and all workers were impacted by the 1900 presidential election in which the “expansion” debate played a key role.⁹ Labor spokesmen also employed similar rhetoric to that of the official anti-imperialist movement: they lamented the “death” of the Republic, criticized the cost – material, social and ethical – of maintaining a large imperial army, and denounced the inhabitants of the islands as racially inferior and irreconcilable to the American way of life. Union workers’ opposition to empire, however, emanated above all from their trepidation that territorial annexations threatened the very existence of labor’s social, racial, and ideological vision of America.

The labor movement’s mobilization against imperialism primarily emanated from the leadership of AFL craft unions and the popular labor press – and much of what follows traces a course set by labor leaders, craft journal editors, and central labor union officials. Large contingents of the rank-and-file also protested the acquisition of colonies (especially the Philippines) in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. Rank-and-file workers constituted a large portion of the audience at anti-imperialism rallies in New York City on January 22, 1899, Boston on March 20, 1899, and Chicago on April 30, 1899, for instance.¹⁰ Meanwhile, nearly two-dozen unions sent petitions to Congress in 1899 denouncing Empire and, according to historian Philip Foner, thousands of individual trade unionists addressed petitions to the President and Congress that had been

⁹ J.P. McDonnell, editor of the *Paterson Labor Standard*, was a founding member of the New Jersey Anti-Imperialist League as well.

¹⁰ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 2: 423-424; “Expansion is Denounced,” *New York Times*, Jan. 23, 1899, 1; “Averse to a Large Army,” *Boston Globe*, March 21, 1899, 9; “The Central Music Hall Meeting,” *Chicago Tribune*, May 1, 1899, 6.

drawn up jointly by the Anti-Imperialist League and the American Federation of Labor.¹¹ Yet, the driving force behind labor's opposition to empire undeniably came from the leadership. The central place labor leaders played in molding the labor movement's anti-imperialist cause could indicate that many workers had fewer qualms with empire than their union spokesmen. But the leadership's outspoken and public opposition to imperialism did not lead to a countervailing rank-and-file surge behind colonialism. Turn-of-the-century AFL leaders – no one more so than the Federation's president Samuel Gompers – were increasingly determined to set a national, “top-down” course for the labor movement. Labor officials' efforts against American imperialism reflected the AFL's burgeoning “interest-group” strategy that coincided with the crystallization of their federal lobbying tactics regarding Chinese Exclusion and the eight-hour-day. Nevertheless, the relative paucity of rank-and-file voices is an issue – one hopefully mitigated, to some extent, by the chapter's breadth of sources and utilization of central labor union newspapers and letters to labor journal editors.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was, from the perspective of the union worker, a constant battle for the survival of a working-class conception of America's meaning and purpose. On the one hand, the working class organized during the late-nineteenth-century in order to fight for their present material livelihoods and hopeful future advancement in a nation that was rapidly industrializing and centralizing power in the hands of the corporate elite. On the other, workers aspired for an America that conformed, at least in some respects, to the values and culture of their idealized

¹¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 3rd Session, 526, 676, 683, 730, 781, 882, 884, 919, 1149, 1221, 1236, 1414, 1443, 1639, 1729, 1964, 2124, 2427; The form-letter petitions protested “...against any extension of the sovereignty of the United States over the Philippine Islands, in any event; or other foreign territory, without the free consent of the people thereof.” Foner, *History of American Labor Movement*, 2: 424.

“Artisan’s Republic.” American workers viewed the national debate over imperialism through this same lens. When union workers mourned “the waning of the republic and the birth of the empire” they were utilizing rhetoric long-established within the labor movement. America’s working class maintained for years that the “money powers”’ relentless pursuit of personal profit led them to conspire against the founding principles of the Republic: Imperialism, thus in labor’s worldview, was the logical extension of several decades’ worth of industrial-capitalist-led betrayal. Workers also fused their traditional anti-militarism to the newfangled anti-imperialist cause. Although many rank-and-file workers had rejected exhortations to oppose the “honorable” war against Spain on the basis of their anti-militarism doctrine, they expressed alarm towards the domestic ramifications of what would necessarily be a massive standing imperial army. Finally, and most significantly, many union workers opposed the turn-of-the-century policy of territorial acquisition because they believed the immigration of (or even the competition with) the islands’ “racially inferior” inhabitants to the United States was a menace to the white working class.

In the half-dozen-or-so years after the termination of the Spanish-American War, however, most of organized labor relinquished their anti-imperialist stance. The majority of union workers fought for the protection of their labor from competition with the inhabitants of America’s new Empire; protested against the importation of contract labor to (or from) the islands; demanded that white American workers be employed on imperial projects (such as the Panama Canal); organized in opposition to the immigration of the islanders to the United States; and otherwise vigorously defended their vision of a white workers’ Republic. Organized labor’s anti-imperialism was always predicated on both

material and ideological self-interest. The eventual demise of labor's anti-imperialism was nearly assured by their overwhelming focus on the preservation of white workers' racial and class privileges. Consequently, by 1905 (at the latest) union workers had, for all intents and purposes, abandoned the anti-imperialist movement.

Organized Labor during the Spanish-American War

The patriotic flag-raising mentioned in the last chapter continued throughout the early summer of 1898. The ceremonies' constant emphasis on social and sectional reconciliation and the repetitious symbolism surrounding the flag exposed how the majority of Americans viewed the war through their particular self-interested – or, at best, self-reflective – lens. Surely some reveled in the seemingly altruistic endeavor to “save” Cuba. Many Americans, in fact, somehow continued to envision the War of 1898 as a selfless act of liberation even after the war concluded with the United States having acquired dominion over the islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, Guam, and Hawaii.¹² This conviction that the war actually fulfilled the proclamations of America's moral responsibility to Cuba – that a great Republic was vindicated by its dedication to abstract “Freedom” – has long remained a cogent and unifying element of nationalism not only for the working class, but also for the entire country.¹³ Such spurious notions of the “meaning” of the Spanish-American War grew out of the congratulatory tone that

¹² Hawaii was annexed to the United States on July 7, 1898 through a joint Congressional resolution called the Newlands Resolution. The Treaty of Paris was signed on December 10, 1898, with Spain relinquishing all rights to Cuba and ceding Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines to the United States. The United States established coercive control over Cuba through the Platt Amendment in the 1902 Cuban Constitution. The Platt Amendment restricted Cuba's foreign policy and commercial rights, required that the Cuban government sell land to the U.S. for naval facility developments, and provided legal recourse for future U.S. interventions.

¹³ Pérez Jr., *War of 1898*.

dominated the country's popular war discourse. During the war and its immediate aftermath, Americans predominantly focused their attention on the domestic implications of the events unfolding in the Caribbean and the Pacific. As with the sympathy movement meetings of 1895-96, their views of Cubans receded into the background, as Americans ruminated and even obsessed about what the conflict would *bring* Americans and *prove* about Americans.

Organized labor, in this respect, emulated the rest of the nation. America's union workers spent the first months of the campaign against Spain trumpeting labor's service in the war-effort. Some unions even made efforts to organize entire regiments of soldiers from their ranks. Members of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel and Tin Workers at the South Chicago mill of the Illinois Steel Company, for example, offered the services of the four thousand "rolling mill men" to the military, declaring their willingness to "shed our blood to protect the stars and stripes of America."¹⁴ AFL president Samuel Gompers declared after the conclusion of the war that it was "from the ranks of labor [that] came the quarter of a million men who volunteered to sacrifice their lives upon the altar of their country in so great a cause."¹⁵ Gompers' claim, while certainly an exaggeration meant for effect, testified to the degree that labor spotlighted their significant role in the successes of the Spanish-American War in order to establish beyond doubt their patriotic credentials. Moreover, it was a common contention among

¹⁴ "Colonel M.M. Garland," *National Labor Tribune*, May 5, 1898, 5. In a similar fashion, the Amalgamated Society of Painters and Decorators reported that roughly one-thousand members of its organization hoped to enlist as a regiment. "A Regiment of Union Painters," *National Labor Tribune*, June 2, 1898, 2.

¹⁵ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1898), 19. (hereafter cited as AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898) There were only 300,000 total troops in active service during the Spanish-American War – 250,000 of them volunteers. Many of them, of course, were not from the ranks of labor.

union workers. James L. Barry of the Actors Protective Union felt certain that “organized labor will be found to be well represented in the present war against Spain” as the “workingmen will never forget the treacherous murder of their countrymen by the blowing up of the Maine.”¹⁶ Union leaders contended that labor’s war-time service would change forever the perception of the labor movement. P.H. Morrissey, Grand Master of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, reminded workers that it had “often been stated by those who oppose it, that organized labor is a menace to good government and an enemy to society.” Through labor’s efforts during “this crisis,” Morrissey countered, “it will be proven that we are as loyal as any other class of citizen.”¹⁷

Union officials conscientiously tied the war effort to the values of the labor movement. Labor leaders in various organizations, including the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, the Fall River Loom Fixers Association, and the New York Central Labor Union, assured the rank-and-file (and, importantly, the public at large) that should the workers enlist that their union benefits would remain intact.¹⁸ Mason Warner, an important voice within the Ohio Federation of Labor, proudly noted that across the nation unions had announced “that all members who may be exposed to the dangers of a soldiers’ life will be entitled to sick and death benefits” as well as being “excused from all duties and fees.” Some unions even provided the families of those who enlisted with

¹⁶ “The Central Labor Union,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1898, 5; A member of the Glass Bottle Blowers Association went further, claiming that “the records prove that the great majority of the members of the volunteer army in Cuba are members of labor organizations.” “With the Green Delegates,” *Commoner and Glassworker*, July 16, 1898, 4.

¹⁷ P.H. Morrissey, “War Circular,” *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*, June 1898, 518.

¹⁸ P.H. Morrissey, “War Circular,” *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*, June 1898, 517; “Labor Notes,” *Washington Post*, May 1, 1898, 28; “The Central Labor Union,” *New York Times*, May 2, 1898, 5.

weekly stipends. “In looking after the families of the men who have gone to the front,” Warner declared, “labor unionists are proving themselves true patriots.”¹⁹

Prominent labor figures most often attempted to cement union workers’ importance in the minds of the rest of nation by describing the military during the Spanish-American War as the embodiment of American class reconciliation. “The army in the field is an army taken from the ranks of labor,” eulogized influential labor editor D.L. Cease, as “artisans have abandoned the factory, furnace, railroad, mine, and with the men from the other branches of business have marched solidly to the front.”²⁰ W.C. Cain, in a June 1898 letter to the *Trackmen’s Advance Advocate*, colorfully characterized what the volunteer military meant for labor and class reconciliation:

And from workshop and mill, from plow and bench, from office and counting-room, from cottage and mansion, the tramp, tramp, has sounded, and in the long, straight lines of somber blue positions and care have been flung aside, and the artisan and the aristocrat are elbow to elbow, man to man, ready to fight in a common cause, ready to die, if need be, for a friend. In all the horrors of war there is still this silver lining...brave hearts rise above the pettiness of modern life and the selfish greed of trade and commerce.²¹

Workers especially utilized this idealized imagery during the first heady months of war.

May and June of 1898 represented the peak of labor’s exaltation of the war, but the labor movement retained a narrative strain of self-promotion, expected material promise, and hopeful national unity well through the nationwide peace celebration that followed the termination of the conflict in August 1898. Samuel Gompers, for one,

¹⁹ “Labor Union and Patriotism,” *Toledo Union*, June 25, 1898.

²⁰ D.L. Cease, “Intelligence Ahead,” *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*, June 1898, 516; John Coniff, speaking at a June flag-raising at a tin mill in Wheeling, West Virginia, agreed. “One of the great blessings of the present struggle,” Coniff memorialized, “is that it has caused a union of all classes and all elements of society, bound together in what appears an indissoluble union for the preservation of our national honor.” “Wheeling’s Flag Raising,” *National Labor Tribune*, June 9, 1898, 5.

²¹ W.C. Cain, “Our Boys in Blue,” *Trackmen’s Advance Advocate*, June 1898, 345-46.

frequently extolled the war-time virtues of labor during the final months of 1898.

Gompers maintained the credit for the victory against Spain belonged to “the men who carried the guns and who were behind the guns.”²² He singled out the valiant efforts of the Machinists, the Boilermakers, and the Firemen, describing the latter as men “who fed the flames in the furnaces, knowing the perils which awaited them, yet unbuoyed by the excitement of the storm of shot and shell without.” The AFL president hailed the “brave toilers of America” for their war-time service record, offering assurances that they “have covered themselves and posterity with glory.”²³ Those workers who stayed at home also played their part, Gompers noted, producing all the goods necessary for war and “willingly bear[ing] the necessary burdens of taxation, to maintain the glory of our arms, as well as to secure the achievements of peace.”²⁴

Some union figures – particularly those in industries in the midst of a war-time boom – quickly came to believe that the war with Spain would bring material advantages to the labor movement as well. Septimus Hazen Smith, editor of the *Wood-Worker*, predicted as early as May 1898 that the war would be a good thing for the Amalgamated Wood-Workers’ International Union of America. “The results of the war will be that the United States will stand on an even firmer footing among the great nations of the earth than ever before,” declared Smith, and “such a stirring up will prove beneficial to us, at

²² AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 19.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Samuel Gompers, speech delivered at the National Conference upon “The Future Foreign Policy of the United States” held in Saratoga, New York on Aug. 20, 1898; reproduced in *American Federationist*, Sept. 1898, 136.

least.”²⁵ William Farley, a high-ranking official in the United Mine Workers of America reported in September 1898 that “the coal and iron trades have not been so healthy for some years.” Farley, president of UMWA district 20, told Alabama miners, “The possibilities accruing from the...war are of such magnitude in opening out new fields of coal and iron that no state in the union will be benefited so largely as Alabama.”²⁶ A.R. Hamilton, editor of the *National Labor Tribune*, refused to circumscribe his positive outlook on the war to merely his own craft union. He determined that “the evidence is pretty conclusive that the war with Spain has had a good effect already on the business of the country.” “Not alone in the iron and steel industry is the boom felt, but in all other branches,” remarked Hamilton, as “all this money being placed in circulation cannot fail to have some beneficial effect, and as a result trade in all branches is improving rapidly.”²⁷ As Americans celebrated their troops’ mounting victories over Spanish forces, there were those within organized labor who wholeheartedly believed the conflict would lead to social and material advances for America’s working class.

Despite such positive views of the war’s benefits to the working class among some labor leaders, most workers quickly became critical of the U.S. war effort because of the way the government handled the mobilization process. Throughout the war there was a genuine popular uproar concerning the atrocious conditions of the army volunteer camps, the lack of medical supplies, frequent transportation failures, and tainted food supplies – typified by the “embalmed beef” scandal that culminated in post-war

²⁵ Septimus Hazen Smith, Editorial, *Wood-Worker*, May, 1898, 14; Likewise, S.P. Austin, a member of the Glass Bottle Blowers’ Association of America, believed that because of the war, “American glassware in many lines can find new fields of consumption if intelligent effort is made.” S.P. Austin, Editorial, *Commoner and Glassworker*, July 23, 1898, 8.

²⁶ William Farley, “Address to Miners,” *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, Sept. 22, 1898, 4.

²⁷ A.R. Hamilton, “War Booming Trade,” *National Labor Tribune*, June 9, 1898, 2.

Congressional hearings.²⁸ Accusations of gross incompetence, political intrigue, and conspiratorial profit-mongering regarding the feeding, clothing, and arming of the hastily organized army of roughly 250,000 volunteers spread throughout the labor movement during the war. Those who had been critical of the call for war in the spring of 1898 were particularly outspoken towards government misconduct. “The stories that appear in the daily press...regarding the quality and quantity of food furnished the soldiers,” commented the editor of the *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, “are disappointing and disheartening.” John W. Hayes lambasted the “lack of nourishing food and unsanitary and otherwise unfit quarters” found at the military camps, and reflected that “nothing is so calculated to knock all the patriotism out of a man as the knowledge that he is compelled to suffer through neglect or incompetence of those whose duty it is to look after his comfort and welfare.”²⁹ Max Hayes, the leading figure of the Cleveland Central Labor Union, was perhaps the most vituperative critic of the war among members of the American Federation of Labor. Hayes constantly harangued government, military, and industrial officials for their self-serving operation of the war. Only days after fighting between Spain and the United States had ceased, Hayes offered this biting critique of the war-effort:

In the course of a few days, when the troops return home, the public will have an opportunity to learn something about the scandalous manner in which the workingmen soldiers were starved, robbed, denied medicine when sick or wounded and treated generally like cattle, while the capitalistic officers drew high salaries, did nothing and waxed fat, and the contractors, corporationists and

²⁸ Graham A. Cosmas, *An Army for Empire: The United States Army in the Spanish-American War* (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri Press, 1971), 5-11. Also, see: Vincent J. Cirillo, *Bullets and Bacilli: The Spanish-American War and Military Medicine* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004); Edward Keuchel, “Chemicals and Meat: The Embalmed Beef Scandal,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 98 (Summer 1974); 65-89.

²⁹ John W. Hayes, Editorial, *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, July 1898, 6.

bankers experienced a veritable paradise of jobbery and robbery. Yes, war is a good thing – for plutocrats.³⁰

Even labor leaders and rank-and-file workers who earnestly called for war against Spain decried corporate-government malfeasance in the actual conduct of the war. Criticisms of the government's handling of the war-effort, in fact, appeared throughout the labor press.³¹ While "the Armours get contracts every other day for millions of pounds of fresh beef," griped Cornelius Guiney, the editor of the *Minnesota Union Advocate*, "our young men" in the army "are being fed exclusively on black bread and hard tack."³² Edward Shriver, a rank-and-file railway conductor and long-time advocate for Cuban independence, believed a "conspiracy" was "one of the sinister features of the war." "The same men who opposed fighting at all because they valued their personal money interests so much more than common humanity," reproached Shriver, "are now seeking to make the most out of the war into which they have been forced against their will."³³ Many within organized labor would have agreed with Frank A. Kennedy, the editor of the *Western Laborer*: "Of course, we expected swindling by army and navy contractors... [but] the fact is that the mobilization of the army and conduct of the war is a disgrace to the nation."³⁴ Their disgust with corrupt government officials and

³⁰ Max S. Hayes, Editorial, *Cleveland Citizen*, August 20, 1898, 2.

³¹ Even soldiers who enlisted out of the ranks of organized labor joined in the criticism. Harry M. Kinkead, a locomotive fireman and Pennsylvania volunteer fighting in the Philippines, complained, "We are being very poorly fed. The food we get is hardly fit for dogs." Harry M. Kinkead, "From Our Soldier Boys," *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, Oct. 1898, 435.

³² Cornelius Guiney, Editorial, *Minnesota Union Advocate*, July 22, 1898, 2.

³³ Edward J. Shriver, "Some War Reflections," *Railway Conductor*, Aug. 1898, 545.

³⁴ Frank A. Kennedy, "To Be or Not to Be," *Western Laborer*, June 25, 1898; Such criticisms were extremely common. For example, W.J. Coyne, a Boston union worker, cursed "those in power" for allowing "the great injustices that are being perpetrated upon our soldiers." W.J. Coyne, letter to the editor, *Railway Conductor*, Aug. 1898, 578.

profiteering military contractors merged with the labor movement's long-standing narrative positioning the "money powers" as enemies of the American Republic.

The fact that much of organized labor became so critical of the war-effort – which the majority of union voices had by the end of June 1898 – implicitly leaves unsettled the question of why union workers originally celebrated the Spanish-American War with such exuberance. Labor had willingly embraced the war-effort because it promised fulfillment of their self-serving delineation of American patriotism. Union workers' initially championed the Spanish-American War because the notion of saving the "oppressed" (Cubans) from their "oppressors" (the Spanish, as well as the "money powers" that tried to prevent the war) closely adhered to labor's own generic vision for society. They surged behind the war, in other words, because its recognized purpose conformed to their previously held value-system. Organized labor's specific interpretation of the war, combined with the popular understanding that it was to be a "people's conflict," encouraged workers to dream of the peculiar advantages to be gleaned through a military defeat of Spain. Patriotism and self-interest, of course, have long been bedfellows. Labor's plea for class reconciliation and desire to be embraced as patriotic citizens were foremost among the possible benefits of the Spanish-American War.

The circumstances of the war quickly dispelled such illusions. The scandalous implications of war-time profiteering as well as the immediate talk of imperial conquest and a permanent imperial army seemed to alter the purpose behind the war. Workers were partially motivated to support war in the spring of 1898 by rumors of a "money powers'" conspiracy to prevent it – several months later the "money powers" had

seemingly hi-jacked the “people’s war” and were actively subverting its honorable intentions. White workers were also forced to confront the realities of race in Cuba and the Philippines, further complicating what had largely been an allegorical engagement with *Cuba Libre*. The promised social reconciliation also failed to materialize. Class conflict continued throughout the war – despite all the vaunted discussion of unity – as there were roughly the same number of strikes in 1898 as there had been during the preceding two years.³⁵ Workers’ disillusionment with the conflict they were experiencing – in contrast to the fight they had imagined – reflected their naiveté back in the spring build-up to war. Beguiled by their own metaphors, driven by an almost desperate hope to have their particular definition of American nationalism enshrined into mainstream American ideology, they ignored a quarter-century’s worth of growing corporate-industrial influence and convinced themselves they could “re-make” the Republic with a “people’s war.” They were wrong. But throughout the twentieth century workers continued to struggle with the often-contradictory impulses of patriotism and class-consciousness – the allure of social reconciliation and national renewal leading workers, time and again, to support repressive tactics at home and oppressive policies abroad.

Union spokesmen persisted in their panegyrics to labor’s war record during and after the conflict as they depicted the working class as the true embodiment of Americanism. Meanwhile, they lambasted the “money powers” by juxtaposing the war-time services of patriotic labor with the supposed “un-patriotic” greed of Wall Street.

³⁵ There were 1,026 strikes in 1896, 1,078 strikes in 1897, and 1,056 strikes in 1898. The number of strikes nationwide trended upward in the years that followed, in 1899, 1,797 strikes; in 1900, 1,779 strikes; in 1901, 2,924 strikes; in 1902, 3,162 strikes; in 1903, 3,494 strikes. United States Bureau of Labor, *Twenty-First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor: Strikes and Lockouts*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906), 478.

Thus, workers continued the same “narrative” they had developed before the war, merely shifting the indictment against the “money powers” from trying to prevent an honorable war to actually perverting it for corporate gain. Labor’s genuine, albeit tenuous, ratification of the United States’ first foreign war in fifty years was undermined by the end of June 1898: first, by the prevalence of corrupt military contracts that, workers’ intimated, caused U.S. soldiers to be ill-fed and under-prepared and diverted war funds into the coffers of wealthy capitalists; and, second, by U.S. imperialists’ designs to seize Spanish colonial possessions.

Labor spokesmen who had wholeheartedly supported war in the spring of 1898 wondered querulously about what had happened to the humanitarian war in the name of freedom. In just a matter of weeks following Dewey’s victory in Manila, much of the rhetoric (and nearly all government and military actions) regarding the war went from assuring republican freedom in Cuba to acquiring an island empire that would span the Caribbean and Pacific.³⁶ “The entire policy which has been followed out,” wrote an obviously disgusted Edward Shriver at the end of June 1898, indicates “we are not so much anxious to free the Cubans as to take from Spain her richest possessions, for subsequent distribution... among those who have influence enough to be nearest the basket when the plums fall into it.”³⁷ Likewise, Charles Guiney wondered whether the whole business of the war “was not gotten up and is not being conducted for the benefit

³⁶ Pérez Jr., *War of 1898*, 81-107.

³⁷ E.E. Clark, “The Progress of the War,” *Railway Conductor*, July 1898, 473. John A. Morris, a Los Angeles union worker, reached a similar conclusion in July: “This war with Spain is not for Cuban freedom, but a fight between two sets of capitalists, one labeled Spain and the other American, for the possession of Cuba; and in either case the liberty of Cuba will not be secured.” John A. Morris, “The War with Spain,” *Labor Leader*, July 16, 1898, 1.

of...the horde of syndicates, trusts and corporations.”³⁸ Labor interpreted the shifting tenor of Spanish-American War discourse as proof that U.S. decision-makers were no longer (or had never been) interested in the liberation of the island of Cuba. Instead, many workers came to see the war as simply a capitalist “conspiracy” to construct an American empire.³⁹

Organized labor specifically characterized the movement to acquire colonies during the War of 1898 (and in the case of Hawaii, actual annexation) as a creation of the “money powers.” John W. Hayes, an after-the-fact convert to the war cause, found it “curious” that the same capitalists who had “opposed everything calculated to bring on a war” with Spain “now favor taking everything in sight.”⁴⁰ Labor leaders were careful, particularly during the height of the war, to distinguish between what they contended were the honorable intentions of the American people and the dishonorable profiteering of the “money powers.” “We declared to the world that we went out waging no war of conquest, but in the interest of liberty and humanity,” reminded Frank A. Kennedy, who had supported the call for war, “yet in the face of this declaration, we have annexed Hawaii as a coaling station.” The demands to seize the Philippines, the Omaha labor

³⁸ Cornelius Guiney, Editorial, *Minnesota Union Advocate*, July 22, 1898, 2.

³⁹ Those within the labor movement who had opposed war from the outset were particularly critical of the “betrayal” of the supposed ideals behind the war. Socialist leader Eugene Debs was unequivocal in his denunciation of American policy: “This is not a war for humanity – far from it.” He noted that instead of relieving the suffering of the islanders, “we establish a blockade so that more of the reconcentrados are starved. We send over a fleet to capture the Philippines, and we give a lot of contractors a chance to grow richer than ever equipping the army.” “Debs Retires,” *Cleveland Citizen*, June 18, 1898, 2. Debs, however, endorsed the annexation of Hawaii, because the islands were “composed in a degree of Caucasians, and...already have an established government.” Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs, Citizen and Socialist* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 226-227.

⁴⁰ John W. Hayes, “The New Imperialism,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Aug. 1898, 4. Cornelius Guiney, spokesman for the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Assembly as well as the Minnesota State Federation of Labor, lamented that “our Philippine, Hawaiian and West India possessions, present and prospective, are all being exploited in advance for every dollar of wealth there is in them for those industrial vampires.” Cornelius Guiney, Editorial, *Minnesota Union Advocate*, July 22, 1898, 2.

editor further noted, “indicate a desire on our part to gain a foothold on the continent of Asia.” “The money power has seized [the islands] through their tools, the politicians,” maintained Kennedy, “and the warning voice of the people has been disregarded, and an expansion policy is now the course to be pursued by the administration.”⁴¹

Union leaders developed what can loosely be framed as an “anti-imperialist discourse” during the Spanish-American War. They frequently portrayed the annexation of island colonies as a nefarious plot orchestrated for the aggrandizement of American capitalists. Many workers linked this supposed scheme to their established movement narrative that maintained that the “money powers” actively conspired against “the Republic.” They also condemned the elevation of an imperial policy for its attendant advancement of militarism. “Little could the founders of the Republic have guessed,” reflected Edward Shriver in a common reproof of American imperialism, “that their lineal successors in governmental power would ever come to a point where they would promulgate on behalf of the Republic the very policies and ideas against which its formation was a protest.”⁴² Anti-imperialist union workers personalized the potential ill-effects of U.S. territorial expansion, signifying that labor’s “anti-imperialism” was almost entirely concerned with how an American empire would harm the working-class.

Organized labor’s most significant denunciation of the initiative to seize and control Hawaii, as well as Spain’s colonial possessions during the War of 1898 was that they believed the islands’ inhabitants inherently threatened the survival of union workers’ class and racial privileges. Union leaders began mobilizing against the future annexation of the Philippine islands even as the battle against Spain continued to rage during the

⁴¹ Frank A. Kennedy, “Imperialism,” *Western Laborer*, July 30, 1898, 2.

⁴² Edward J. Shriver, “Some War Reflections,” *Railway Conductor*, Aug. 1898, 544.

summer of 1898. D. F. Kennedy, for example, maintained it would “be the same in effect as the dumping of the cheap labor of the Philippines on our shores.” Kennedy, editor of the Indianapolis labor journal *The Union*, expressed alarm at the proposal “by the jingo element to import 7,000,000 Asiatic laborers into the United States.”⁴³ Kennedy was hardly alone in his condemnation. Samuel Gompers, writing in July 1898, proclaimed that “the powers which are at work to encompass the degradation of the American workers” were responsible for the nation’s newfound imperial ambitions. He denied, in turn, “that territorial conquest and annexation is a good policy for the American people” and chastised those whose policies would mean “that the Chinese, the half-breeds and semi-barbaric people of the Philippine Islands, are to be admitted as part of these United States.” Empire, in other words, was part of a conspiracy to reduce white workers to the social status of their racial inferiors; or, as Samuel Gompers often put it, to “Chineize America.”⁴⁴

Workers rallied behind the Spanish-American War with visions of achieving a respected place for organized labor within the mainstream of American decision-makers and returning the Republic to its previous purpose – one remembered, or at least imagined, as more humane and less materialistic. Ironically, at the close of the Spanish-American War American workers were forced to confront what they believed to be an intrinsic threat to the very existence of “dignified” white union labor as well as the realization that, in the words of Omaha labor editor Frank A. Kennedy, “the republic

⁴³ D.F. Kennedy, “Lest We Forget,” *The Union* (Indianapolis), July 2, 1898, 2.

⁴⁴ Samuel Gompers, “To Free Cuba, Not To Chineize America, Was the War Begun,” *American Federationist*, July 1898, 92-94.

wanes and the empire is born.”⁴⁵ The rapid dissolution of organized labor’s conditional support for the Spanish-American War should in no way seem surprising given the altered circumstances of the war. The war, popularly endorsed at its declaration, hardly played out as the majority of workers had envisioned. The battle against Spain, furthermore, scarcely brought workers their much-desired social cohesion. Workers confronted with the same old story of Wall Street greed – of a rich man’s war and a poor man’s fight – and facing the “new” threat of competition with (or immigration of, or even citizenship for) millions of “Asiatic” workers responded with accusations of a “money powers” conspiracy and racist denunciations of “the half-breeds and semi-barbaric” peoples of the conquered islands. Organized labor, in subsequent years, constructed their entire opposition to America’s newfound empire on the fusion of the racial and class-based arguments they first formulated during a war that they had initially – and perhaps naively – championed as a triumph for the worker’s republic.

Labor and Anti-Imperialism

American labor underwent a dramatic transformation in the years following the Spanish-American War. The disastrous depression that preceded the war had been the social backdrop for the disintegration of the Knights of Labor as an influential force in the labor movement as well as the (short-term) dissolution of industrial unionism due to the collapse of the Knights and the American Railway Union.⁴⁶ Employers, meanwhile,

⁴⁵ Frank A. Kennedy, “Imperialism,” *Western Laborer*, July 30, 1898, 2.

⁴⁶ The Knights of Labor, which at its peak in 1886 contained over 750,000 members, had shrunk to only “a few thousand” by 1900. *Report of the Industrial Commission on the Relations and Conditions of Capital and Labor*, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), vol. 7, p. 9. The American Railway Union dissolved shortly after the failed Pullman Strike in 1894, in which the union’s leadership was jailed and federal troops attacked strikers in Illinois. Industrial unionism remained an organizing force within the

continued to rely upon military force to crush labor strikes during and after the depression, while the persistence of mass unemployment, historian David Montgomery has shown, “allowed employers generally to slash their operatives’ piece rates and humble their craftsmen.”⁴⁷ The depression was followed by a massive corporate merger movement. Corporate consolidation – beginning slowly in 1895, finally taking off in 1898, and slowing again by 1904 – occurred in every significant mining and manufacturing industry. “The merger movement...was of unrivaled proportions,” economic historians Douglas Steeples and David Whitten assert, and signified that “combines had come to dominate manufacturing” and “investment bankers...had achieved new heights of power.”⁴⁸ Corporate America’s growing economic and political supremacy in the late nineteenth century not only survived the depression, but actually emerged from it stronger and concentrated in fewer hands upon entering the twentieth century.⁴⁹

United Mine Workers of America, as well as the Western Federation of Miners/Western Labor Union, but otherwise failed to exist as an alternative to craft unionism until the establishment of the International Workers of the World (IWW) in 1905.

⁴⁷ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (1987; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 172.

⁴⁸ Douglas Steeples and David O. Whitten, *Democracy in Desperation: The Depression of 1893* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1998), 77. The merger movement of 1895-1904 was initiated by the Supreme Court’s 1895 ruling that the Sherman Anti-Trust law only forbade trusts that were in restraint of trade and therefore did not apply to the combination of manufacturing and mining. Combinations were concentrated in the following industries: bituminous coal, primary metals, petroleum products, food products, transportation equipment, chemicals, fabricated metal products, and machinery. Altogether, 319 consolidations took place, involving roughly \$6.3 billion in capital. The yearly breakdown was the following: five in 1895 and 1896, 10 in 1897, 26 in 1898, 106 in 1899, and between forty-two and forty-three during 1900-1902, fifteen in 1903, and nine in 1904. More than a third of the new combinations were monopolistic in intent. Following the merger movement, 319 firms controlled 40% of all manufacturing assets in the United States. Furthermore, in each of fifty industries, a single firm generated 60% or more of output. 86% of combinations involved holding companies, while only 14% involved outright acquisition. *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ For scholarship on the “centralization” of power at the turn of the century, see, for instance: Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Michael H.

The depression had a somewhat similar effect on the elevation of “business unionism” in the American labor movement. The American Federation of Labor was the only significant union umbrella organization left following the 1893-1897 depression. In fact, “surviving the 1890s depression,” asserts historian Julie Greene, “became the AFL’s first major achievement.”⁵⁰ AFL president Samuel Gompers maintained as much himself: “While in every previous industrial crisis the trade unions were literally mowed down and swept out of existence, the unions now in existence have manifested, not only the power of resistance, but of stability and permanence.”⁵¹ The labor movement grew rapidly after the depression – trade union membership more than quadrupled between 1897 and 1904, rising from 440,000 to 2,067,000. The American Federation of Labor, moreover, achieved its unquestioned status as the dominant force within the labor movement during these years – representing eighty-one percent of all U.S. union members by 1904.⁵²

Gompers and other AFL leaders attributed the progress of the labor movement at the turn of the century to their own conservative stewardship and the inherent strengths of pure-and-simple craft unionism. “On every side,” Gompers propounded in regards to the state of the AFL under his leadership in late 1899, “we see the splendid evidences of our

Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987); Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982).

⁵⁰ Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 37.

⁵¹ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1893), 12.

⁵² David Montgomery, “Workers' Movements in the United States Confront Imperialism: The Progressive Era Experience,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 7:1 (January 2008), 14.

efforts in the improved economic and social condition of our people.”⁵³ The Federation’s leadership affirmed their principle of organizing only skilled craft unions at the 1901 AFL convention in Scranton, Pennsylvania, declaring “the magnificent growth of the A.F. of L.” was “the result of organization on trade lines.”⁵⁴ The American Federation of Labor expanded in size and stature, in other words, at the same time it became narrower and more conservative in its actions and policies. Samuel Gompers and his supporters increased the authority of the federation’s executive council, maneuvered to suppress internal dissent from more radical members, allied with capitalists in the National Civic Foundation, opposed all efforts at organizing unskilled workers, expanded the use of “No Strike” contracts, eschewed election politics in favor of federal lobbying campaigns, and curtailed the independence of urban central labor unions and state federations of labor.

The AFL’s metamorphosis into an “aristocracy of labor” – the turn towards conservative craft unionism in which a small minority of skilled laborers vigorously defended their own privileges, often to the detriment of the working class as a whole – emerged out of the realities of the depression and the specific policy choices of the federation’s leadership between 1897 and 1904. The AFL and its union members, however, were scarcely secure in their social and economic position even after the federation’s considerable growth. Following the economic depression, America’s unemployment rate remained high – it was 12% in 1900 and failed to drop below 10% over the ensuing decade.⁵⁵ Unemployment continued to define the lives of both

⁵³ “The Voice of Labor,” *Helena Independent*, Dec. 12, 1899, 5.

⁵⁴ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-First Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1901), 240.

⁵⁵ James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 21.

organized and unorganized labor: a 1901 Bureau of Labor Statistics study of 25,000 working-class families (union as well as non-union) discovered that half of the principle breadwinners were unemployed for an average of two months each year.⁵⁶ AFL members and other union workers found themselves increasingly threatened on all sides of the social landscape. Corporate conglomerates expanded their power and reach and, in turn, used that strength to enforce “open shops” and other anti-union agendas. Meanwhile, the massive influx of “new immigrants” (immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe) following the depression increased job competition and, combined with the millions of unskilled laborers already in the United States and the rapid proliferation of labor-saving machinery, led union workers to worry about the future of skilled labor.⁵⁷

Organized laborers’ confused and contradictory responses to the challenges they faced from “above” and “below” at the turn of the century were indicative of a social group in the midst of a drastic ideological upheaval. On the surface, many union workers continued to invoke an idiom that had clearly become outmoded, even as the leadership of the American Federation of Labor repeatedly aimed to adapt skilled labor to the contemporary demands of corporate capitalism. AFL leaders occasionally professed their fidelity to the republican ideals of the past, particularly when social, political and economic expediency propelled them to seek the mantle of “mouthpiece for the entire working class.” Many rank-and-file workers, in contrast, steadfastly identified with the language of nineteenth-century producerism well into the twentieth century – finding

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25. Moreover, during 1900 6.5 million workers, or 25% of all workers over the age of ten, were out of work at some point or another. More than 2 million were unemployed for four to six months. Noel Jacob Kent, *American in 1900* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 80.

⁵⁷ Green, *World of the Worker*, 46-50.

meaning in a fleeting value-system that nevertheless persisted awkwardly alongside the machinations of conservative “business unionists.”

White union workers moved to salvage the specter of a shared working-class identity – one crumbling at the turn of the twentieth century – by safeguarding their legacy of racial privilege. They sought class unity, in other words, through the preservation of racial superiority. Turn-of-the-century craft unions “were never able to achieve total security,” historian Alexander Saxton notes, and were therefore “obliged to appeal for support from sympathizers outside their own ranks.” The AFL, in particular, was more likely to gain support “from the white working class as a whole if the attention of that class was not too firmly riveted on the fact that fewer than one in ten workers enjoyed the benefits of craft unionism.” “A high level of racial hostility centered attention on racial differences between white and non-white,” Saxton continues, “rather than on cultural differences among immigrants, between immigrants and native born, or on economic differences between skilled and unskilled.” Racism, therefore, “tended for this reason to unite the white labor force across differences of ethnic background and across inequalities of wages and working conditions.” “The white supremacist commitment – part of the American heritage of artisan egalitarianism – worked to the advantage of skilled craft unionism,” Saxton concludes, because it enabled “it to draw upon the political and economic resources of the white working class without assuming the responsibility to defend the interests and needs of the class as a whole.”⁵⁸

Working-class “whiteness” was oppositional in nature – set in contrast to the “racially inferior” workers who purportedly undercut the “dignity” of white labor and

⁵⁸ Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 2003), 315.

threatened to deny them their rightful place as sole inheritors of the American Republic. Union workers conjured the material and psychological “wages” of whiteness in the midst of forging an “aristocracy of labor” in order to exploit, at least on some level, unskilled and unorganized white workers who had increasingly found themselves bereft of the benefits – or even outside the considerations – of the American labor movement. Union workers, furthermore, continued to exclude and disparage black and Asian workers within the United States – formulating an image of the “Other” that effectively veiled the similar economic conditions shared by unskilled laborers regardless of race. The American Federation of Labor officially endorsed racial segregation in 1900 and fought successfully for the renewal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1902; union workers reacted violently to the use of African-American or Asian-American labor as strike-breakers; and organized labor maintained a racial discourse that laid a significant portion of the blame for white working-class deprivations on black and Asian workers’ “willingness” to work for low wages.⁵⁹ Finally, organized labor attempted to fuse white working-class interests at the turn of the century to an anti-imperial policy based upon the protection of workers’ racial privilege from the “Asiatic hordes” of America’s colonial possessions.

⁵⁹ For Samuel Gompers’ remark setting an official policy of racial exclusion, see: American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1900), 22-23. (hereafter cited as AFL, *Twentieth Proceedings*, 1900) For an example of the AFL’s activities in support of the Chinese Exclusion Act, see: American Federation of Labor, *Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion. Meat vs. Rice. American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism. Which Shall Survive?* Senate Doc. No. 137, 57th Congress, 1st Session (Washington D. C.: 1902). For more on racial conflict and violence towards African-American strikebreakers, see: Paul D. Moreno, *Black Americans and Organized Labor: A New History* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For an example of the racial violence against African-American strikebreakers, see: Rosemary Feuer, “Remember Virden! The Coal Mine Wars of 1898-1900,” *Illinois History Teacher*, vol. 13: 2 (2006); 10-22. For scholarship on the role xenophobic anti-immigration policies played within organized labor, see: Gwendolyn Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party and State, 1875-1920* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

Although much of the labor movement coalesced around race-based anti-imperialism in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War, there were exceptions. Labor proponents of territorial expansion united behind economic self-interest and the earnest longing to be embraced as patriotic American citizens. J.W. Bramwood, spokesman for the printers' union, believed imperialism was a signpost for national "progress" and claimed in May of 1899 that American occupation of Cuba "certainly has immensely benefited the printing business."⁶⁰ Bramwood also expected that the printing industry would "flourish more than heretofore" in Hawaii "now that English is the language of the schools."⁶¹ A number of the railroad brotherhoods also supported imperialism, as they contended colonies would be a boon to U.S. trade and the railroad industry alike. E.E. Clark, Grand Chief Conductor of the Order of Railway Conductors of America and Chairman of the Federation of American Railway Employees, heralded the nation upon entering "a new era which will be filled with commercial victories no less brilliant than those which have marked the progress of the [Spanish-American] War." All America's future imperial success required was for patriotic Americans to "stand behind these leaders and aid them in every possible way in carrying out the tremendous tasks imposed

⁶⁰ J.W. Bramwood, "Expansion and Other Topics," *Typographical Journal*, March 1, 1899, 214; *Ibid.* May 1, 1899, 382. Conservative leaders of the International Typographical Union (ITU) were some of labor's most outspoken advocates of America's Empire. Samuel Donnelly, the president of the ITU fully endorsed U.S. expansion, claiming in opposition to other AFL delegates' reticence, "the greatness of the English nation rests largely in its colonial policy" and "we must either come under the wing of that great power or put ourselves on an equal footing with it." Donnelly's implication, of course, was that he meant for the United States to join Great Britain as a world imperial power, not succumb to it. AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 94.

⁶¹ J.W. Bramwood, "Notes of Interest," *Typographical Journal*, Oct. 1, 1900, 282. Similar professions were made within the Bricklayers and Masons' International Union. For example: Fred Anderson, a member of the Bricklayers and Masons' International Union (BMIU), wrote from Havana in early 1899 that "this country (Cuba) will present wide opportunities to the ambitious of our craft." "From 'Our War Correspondent,'" *Bricklayer and Mason*, March 20, 1899, 5.

upon them by the victories they have won.”⁶² Later, celebrating the first year of America’s global empire, Clark mused over the “hundred million dollars a year” that appeared “to be the present market offered to the people of the United States by Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines.”⁶³

The printers and railroad brotherhoods exemplified how the conservative policies of pure-and-simple craft unionism actually induced some labor leaders to seek immediate material and cultural advancement through support of American imperialism. They also exposed the convoluted relationship between white workers’ entrenched racism and potential craft gains through imperialism. E.E. Clark, who actually devoted considerable space in the *Railway Conductor* to his own racist denunciations of African-Americans, downplayed any “threat” posed to skilled white labor:

Under the most favorable of conditions years must elapse before these new citizens could hope to compete in any considerable measure with skilled mechanics, so their competition must be insignificant, at least until time has had opportunity to make all ready for the changes. When we consider their distance from our shores, their surroundings and the climatic conditions which have taken part in moulding their character, it seems safe to assume for them a permanent place in furnishing the common labor the development of the vast resources which have lain untouched in these islands under the Spanish rule.⁶⁴

Samuel Donnelly, on the other hand, admitted that he desired an empire despite the drawback of “the employment of (Chinese) contract labor.” Foreshadowing other union laborers’ eventual acquiescence to American imperialism, Donnelly embraced the

⁶² E.E. Clark, “The Cause of Humanity Won,” *Railway Conductor*, Sept. 1898, 628.

⁶³ E.E. Clark, Editorial, *Railway Conductor*, Jan. 1900, 26.

⁶⁴ E.E. Clark, “Our Future National Policy,” *Railway Conductor*, Oct. 1898, 694. Clark even went as far to defend the lynching of African-Americans in the U.S. South. See, for example: E.E. Clark, “The Negro as an Equal,” *Railway Conductor*, Sept. 1899, 697-98.

benefits of empire as early as December 1898, maintaining that competition with Asian contract labor was “the one thing we need to fight; that is all.”⁶⁵

Conservative pro-empire labor leaders predominantly skirted the race issue. D.L. Cease, the influential voice of the *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, joined his fellow railroad brotherhood leader E.E. Clark in downplaying the issue, stating that he did “not believe there is much to be feared in the assumption of United States control [in Hawaii and the Philippines] if the people demand in unmistakable terms the protection of American labor.”⁶⁶ Most pure-and-simple imperialists simply ignored the racial make-up of the islanders. One prominent union leader told journalist Dexter Marshall, “The probability is that new enterprises requiring the services of many skilled American workmen will shortly be established in both Cuba and Porto Rico, to say nothing of Hawaii or the Philippines, and this will cause a demand for labor that will surely tend to increase wages.” Any mention of race was conspicuously absent; instead, the unionist hoped that, with U.S. firmly committed to expansion, “the wage earners of the country may reap every available benefit from the coming quickening of the country’s industrial pulse.”⁶⁷

Union imperialists hardly seized the mantle of the “white man’s burden;” on the contrary, labor leaders usually ignored, evaded, or spoke wearily of the racial make-up of the islands’ inhabitants when declaring themselves in support of empire. Historian Eric T. L. Love correctly notes that historians have tended to over-generalize when discussing the influence of “white man’s burden” or “benevolent assimilation” rhetoric among those

⁶⁵ AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 94.

⁶⁶ D.L. Cease, “Labor Interests and Annexation,” *Railroad Trainmen’s Journal*, Dec. 1898, 991-992.

⁶⁷ “Labor Men Discussing Samuel Gompers’ Latest Utterances,” *Grand Rapids Herald*, Aug. 23, 1898, 8.

justifying U.S. territorial expansion.⁶⁸ Many imperialists, in fact, purposely avoided using such language since Americans dedicated to white supremacy would have bristled at placing “racially inferior” groups at the center of U.S. policies. Such advocates of empire, Love maintains, “reacted with silences, disingenuous evasions and denials that race had anything to do with their expansionist projects.”⁶⁹ By the turn of the twentieth century, organized labor had a decades-long history of opposing Asian immigration to the United States. White workers, furthermore, had developed a collective ideology during the nineteenth century largely predicated on the retention of racial hierarchy and the insistence that they alone were to inherit the American Republic. Nearly all white union workers shared the commitment to white supremacy – when it came to the United States’ turn-of-the-century imperial forays, however, the labor movement divided primarily over the degree of trepidation workers held towards the colonial dependents. Pro-empire unionists were always on the defensive regarding the “race issue.” They reveled in the potential economic benefits of empire, more confident than most union members that white labor would prevail over (or, at least, be protected by the U.S. government from) the “Asiatic hordes.”

While certain conservative business unionists (particularly those who envisioned material gains for their craft) rallied their efforts behind the nation’s territorial expansion in the Caribbean and Pacific, American Socialists initially failed to agree upon whether “imperialism” was even a question union workers should be debating. Numerous Socialists, for instance, dismissed the issue entirely. “What but meaningless phrases are

⁶⁸ Eric T.L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 6.

⁶⁹ Love, *Race over Empire*, xi-xii.

‘imperialism,’ ‘expansion,’ ‘free silver,’ ‘gold standard,’ etc., to the wage worker,” asked Eugene Debs. “These issues,” he decided, “do not concern the working class.”⁷⁰ Max Hayes, an important Socialist voice in the AFL, agreed, claiming, “We cannot afford to trifle with this question as workers,” as it was only “a scheme of the politicians to confuse them and attract their attention from a question of vital interest to labor.” “As trade unionists,” Hayes concluded, “we should wash our hands of this capitalistic proposition and have nothing to do with it.”⁷¹

When U.S. Socialists denied the validity of the imperialism debate they did so based upon a Marxist-inspired interpretation of global economics that deemed territorial expansion an “inevitable” offshoot of the capitalist system. Eugene Debs professed, “My sympathy is entirely with the Filipino who objects to being governed by Wall Street,” but pronounced imperialism to be merely a minor part in “the central, controlling, vital issue of the hour.” “The working class must get rid of the whole brood of masters and exploiters,” Debs averred, “and put themselves in possession and control of the means of production.”⁷² Other American Socialists demanded U.S. workers not give countenance to the political conflict regarding overseas territorial acquisitions. Instead, they called on

⁷⁰ Eugene V. Debs, “Outlook for Socialism in the United States,” *International Socialist Review*, vol. 1, no. 8 (September 1900), 132-133. Debs, the most influential Socialist in the United States in the early twentieth century, continued to make these arguments. In 1904, for instance, Debs declared, “The capitalists may have the tariff, finance, imperialism and other dust-covered and moth-eaten issues entirely to themselves. The rattle of these relics no longer deceives workingmen whose heads are on their own shoulders. They know by experience and observation that...imperialism and anti-imperialism...mean capitalist rule and wage-slavery.” Eugene V. Debs, “The Socialist Party and the Working Class,” *International Socialist Review*, vol. 5 (1904-1905), 130.

⁷¹ AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 95. Imperialism, argued New Jersey Socialist Labor Party member Matthew Maguire, was a “humbug issue,” nothing more than “the wild attempt of the antiquated and corrupt old parties...to throw dust in the eyes of the people and distract attention from the industrial problems.” “True Sense,” *The People*, March 26, 1899, 1.

⁷² “Debs in a Hopeful Mood,” *World-Herald* (Omaha), Jan. 12, 1900, 2; Eugene Debs, “Outlook for Socialism in the United States,” *International Socialist Review*, vol. 1, no. 8 (September 1900); 133.

workers to dedicate all of their attention to a “greater” calling – the overthrow of capitalism.⁷³

Still other Socialists attacked American imperialism for its cruelty to the colonized, even though they considered them to be lesser beings compared to American workers. J.A. Wayland, editor of the *Appeal to Reason*, the most influential Socialist newspaper in the United States at the turn of the century, characterized the United States’ empire in the Pacific as “shooting them into submission, taking their country, and governing it for the benefit of American trusts and other legal outlaws.”⁷⁴ “The question of the annexation of the Philippines involves just one point,” determined Socialist Labor Party luminary Daniel De Leon, and that is “whether or not our capitalist class will allow the chance to slip through their fingers to lower the wages of the American workers 90 per cent, or more, and to do so under the guise of patriotic martyrdom.” He condemned American imperialism because it meant “reducing the higher standard of life of [American workers] down to, as near as possible, the standard of life of the [Filipinos].”⁷⁵ Al Ryan, a member of the Social Democratic Party, denounced U.S. imperialism as “a question of how much American product can be put into their market,” and sarcastically suspected “the poor heathen must be content to consume American product or die by the bayonet.”⁷⁶ Needless to say, many of the “poor heathens” to whom Ryan referred were

⁷³ H.L. Boothman, “Philosophy of Imperialism,” *International Socialist Review*, vol. 1, no. 4 (October 1900); 229; *Ibid.*, vol. 1, no. 5, (November 1900); 303; Boothman’s rendering of the “Socialist” position on U.S. imperialism was by far the most in-depth of the first three years of American empire.

⁷⁴ J.A. Wayland, Editorial, *Appeal to Reason*, Feb. 18, 1899. *Appeal to Reason* had the largest circulation of any Socialist-inspired newspaper, standing close to 100,000 in 1900.

⁷⁵ Daniel De Leon, “Paving the Way for Amalgamation with the Filipinos,” *The People*, Oct. 16, 1898, 2.

⁷⁶ Al Ryan, “Some Views on Expansion,” *Cleveland Citizen*, Oct. 20, 1900, 4. At the time of the debate over U.S. imperialism, Socialists were divided into competing factions, with Daniel De Leon’s Socialist

Catholics, having converted to the faith with the establishment of Spanish colonial rule at the end of the sixteenth century.

Most turn-of-the-century American Socialists concluded that the capitalist system spawned U.S. imperialism; they merely disagreed over what – if anything – workers should do about it. American Socialists, however, generally failed to formulate a coherent policy opposing U.S. imperialism during the early years of the twentieth century, despite the considerable vitriol they often directed towards capitalist-imperialists. This omission resulted from the “scientific” fatalism that increasingly governed the worldview of many American Socialists at the turn of the century. Their view on international relations, historian W.H. Peterson explains, was hampered by “impossibilism,” a mindset that made them reject “the idea that significant reform was possible under capitalism.”⁷⁷ Socialists, therefore, mainly ignored the “here-and-now” battle against imperialism, which meant that they, the voices within labor perhaps most likely to forge a broad ideological opposition to American empire, willingly removed themselves from the discussion.

Organized labor’s campaign against American territorial expansion advanced, instead, under the narrower constructs of the American Federation of Labor’s conservative brand of craft unionism. Labor’s opposition to empire was, however,

Labor Party and Eugene Debs’ Social Democratic Party the most prominent antagonists. Both groups had considerable internal dissent, as well.

⁷⁷ Walfred H. Peterson, “The Foreign Policy of the Socialist Party of America before World War I,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, vol. 65, no. 4 (October 1974); 179. Peterson continues: “Reasons given for this rejection varied. One, stressing a primitive economic determinism and consciously or unconsciously questioning the utility of the Socialist party, maintained that evolutionary economic – not political – forces produced all social change. Another, emphasizing the class struggle, said that reforms were impossible or only illusions, because the ruling bourgeoisie had an antireform interest that could not be overridden. In partial contradiction to these considerations, one practical reason cited for impossibilism asserted that the promise of reforms for the here-and-now diverted attention and energy from the real issue, the overthrow of capitalism. True revolutionaries should not go around encouraging the workers to spend effort improving the hated competitive system.”

strengthened by the growing influence of the AFL (and the trade union movement as a whole) in America's social and political landscape. Many of the labor movement's most influential spokesmen denounced imperialism, including the last line of producerist-inspired unionists like J.P. McDonnell and George E. McNeill as well as the vanguards of business unionism like Samuel Gompers, Andrew Furuseth, and George W. Perkins. Workers' willingness to join the anti-imperialist cause was no doubt buttressed by the existence of a wider movement headlined by some of America's most significant public leaders. The American Anti-Imperialist League actively courted the support of union workers, while Gompers' participation in the League was consistently commented upon by the national press. The rank-and-file, moreover, actively protested against imperial policies between 1898 and 1901, as thousands of union workers attended anti-imperialism rallies.⁷⁸

Yet, far too much has been made about the connections between organized labor and the wider Anti-Imperialist movement led, for the most part, by conservative political figures, Mugwumps, middle-class "progressives" and wealthy New Englanders.⁷⁹ Despite sharing some of the language and arguments of the Anti-Imperialist League – and, to a large extent, the 1898 to 1901 relevant time-frame – organized labor's anti-imperialism discourse reflected the particular concerns and ideologies of turn-of-the-century union workers. Members of the rank-and-file as well as union spokesmen drew the distinction between colonialism in the Pacific and all previous U.S. expansion in North America and assailed the annexation of Hawaii and the Philippines because it

⁷⁸ See Chapter IV, note 10 and 11.

⁷⁹ For scholarship that has over-emphasized the connection between the Anti-Imperialist League and organized labor, see: Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 426-437; Love, *Race Over Empire*, 181-186.

would force the American working class into competition with the islands' cheap labor and the products of that cheap labor. Numerous union branches – like the Trades and Labor Assembly of Superior, Wisconsin; the Labor Council of San Francisco; and the Cigar Makers' Union no. 129, of Denver, Colorado – sent anti-imperialism petitions to Congress.⁸⁰ “As workingmen,” read the Denver union branch’s petition to Congress, “we protest against the admission to our ranks of a horde of semi-civilized races whose highest wants can be...[met by] 5 cents to 15 cents per day.” “Against such competition,” these workers declared, “there can be no defense.”⁸¹ Even worse was that, as American territories, the inhabitants of the islands – described by Samuel Gompers as “a semi-barbaric population almost primitive in their habits and customs, as unlike the people of the United States in thought, sentiment, education, morals, hopes, aspirations or governmental forms as night is to day” – could freely immigrate to the United States.⁸² Thus, from the outset, labor’s objection to American imperialism was conditional, based primarily upon the social, cultural, and economic threat posed to workers by the annexation of “racially inferior” colonials.

U.S. union spokesmen expressed contradictory opinions regarding which territories, if any, their nation was justified in seizing. They had little problem with the acquisition of small coaling stations in the Pacific – their “necessity” for trading and military purposes were accepted without question by most Americans. Cornelius Guiney, an important figure in Minnesota labor organizations, decried imperialism, yet

⁸⁰ *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 3rd Session, 882, 1639, 1221.

⁸¹ *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 3rd Session, 1221.

⁸² Samuel Gompers, speech delivered at the National Conference upon “The Future Foreign Policy of the United States” held in Saratoga, New York on Aug. 20, 1898; reproduced in *American Federationist*, Sept. 1898, 138.

simultaneously noted without irony that the United States must take “possession of certain rights on the [Philippine] Islands, at least to the extent of possessing ourselves and maintaining our right to a coaling station there and in the Ladrões.”⁸³ Some union leaders thought that extending U.S. dominion into Asia was unreasonable, but that America was justified in seizing Puerto Rico. “We are opposed to imperial conquest and the plundering of the natives of [the Philippine] islands,” declared Frank A. Kennedy, editor of the *Western Laborer*. “With contiguous territory like Porto Rico the case is different,” Kennedy equivocated, since the U.S. had “no foothold in the West Indies, which are virtually in American waters, we would be justified in holding Porto Rico.”⁸⁴ Labor was torn, to some extent, in their predictions concerning the future of Cuba. Jared Sater, a Lafayette, Indiana worker, bewailed the imperialist land-grab that added “Porto Rico and the Philippines for companion pieces to Honolulu,” and lamented, “Cuba alone will be made a free republic.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, a New York cigarmaker named Harris, warned in November 1898 of “a movement on foot to annex Cuba.”⁸⁶ Labor’s *primary objection* to U.S. expansion, however, was the annexation of Hawaii and, to a much larger extent, the Philippines. It was fear of the “Asian hordes” that united much of the labor movement against empire.

⁸³ Cornelius Guiney, “The Philippines,” *Minnesota Union Advocate*, Sept. 23, 1898, 2. The Ladrões were former Spanish colonies that consisted of Guam and the current-day Mariana Islands.

⁸⁴ Frank A. Kennedy, “The Dilemma and the Remedy,” *Western Laborer*, Dec. 31, 1898, 2.

⁸⁵ Jared Sater, “Some Thoughts on the War,” *The Union* (Indianapolis), Feb. 18, 1899, 2. A few labor spokesmen, such as A.R. Hamilton of the *National Labor Tribune*, expressed their support for U.S. annexation of Cuba – *but only if Cubans so desired*: “If Cuba should voluntarily renounce her independence in our favor, we might annex her without dishonor.” A.R. Hamilton, “The President’s Message,” *National Labor Tribune*, Dec. 8, 1898, 1.

⁸⁶ “The Central Labor Union,” *New York Times*, Nov. 14, 1898, 2.

Many “anti-imperialist” workers made it clear that they did not, however, oppose “expansion” in principal. White workers had, like most Americans, internalized a loosely-defined conception of “manifest destiny” and, given the right circumstances, were not necessarily averse to its extension. Yet, also like many Americans, white union workers assumed, in the words of historian Eric T. L. Love, “territorial expansion should be for the principal if not exclusive benefit of whites.”⁸⁷ The ideology underpinning Americans’ concept of “manifest destiny” had its antecedents in the founding justifications for the European colonization of North America, namely the principle that the nation – or race – that harnessed the productive capacity of the land to the fullest extent had a natural (or God-given) right to it. Organized labor opposed the acquisition of Hawaii and the Philippines – populated, in their mind, by millions of “racially inferior” natives – because, among other reasons, they supposed the lands would not – or even could not – be settled by white Americans.

Between 1898 and 1901, union workers repeatedly reiterated their support for contiguous “settler” colonialism and rejected overseas, or “franchise,” colonialism. Delegates to the Western Federation of Miners convention declared, “We are opposed to the expansion of our national boundaries for the acquisition of territory, populated by other than the Caucasian race.”⁸⁸ “Expansion by natural growth in thinly settled contiguous territory...for the expressed purpose of ultimate statehood,” professed J.F. McBride of the Pattern Makers League of North America, “cannot be confounded with, or made analogous to, foreign territory conquered by law and wrested by force from a

⁸⁷ Love, *Race Over Empire*, 20.

⁸⁸ “Miners Demand Radical Steps,” *Idaho Daily Statesman*, June 4, 1901, 1.

weak enemy.”⁸⁹ Sam L. Leffingwell, a printer and veteran leader of the U.S. labor movement, favored “the extension of boundary lines to contiguous, neighboring territory, in which the assimilation of a people to our own habits, customs and methods of government...would be of ultimate accomplishment.” Expansion “far away from the motherland out into distant seas, over unwilling peoples,” on the other hand, “has its detriment.”⁹⁰ Henry White, influential business unionist and editor of the *Garment Worker*, proclaimed, “Larger area is beneficial when it naturally comes as a result of an expanding civilization, but not when home interests are disregarded and the vitality of the country is drawn upon in order to sustain foreign possessions, and which first makes necessary the subjection of the native races.”⁹¹ Finally, no one was clearer about the distinctions between manifest destiny and empire in the Pacific than Gompers:

We have ruled savages against their will in the process of our uprooting of the Indian tribes, but never where it was not reasonably certain that their places would soon be taken by a settled white population many times as great as that of any wilderness occupied only by nomadic hunters and warriors. In the Philippines, with its 7,000,000 or 8,000,000 in an area less than half that of the State of Texas, no such change can ever take place.⁹²

⁸⁹ J.F. McBride, “Imperialism,” *Pattern Makers’ Journal*, located in *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, April 1899, 380.

⁹⁰ Sam L. Leffingwell, “The Trade Union Movement,” *American Federationist*, July 1899, 98. Such declarations were *extremely common*. Other examples include: “All Americans are for expansion in right directions and on correct principles,” commented labor advocate Patrick O’Farrell in a letter written in the spring of 1900, but the acquisition of the Philippines was “not expansion. It is ‘pure and unadulterated imperialism,’ and is incompatible with the basic principles of our government.” Patrick O’Farrell, “Captain O’Farrell’s Principles – He Opposes Philippine Policy,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, April 1900, 3; John W. Hayes, longtime secretary of the Knights of Labor, supported “‘national expansion’ of the right kind,” in which “American workingmen” have the chance for “more employment, shorter hours of labor, and better wages.” “But,” Hayes determined, “they see nothing of the sort in the countries which war has put in our possession.” John W. Hayes, “National Expansion,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Feb. 1899, 4; Sidney J. Kent, a Nebraska carpenter, explained that he “believed in expansion, but not the kind in vogue [in England].” AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 95.

⁹¹ *Garment Worker*, located in *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, May 27, 1899, p. 7

⁹² Samuel Gompers, speech delivered at the National Conference upon “The Future Foreign Policy of the United States” held in Saratoga, New York on Aug. 20, 1898; reproduced in *American Federationist*, Sept. 1898, 138.

Labor's race-based opposition to empire was related to Constitutional and legal questions regarding expansion. The United States acquired Hawaii and the former Spanish possessions in 1898, but the question of the territories' relationship to the United States was left to be determined by Congress and the courts. Contemporary legal and political scholars acknowledged that the United States had a right to acquire territory, but they disagreed over the legal status of the island possessions and how the territories should be governed. All previous U.S. territorial acquisitions had been incorporated as territories under the ultimate assumption of statehood, but very few Americans – imperialist or anti-imperialist – wanted the new acquisitions to become part of the United States. Thus, the nation's newly-seized territories in the Caribbean and Pacific (and their millions of non-white inhabitants) immediately caused a far-reaching debate regarding whether or not, in the parlance of the day, "the Constitution followed the flag."

Anti-imperialist union workers, such as John W. Hayes, argued "that the action of the President and those who surround him is in conflict with the Constitution of the United States." Hayes cited the 1857 Dred Scott decision in his much-publicized anti-imperialist circular in March 1899 to assert "we must either admit the Philippine islands as a state or a number of states or withdraw our troops from them."⁹³ Hayes preference, of course, was to withdraw American troops and relinquish sovereignty over the islands.

⁹³ John W. Hayes, Circular, reproduced in "Labor's Voice of Protest," *National Labor Tribune*, March 30, 1899, 8. The Dred Scott decision played an important role in debate over empire, generally, and the Insular Cases, specifically, due to Judge Roger Taney's majority opinion that declared the United States encompassed both the *territories* and the *states*: "There is certainly no power given by the constitution of the Federal government to establish and maintain colonies bordering on the United States, or at a distance, to be used and governed at its own pleasure...and if a new State is admitted, it needs no further legislation by Congress, because the Constitution itself defines the relative rights and duties of the State, and the citizens of the State, and the Federal government. But no power is given to acquire territory to be held and governed permanently in that character." Text from Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 47.

A.R. Hamilton, writing in the *National Labor Tribune* in February 1900, referenced the “uniformity clause” in his despondent admission that “the Constitution extends everywhere that the national authority does, and the United States extends as far as the Constitution.”⁹⁴ Samuel Gompers rejected the possibility of “a legislative barrier against...the Philippines, Hawaii, Cuba and Porto Rico” in a letter to F.B. Thurber, president of the United States Export Association. The AFL president relied upon the combined forces of the “Uniformity Clause,” the “Commerce Clause” and Judge Taney's Dred Scott decision to proclaim, “The Constitution of the United States forbids the interdiction of the free entry of men and their products between our States, Territories and possessions.”⁹⁵ Labor’s arguments, however, transcended the nuances of Constitutional law, as they maintained empire was a menace to the persistence of the white workers’ Republic.

Workers, as with the majority of Americans at the end of the nineteenth century, had long assumed that the United States could not acquire land or govern its inhabitants in a colonial relationship.⁹⁶ Anti-colonialism (notwithstanding the nation’s history of settler colonialism and control over Native Americans) was embedded within white Americans’ self-fashioned historical narrative. The United States’ new acquisitions, therefore, bred caution and uncertainty. “Our flag has been planted where our

⁹⁴ *National Labor Tribune*, February 15, 1900, p. 1; The “Uniformity Clause” in the U.S. Constitution (known, generally, as the “Taxing and Spending Clause”) reads: “The Congress shall have Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States; *but all Duties, Imposts and Excises shall be uniform throughout the United States.*” U.S. Const., art. I, § 4, cl. 1.

⁹⁵ Samuel Gompers to Francis B. Thurber, Nov. 25, 1898, Samuel Gompers’ Letter-books. The “Commerce Clause” gives Congress the power “to regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states, and with the Indian tribes.” U.S. Const., art. I, § 8, cl. 3.

⁹⁶ Love, *Race over Empire*, 20.

constitution can never follow,” worried John T. Wilson, editor of *Trackmen’s Advance Advocate*. “Shall we survive as a republic,” he mused, “or shall we perish as an empire?”⁹⁷ Frank A. Kennedy was even more explicit regarding the implications of U.S. control over the Philippines. “[They have] a large population of Chinese and half breeds,” Kennedy despaired. “What are we to make of these people? They cannot become citizens of the United States and we cannot make them ‘subjects’ of a republic.”⁹⁸ Workers’ conclusion that the nation’s new acquisitions would have to be incorporated into the United States was the generating force behind the labor movement’s anti-imperialism.

Anti-Militarism, Labor Republicanism, and a Commitment to White Supremacy

Samuel Gompers consciously seized the anti-imperialist leadership mantle within the labor movement – his failure to guide labor’s hand in the war-declaring process no doubt driving his resolve to steer the movement through the debate over empire. Years later, Gompers emphasized his guiding influence within the anti-imperialist cause, claiming that “even before our troops reached Spanish soil” he had initiated “protest[s] against any policy of imperialism.”⁹⁹ Gompers expressed his “very grave fear as to the future of our country” in his private correspondence as early as the summer of 1898. In a letter to AFL Treasurer John B. Lennon, he voiced his determination regarding the possibility of empire, promising “to enter an emphatic protest against anything that may

⁹⁷ John T. Wilson, “Railways, Wars, and Trusts,” *Trackmen’s Advance Advocate*, Sept. 1900, 520.

⁹⁸ Frank A. Kennedy, “An Unholy War,” *Western Laborer*, February 25, 1899, 1.

⁹⁹ Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography* (1924; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1957), 270.

endanger the standard of the wage earners of our country, or place an obstacle in their progress.”¹⁰⁰ Gompers carried his protest of imperialism to the rank-and-file of the labor movement, speaking at labor gatherings across the nation as well as using his opening speech at his federation’s 1898 convention to detail what was at stake for the American working class. “We cannot annex the Philippines without a large increase in our standing army,” stated Gompers, and “a large standing army is repugnant to republican institutions and a menace to the liberty of our own people.” The largest threat, however, came from outside U.S. borders. “If our interests as wage earners were endangered by the annexation of an island [Hawaii] with 100,000 inhabitants,” he asked rhetorically, “how much more is the danger in taking a group of islands inhabited by 8,000,000 of people, perhaps nearer the conditions of savages and barbarians than any island possessed by any other civilized nation on earth?” Finally, he called on the delegates to save the white workers’ republic:

It has always been the hewers of wood and the carriers of water, the wealth producers, whose mission it has been not only to struggle for freedom, but to be ever vigilant to maintain the liberty or freedom achieved; and it behooves the representatives of the grand army of labor, in convention assembled, to give vent to the alarm we feel from the dangers threatening us and our entire people, to enter our solemn and emphatic protest against what we already feel, that with the success of the policy of imperialism the decadence of our republic will have already set in.¹⁰¹

Organized labor constructed its anti-imperialist discourse on Gompers’ three essential components: anti-militarism, labor’s republican tradition (albeit one transformed by the realities of business unionism), and a commitment to white supremacy. Union workers’ traditional aversion to militarism – temporarily overcome in the spring of 1898

¹⁰⁰ Samuel Gompers to John B. Lennon, Aug. 16, 1898, Samuel Gompers’ Copybooks, XXIV, 571-572. See also, Gompers to Edward O’Donnell, Aug. 13, 1898, *ibid.*, 538.

¹⁰¹ AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 19-20.

– resurfaced in the aftermath of the Spanish-American War. The U.S. army, which had only 25,000 regulars prior to the War of 1898, expanded to over 126,000 by the beginning of the Philippine war for independence. U.S. government officials had, furthermore, indicated their intention to retain a much larger standing army in the future – as many as 150,000 regular soldiers, or six times more than before the war against Spain. In the spring of 1898, George W. Perkins attacked the patriotism of workers who expressed “cowardly prattle” towards war with Spain.¹⁰² Two years later, Perkins protested: “Expansion leads to imperialism which tends to militarism which leans to despotism, and all four lead to oppression and misery for the toiling masses as sure as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west.”¹⁰³ Chastened by the rapidity with which a supposed “people’s war” had turned into imperial conquest, labor leaders fervidly denounced a large standing army.

Anti-imperialist workers – across organizational and ideological lines – condemned the economic and human costs of militarism. Imperialism meant “we shall have the pleasure of paying about \$150,000,000 a year for the maintenance of the army,” J.P. McDonnell maintained, and it “won’t better the condition of the American wage-workers – *of those who will have to pay it.*”¹⁰⁴ That was not what he had in mind when he supported the war against Spain. J.D. Hailey, a Los Angeles worker, found it deplorable that empire cost “millions of dollars and many lives of the bravest and best of

¹⁰² George W. Perkins, Editorial, *Cigar Makers Journal*, May 1898, 9.

¹⁰³ George W. Perkins, Editorial, *Cigar Makers’ Journal*, March 1900, 9.

¹⁰⁴ J.P. McDonnell, “Editorial Notes,” *National Labor Standard*, Dec. 8, 1898; *Ibid.*, “Editorial Notes,” Jan. 12, 1899. Emphasis in original.

American men.”¹⁰⁵ Henry E. Allen, a Galesburg, Illinois union activist, pitied “every mother and father who receives a soldier son...shrouded in death from the Philippines,” bewailed “the sufferings of the Filipinos – their cities and villages in ashes...their thousands of dead and wounded,” and, finally, decried “this terrible slaughter in the name of commercialism and ‘new markets.’”¹⁰⁶

Labor’s opposition to a large imperial standing army was, however, based first and foremost upon the perceived threat military forces posed to the working class. Edward F. Boyce, president of the radical Western Federation of Miners, rejected “an increase in the standing army” as it had “no other significance but the complete subjection of the laboring masses.”¹⁰⁷ A branch of rank-and-file Denver workers agreed, decrying a standing imperial army as a force “of repression and coercion.”¹⁰⁸ W.S. Carter, a prominent voice in the more conservative railroad brotherhoods, shuddered at militarism’s consequences for labor in the summer of 1899, predicting “that within the next few years *plutocracy will attempt to exterminate trade unions by law*, and to create a vast standing army by which the spirit of the common people will be crushed.”¹⁰⁹ Labor did not have to look deep into its past – or thousands of miles away to Asia, for that matter – to recognize the menace of militarism. Less than three months after U.S. troops and Filipino soldiers exchanged the first shots of the Philippine War for Independence,

¹⁰⁵ J.D. Hailey, “The Issues Ahead,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Sept. 9, 1899, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Henry E. Allen, “Squibs,” *Galesburg Labor News* (Ill.), Sept. 1, 1900.

¹⁰⁷ “King Labor’s Great Day,” *Butte Weekly Miner*, Sept. 7, 1899, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 3rd Session, 1221.

¹⁰⁹ W.S. Carter, “Militarism vs. Industrialism,” *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, July 1899, 38. Emphasis in original. Such expressions of fear were extremely common: Henry E. Allen demanded to know, “What assurances have I that the person who favors shooting down men that have never done us injury, seven thousand miles away, for maintaining their rights will not favor shooting down American workingmen for demanding their rights?” Henry E. Allen, “Squibs,” *Galesburg Labor News* (Ill.), Nov. 4, 1899.

federal soldiers were called to Coeur d'Alene, Idaho to suppress a strike of the miners against a mining company owned by the Standard Oil Trust.¹¹⁰ The governor of Idaho declared a state of martial law and suspended *habeas corpus*, while Federal troops under the control of Brigadier General Henry Clay Merriam indiscriminately arrested some seven-hundred miners. Merriam had the miners imprisoned for months in large improvised "bull-pens" under extremely harsh conditions. Federal troops remained in Coeur d'Alene until April 1901 and effectively destroyed unionism in the area by utilizing the U.S. military to enforce an edict prohibiting the employment of union members on the mines.

Workers and labor leaders across the country reacted with justified alarm – "It is the beginning of the end," Charles F. Chase, editor of the *Industrial Advocate*, remarked, as Coeur d'Alene meant "large standing armies...and civil and military authorities ever ready to crush labor organizations."¹¹¹ Union workers immediately connected imperialism abroad with militarism at home. The actions of the military at Coeur d'Alene, declared a New York member of the Waiters' Union named Rubin, "is the

¹¹⁰ For scholarship on the Coeur d'Alene bullpens, see: Foner, *History of the Labor Movement*, 2: 430-431; Katherine G. Aiken, "'It May Be Too Soon to Crow': Bunker Hill and Sullivan Company Efforts to Defeat the Miners' Union, 1890-1900," *Western Historical Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3 (Aug., 1993); 309-331. The strike began on April 23, 1899 after the Bunker Hill and Sullivan Mining and Concentrating Company refused to recognize the Western Federation of Miners' union. On April 29, a large group of strikers and supporters seized a train and attacked the Bunker Hill and Sullivan mine. Idaho governor Frank Steunenberg requested the aid of federal troops to suppress the strike and soon after declared martial law. Federal troops under the leadership of Brigadier General Henry Clay Merriam, called to crush the strike because Idaho's militia was on duty in the Philippines, indiscriminately arrested around seven-hundred men. Having already suspended *habeas corpus*, the U.S. army and state officials imprisoned the miners in harsh conditions in boxcars, a barn, and an improvised "bull pen" prison. By the end of July 1899, nearly two-hundred miners were still in custody. Federal troops did not leave the Idaho district until April 1901.

¹¹¹ Charles F. Chase, Editorial, *Industrial Advocate* (Denver), reproduced in "A Taste of Militarism," *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, Sept. 1899, 267. Likewise, H.C. Smalley felt a deep sense of foreboding, imagining the government's actions in Idaho signified, "there is no place in the United States where any poor man is guaranteed liberty." H.C. Smalley, "Worse than Spaniards," *Galesburg Labor News*, July 29, 1899.

outcome of imperialism”¹¹² “Imperialism and militarism simply mean the assumption of power and taking the power out of the hands of the people,” cried Samuel Gompers during an address at a large public meeting in Cincinnati protesting the Coeur d’Alene bull-pens, and “the outrages which have been perpetrated in Idaho is but one of the phases of militarism which is now so rampant among those who would deprive the people of their rights and the country of its republican character.”¹¹³ Walter MacArthur, editor of the *Coast Seaman’s Journal*, declared “the root of militarism, as we find it in Idaho, and as we may shortly find it in other states, lies in the policy now being pursued by the Government toward the Cubans and Filipinos.”¹¹⁴

The link between militarism and imperialism transcended the employment of a large standing army – both endangered the white workers’ republic. “The only effectual method of suppressing militarism at home,” MacArthur assured workers, “is to prevent its establishment abroad.”¹¹⁵ Merriam’s forces included a large contingent of African-American troops – to some white union workers this was an example of the degradation white labor would suffer from imperialism. Cornelius Guiney, editor of the *Minnesota Union Advocate*, protested against white union workers in Idaho being subjected “to the dominion of armed niggers”:

That is the condition in Idaho today. It is exactly the same condition which prevails in the former Spanish possessions...with this substantial difference: That they have reserved the nigger soldiers for doing the dirty work of militarism at home, and sent the white soldier abroad...The civil rights of the people of the United States, and not merely of a lot of half-breed niggers and Malays in Cuba

¹¹² “Labor Demands a Halt,” *World-Herald* (Omaha), May 15, 1899, 1.

¹¹³ “Militarism,” *Machinists’ Monthly Journal*, Dec. 1899, 792.

¹¹⁴ Walter MacArthur, Editorial, *Coast Seaman’s Journal*, reproduced in *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, Sept. 1899, 274.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

and the Philippines, are invaded by the strong arm of military dominion, and there is none to raise a voice outside of the representatives of labor.¹¹⁶

Labor's anti-militarism discourse, however, was more commonly directed at the similarities between government actions in the colonies and in Idaho, implying that white workers were being treated like racially inferior colonial subjects. Addressing the mass protest in Cincinnati, Samuel Gompers compared "the conditions as they prevail in Idaho" to the "slave-like conditions prevailing in Hawaii, or, if you look down East [to the] Filipinos." Miners at Coeur d'Alene, like inhabitants of the former Spanish possessions, were being forced "to swallow their liberty at the point of bayonets."¹¹⁷ The Republic was at stake, alleged the labor movement's most prestigious figure, "and the only people who can hope to maintain liberty are the organized workers of our country."¹¹⁸

Samuel Gompers may have called upon workers to "protect" the Republic, but anti-imperialist union workers, as with opponents of empire elsewhere in the United States, faced accusations of treason for their denunciation of the nation's foreign policy – particularly as U.S. troops continued to battle the Philippine independence movement. Visions of labor's acceptance into the mainstream of American decision-makers appeared to evaporate in the face of charges that labor leaders were acting un-patriotically in denouncing expansion. "So far as Gompers' loose talk means anything," Charles E. Warburton, editor of the Philadelphia *Evening Telegraph*, reproached, "it means

¹¹⁶ Cornelius Guiney, Editorial, *Minnesota Union Advocate*, reproduced in *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, Sept. 1899, 277.

¹¹⁷ "Militarism," *Monthly Journal of the International Association of Machinists*, Dec. 1899, 791.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 793.

treasonable hostility to the Government of this nation.”¹¹⁹ Occasionally, criticism came from within the labor movement. A number of representatives to the New Jersey Labor Congress in August of 1899 actually shouted “anarchy” and “treason” towards J.P. McDonnell as he attempted to read a resolution opposing expansion.¹²⁰ But the rank-and-file never organized in support of empire, as most of the uproar against labor’s anti-imperialism emanated from outside the workers’ movement. “Anyone who differs with the policy of those who are trying with might and main to foist imperialism and militarism upon the people of our country,” griped cigar-maker George W. Perkins, “are accused of being traitors and traducers of the flag.”¹²¹ These indictments, occurring so soon after the patriotic panegyrics to social unity at Spanish-American War flag-raising, must have been particularly distressful to the representatives of the organized working class. They responded with a condemnation of imperialists’ arguments for empire and a vigorous defense of labor’s vision for – as well as place within – the American Republic.

Anti-imperialist union workers argued that territorial expansion would only benefit the capitalist “money powers.” George W. Perkins, a close friend and confidant of Samuel Gompers, objected to the subjugation of the Filipinos since “the expense will have to be borne by the people, while a favored few – trusts and monopolies – will receive all the profits of the result of our exploiting this defenseless people.”¹²² Such criticisms of empire – often made in especially vivid terms – were exceedingly common

¹¹⁹ *Evening Telegraph* (Philadelphia), Jan. 23, 1899. Originally located in Foner, *History of the U.S. Labor Movement*, 2: 424.

¹²⁰ J.P. McDonnell, “Labor Against Imperialism” *National Labor Standard*, Aug. 24, 1899; J.P. McDonnell, “American Organized Labor Stands by the Declaration of Independence,” *National Labor Standard*, Aug. 31, 1899.

¹²¹ George W. Perkins, Editorial, *Cigar Makers’ Journal*, Oct. 1899, 8.

¹²² George W. Perkins, Editorial, *Cigar Makers’ Journal*, Jan. 1899, 8.

between 1898 and 1901. Frank A. Kennedy grieved for Americans who were “sacrificing their sons on the altar of a coldblooded, unpatriotic commercialism to further enrich the trusts and vampire speculators who propose to fatten on the blood of our children by the spoliation of the Filipinos.”¹²³ Likewise, Henry Francis Slade, a Deer Creek, Maryland worker, condemned “the imperialistic hosts of monopolistic rapacity, whose mission is to obtain permanent possession of the reins of government for the subjugation of the industrial masses and finally the destruction of our Constitution and the complete subversion of our Declaration of Independence.”¹²⁴

Workers extended their criticism of imperialists' arguments to dispute the “necessity” for expansion due to “overproduction.” “When we produce more than we consume,” a contributor to the Lancaster, Pennsylvania *Labor Leader* interposed, “there is something radically wrong with our system of distribution; our producers are not allowed to consume that which they produce.” Instead of territorial expansion, the author concluded, “what we have to do is set aright that which is radically wrong, secure an equitable distribution of the wealth produced, prevent the despoiling of the producing classes, [and] put an end to the exactions of monopoly.”¹²⁵ There was strong logic – and, for workers, an even stronger appeal – behind such renderings of the American economy. Workers’ “wages possess less purchasing power than in the past” and “his employment is less secure and hard to obtain,” maintained Cornelius Guiney, representative of the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Council. The impetus behind “the overproduction

¹²³ Frank A. Kennedy, “The People or the Administration – Who Rules?,” *Western Laborer*, April 22, 1899.

¹²⁴ Henry Francis Slade, “A Workingman’s Views,” *Baltimore Sun*, Oct. 2, 1900, 6.

¹²⁵ “Overproduction,” *Labor Leader* (Lancaster, Penn.), Nov. 11, 1899, 2.

theory,” Guiney judged, “lies in the absolute control which organized capital has obtained of the productive agencies of the United States.”¹²⁶ Samuel Gompers agreed, telling an audience of Minnesota workers: “We produce wealth faster than the people have the opportunity to consume it.” The answer was not empire, however. “We want more for the laboring man,” Gompers demanded; “The laboring man is entitled to more because he is the producer of all the wealth in the world.”¹²⁷

Labor leaders made the debate over imperialism a class and race issue. “The commercial class, the plutocracy, of all parties, fiercely cry for expansion, militarism, and imperialism,” averred the virulently racist W.S. Carter in July of 1899. “The industrial class, the members of trade unions,” on the other hand, “pray for the preservation of the *Republic of our fathers*, protest against a blemish on the reputation of American liberty, and look with fear upon the efforts made to substitute Militarism for Industrialism.”¹²⁸ Anti-imperialist union members established their class analysis of imperialism and infused it with arguments centered upon race. They countered claims that expansion into Asia would bring opportunities to the working class by emphasizing that white society could not be expected to flourish in the tropics. “The first and fatal objection” to expansion into the Pacific, Walter MacArthur asserted, is the fact that “Hawaii and the Philippines are situated in the tropics and therefore precluded by climatic conditions from

¹²⁶ Cornelius Guiney, “The Lesson of 1899,” *Minnesota Union Advocate*, Dec. 30, 1898, 2.

¹²⁷ “Two Great Men,” *Minnesota Union Advocate*, Sept. 15, 1899, 1. For scholarship on Gompers’ use of the argument for “More” – and its impact upon successfully rallying union workers behind the tactics of business unionism – see, Rosanne Currarino, “The Politics of ‘More’: The Labor Question and the Idea of Economic Liberty in Industrial America,” *Journal of American History*, vol. 93, no. 1 (June, 2006); 17-36.

¹²⁸ W.S. Carter, “Militarism vs. Industrialism,” *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, July 1899, 26. Emphasis added. For a scholarly note on Carter’s aggressive brand of racism, see: Eric Arnesen, “Specter of the Black Strikebreaker: Race, Employment, and Labor Activism in the Industrial Era,” *Labor History*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2003); 319-320.

the possibility of association in equality with the United States.” “Black cannot be made white by legislative, or any other alchemy,” MacArthur cautioned.¹²⁹ The Chinese were the primary workforce in Hawaii, A.R. Hamilton complained, and “in their work, their homes, food and clothing, the Chinese laborers endure conditions amid which no self-respecting white man could live.”¹³⁰ Samuel Gompers repeatedly argued that whites would perish in the tropics: “The climate of the Philippines forbids forever manual labor by Americans, as it does the planting there of American families, to live and flourish from one generation to another.”¹³¹

Labor leaders ridiculed imperialists’ rhetoric of “racial uplift” and accused them of ignoring the “realities” of race. Much of the white working class, in fact, doubted that they could survive, let alone thrive and “elevate” the native populations, in the tropics. “We cannot elevate the inhabitants [of the Pacific islands] to our standard, but will drag our people down to their level,” Colorado worker John Kirby warned the delegates to the 1898 AFL convention.¹³² While white workers believed in the superiority of the white race, they also suspected that there were white racial limitations. The conviction that there were white racial limitations actually held great sway in the nineteenth century. Union workers, like many Americans, maintained that there were climatic limits to

¹²⁹ Walter MacArthur, Editorial, *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, located in *Cigar Makers’ Journal*, April 1899, 11.

¹³⁰ A.R. Hamilton, “Hawaii’s Labor Problem,” *National Labor Tribune*, Sept. 22, 1898, 5.

¹³¹ Samuel Gompers, speech delivered at the National Conference upon “The Future Foreign Policy of the United States” held in Saratoga, New York on Aug. 20, 1898; reproduced in *American Federationist*, Sept. 1898, 139. There is no doubt that by “Americans” Samuel Gompers means “white Americans,” as his next statement reflects: “Therefore, the wage-earners [of the Philippines] will always be of races governed by a very small minority of another class.”

¹³² AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 95.

territorial expansion.¹³³ Turn-of-the-century imperialism would, according to workers, submerge white Americans into a quagmire of tropical disease, climate-induced sloth, and racial degeneracy.

Many union workers also dismissed the imperialist narratives of “benevolent assimilation” and the “white man’s burden” for their contradictory exaltation of racial violence. J.H.F. Mosley criticized the policy of “pouring troops across the sea” in order “to civilize and otherwise benevolently assimilate the Filipinos.” The United States should adopt as a coat of arms “rifles crossed, two jugs of rum and an unopened Bible,” Mosley offered mockingly.¹³⁴ J.P. McDonnell found it absurd that “our imperialistic newspapers” speak “of taking up the task of ‘civilizing’ the colored races.” Apparently, “the ‘white man’s burden,’ McDonnell proclaimed with disgust, “can only be unshouldered, we are assured, by wholesale slaughter.”¹³⁵ “To wantonly invade and take possession of a country, slaughter its people, and burn, pillage and plunder is to my mind national robbery,” remarked Los Angeles labor advocate John A. Morris, but to imperialists “this is the glory of national expansion, the idea of ‘benevolent assimilation.’”¹³⁶ White union workers condemned the principle of “benevolent assimilation” as a disingenuous excuse given by imperialists in order to justify the seizure of an empire.

¹³³ “These were hot and tropical places,” historian Eric T. Love explains, “points beyond which it was believed that members of the white race could not occupy, settle, develop, or transplant their institutions without suffering some moral or physical calamity.” Love, *Race Over Empire*, 24.

¹³⁴ J.H.F. Mosley, Editorial, *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, Oct. 14, 1899. In a similar fashion, “W.L.F.,” an Iowa member of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, wondered how racial uplift was to work when “Uncle Sam” employed bullets “instead of Bibles.” W.L.F., letter to the editor, *Locomotive Firemen’s Magazine*, April, 1899, 470.

¹³⁵ J.P. McDonnell, “Our Country’s Dishonor,” *National Labor Standard*, Feb. 16, 1899.

¹³⁶ John A. Morris, “Observations,” *Labor Leader* (Lancaster, Pa.), June 3, 1899, 1.

To workers living under the constant threat of unemployment, the ever-present risk of injury on the job, and corporate and governmental repression of labor actions, the rhetoric of the “white man’s burden” was particularly onerous. While government officials worry “their heads over an opportunity to civilize the poor Filipinos, and incidentally to rob him of his home and products during the civilizing process,” sneered John W. Hayes in the spring of 1899, “it might be well to remind them that the millions it will cost us can be spent to greater advance at home, giving employment to our own.”¹³⁷ Jared Sater, an Indiana worker, asked in a letter to the Indianapolis labor paper *The Union*, “Are we such great humanitarians as a nation that we must desolate the intelligent civilized people of the United States to attempt civilization of such a savage race as the Filipinos are – a mixture of ten distinct savage races?” Let the government “be called to the condition of our poor at home if they want to practice humanity,” demanded Sater.¹³⁸

The popular rhetorical association between American imperialism and Rudyard Kipling’s poem “The White Man’s Burden” provoked bitter rejoinders from representatives of the working class. Organized labor abounded with sarcastic references to Kipling’s somewhat dark “call to arms” – J.P. McDonnell, for example, stated succinctly, “The poor man’s burden – a soldier on a white man’s back” – while satires of the poem carrying titles such as “The Poor Man’s Burden,” “The Workman’s Burden,” and “The Miner’s Burden” appeared in labor journals across the nation.¹³⁹ The poetic parodies often touched on the same themes. Like Junius’ “The Workman’s Burden,” they often criticized contemporary social inequities:

¹³⁷ John W. Hayes, “Scraps of Thought,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, March 1899, 7.

¹³⁸ Jared Sater, “Some Thoughts on the War,” *The Union* (Indianapolis), Feb. 18, 1899.

¹³⁹ J.P. McDonnell, “Editorial Notes,” *National Labor Standard*, Aug. 3, 1899.

Pile on the workman's burden.
This is the age of gold,
When trusts and combinations
With capital untold
Have captured all the sources
Of industry and trade
And built colossal fortunes
On labor poorly paid.¹⁴⁰

As with Thomas W. Davis' "The Miner's Burden," the poems focused on the harsh toil that characterized labor's existence and called on workers to organize to gain economic liberty:

Take up the miner's burden –
The never ceasing strife –
Between the cash invested
And the bone and blood of life.
Go watch the ceaseless energy
The miner brings to his aid,
And then remember his effort
Is not more than half paid...

Take up the miner's burden –
And take it up like men –
Prove your worth by action;
Refuse to bow again.
Demand fair treatment ever,
Accord to all the same,
Rejoice in organization!
Stand forth in labor's name!¹⁴¹

Finally, like George E. McNeill's "The Poor Man's Burden," the Kipling satires denounced, in no uncertain terms, American imperialism:

Pile on the Poor Man's Burden –
Your savage wars increase,
Give him his full of famine,
Nor bid his sickness cease...

¹⁴⁰ Junius, "The Workman's Burden," *The Carpenter*, Sept. 1899, 5.

¹⁴¹ Thomas W. Davis, "The Miner's Burden," *United Mine Workers' Journal*, March 30, 1899, 1.

Lift off the Poor Man's Burden –
My country, grand and great –
The Orient has no treasures
To buy a Christian state.
Our souls brook not oppression;
Our needs – if read aright –
Call not for wide possession,
But Freedom's sacred light.¹⁴²

Anti-imperialist labor leaders attacked expansionists on all fronts – they argued empire would only serve the purposes of the “money powers,” criticized “benevolent assimilation” as lofty rhetoric meant to cover over the horrors of a violent colonial suppression, dispelled talk of a “white man’s burden” by stressing white racial limitations and focusing on working-class hardships at home, and invoked the history of “manifest destiny” in order to delineate the proper boundaries for expansion. There was a remarkable ambivalence in labor's anti-imperialism – white workers attacked the “half-breed niggers and Malays” as potential destroyers of the American labor market, but also expressed a perverse sympathy for the inhabitants of the colonies by demanding that American workers not be reduced to the islanders' persecuted status. Labor's central denunciation of imperialism, however, wielded a potent mixture of class, race and American nationalism to contend that imperialism in the Pacific would lead to the debasement of the white working class – and, in turn, the destruction of the American Republic – through a series of interrelated calamities: the possibility of American citizenship for (or even just the immigration of) the “island hordes,” economic competition from workers who survived on miniscule wages in the tropics, and the psychological anguish of being placed on a par with millions of people they considered socially and racially inferior.

¹⁴² George E. McNeill, “The Poor Man’s Burden,” *American Federationist*, March 1899, 9.

Union officials were certain that all they had accomplished – higher wages, shorter hours, better working conditions, stronger social standing – would disappear with colonial immigration. To turn-of-the-century white workers, high wages and racial superiority were mutually reinforcing concepts – as were low wages and racial inferiority. Union workers appealed for high wages because they believed access to a respectable standard of living was required to maintain a level of equality among white republican citizens. Demands for higher wages and better working conditions were politicized in this manner, as laborers' cries for “More” transcended the economic realm to provide a meaningful rallying point for skilled white workers. The inverse was true for non-white workers, according to union laborers; the lesser races were not owed the same standard of living as they were not equal citizens, just as their alleged inborn inferiority predisposed them to accept low wages and poor working conditions. Labor leaders maintained, therefore, that competition with millions of Asians who worked for low wages guaranteed the debasement of white workers' higher wages. Samuel Gompers, in fact, seized upon the language of the “White Worker’s Republic” – American settler expansionism, American exceptionalism, and American producerism – to repudiate colonialism in Asia. “Our manifest destiny and our duty,” Gompers proclaimed, is “to make of the United States a vast workshop,” which would lead to the “attainment of the highest principle of national glory and human progress.” “But to attain this end,” he countered, “is the acquirement of the Philippine Islands, with their semi-savage population necessary? Surely not.”¹⁴³

¹⁴³ Samuel Gompers, speech delivered at the National Conference upon “The Future Foreign Policy of the United States” held in Saratoga, New York on Aug. 20, 1898; reproduced in *American Federationist*, Sept. 1898, 139.

White workers drew upon a long-entrenched movement narrative that positioned the working class as the dutiful defenders of the American Republic – a white Republic, at the close of the century, threatened by the acquisition of an Asiatic empire. Labor’s pronouncements that imperialism was a menace to the Republic – and that the working class needed to save the nation from the betrayal of its founding ideals – were more than mere rhetorical flourish. Union workers had long ago fused their racial, class, and national identities, a self-righteous composite that imparted vitality to the U.S. labor movement by providing a meaningful link between their battles for the advancement of white workers’ standard of living and the historical narrative of American liberty. Their identity was defined, in part, by their perceived role in assuring the preservation of the white Republic. Anti-imperialist workers believed the possibility of American citizenship for the “Asiatic hordes” posed a threat to the white working class’ right to inherit the Republic. Ever-vigilant unionists looked beyond the tangible danger of unimpeded immigration, moreover, and foresaw a future in which U.S. capitalists would manipulate a colonial system to the disadvantage of American workers by importing Asian “contract labor” and exporting factory jobs to the Far East. White workers would then be forced to compete with the “menial wages” and “wretched living standards” of colonial laborers. Such a degradation of the white working class – certain to occur under imperialism – was tantamount, according to workers’ governing ideology, to the destruction of the white Republic.

The debate over U.S. imperialism unfolded at the same time the American labor movement was undergoing a radical and jarring reformulation of its structure, aims, and primary governing ideology. By the first years of the twentieth century, as Julie Greene

has shown, “skilled workers emerged as a distinct social group, isolated and different from other workers, due to a dramatic social and economic remaking of the working class.”¹⁴⁴ Turn-of-the-century union workers, meanwhile, strove to conserve what they could from their past ideology, even as they abandoned all the broader underpinnings that had defined working-class producerism during the nineteenth century. The relatively-newfound economic bifurcation of the working class threatened to isolate union workers from the broader support of the toiling masses – a weakness invariably exploited by their antagonists in government and industry. Moreover, the social distance within the working class troubled many union laborers who had spent much of their lives accustomed to a broader alliance of working Americans. This organizational and ideological uncertainty pervaded workers' attempts to comprehend imperialism – an ambiguity reflected in the labor movement's internal conflicts over empire and in the lasting quest for a semblance of cultural stability.

The “aristocracy of labor” that crystallized after the Spanish-American War was hardly the creation of America’s national debate over empire. Its foundation lay elsewhere, grounded in the conservative ideologies of turn-of-the-century craft union leaders as well as the harsh realities of late-nineteenth-century cyclical economic depressions, judicial restraints on strikes, and violent repressions of more inclusive working-class movements.¹⁴⁵ American imperialism, however, had a considerable

¹⁴⁴ Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*, 24.

¹⁴⁵ The final quarter of the nineteenth century was defined by a “boom-and-bust” economy, with the 1873-1877 and 1893-1897 depressions only the most extreme examples of the volatile process of mass industrialization. By the 1890s, federal and state judges had forged a precedent of issuing “injunctions” against strikes, not only making them “illegal” but also providing a cover of law for employers’ attempts at reasserting control over their factories and yards. Finally, as historian Alexander Saxton has noted, the “employer attacks” on labor in the 1880s and 1890s “fell more heavily on the Knights not only because their organizations were weaker, but because employers perceived them as more dangerous – precisely

impact on the labor movement's transition from broadly-defined "producerism" to narrowly-constructed "business unionism." First, the anti-imperial rhetoric of "saving" the Republic from the perils of empire – and saving the nation's white republican citizenry from the degradations of mixing with the racially-inferior island populations – provided union workers a reassuring link to their "republican" past at a time they were forsaking much of their producerist-inspired ideological tenets. Second, when union workers drew attention to the threat posed by the "Asiatic hordes" in the colonies, they no doubt deflected some of the resentment unskilled and unorganized laborers held towards the escalating exclusivity of the "aristocracy of labor." This was the *exact moment* in the history of the U.S. labor movement when organized workers' primary institution – the American Federation of Labor – abdicated its responsibility to fight for the interests of the wider working class. Yet, the AFL still needed to draw upon the wellspring of support from the toiling masses during difficult times.¹⁴⁶ Fear of the "Other," in this manner, mitigated internal class dissension. Finally, as the following section reveals, once union workers had been assured "protection" from the inhabitants of the colonies – especially Hawaii and the Philippines – they jettisoned the majority of their misgivings about the "betrayal of the Republic," accommodated their ideology to capitalist economic expansion, and sought to partake in the spoils of empire.

because they reasserted the inclusive strategy of the Jacksonian Producer Ethic." Saxton, *Rise and Fall of the White Republic*, 305.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 315.

Labor Embraces Empire

The United States “officially” declared victory in the Philippines on July 4, 1902, establishing a colonial government and military occupation that would last in some form all the way until 1946. Labor’s objection to imperialism had always revolved around its threat to workers’ ingrained personal and group identities – the volatile and transformational mix of race, class and American nationalism. Following a series of U.S. government decisions that largely alleviated union workers’ primary trepidations regarding empire, much of the American labor movement abandoned its anti-imperialist activism and accepted the nation's colonial relationships in the Caribbean and Pacific in return for immigration exclusion, colonial tariffs, and the general maintenance of white workers' racial privileges. By 1905 at the latest, the mainstream American labor movement was actively endorsing the imperial cause and seeking the benefits of American imperialism.

The re-election of William McKinley in 1900 was an important triumph for the expansionist cause – and, indeed, union workers on both sides of the debate viewed McKinley's re-election as an indication that the nation would retain its newly-acquired empire. D.L. Cease, editor of the *Railroad Trainmen's Journal* and early proponent of expansion, asserted plainly that McKinley's defeat of William Jennings Bryan signified imperialism's “opposition might as well fold up its protests and become witnesses to what is done.”¹⁴⁷ Cornelius Guiney, of the Minneapolis Trades and Labor Council, had constantly assailed the nation’s imperial policy, but he wearily acknowledged that McKinley's re-election meant “imperialism is rampant” and “militarism has appealed to a

¹⁴⁷ D.L. Cease, “Congress and Prosperity,” *Railroad Trainmen's Journal*, Jan., 1901, 68.

thoughtless or forgetful people.”¹⁴⁸ Yet, McKinley's re-election itself hardly resolved labor's protests regarding U.S. imperialism. Instead, a series of government policy decisions and Supreme Court verdicts between the spring of 1900 and the summer of 1902 erased many of the conditions of empire that labor had ultimately found so objectionable.

The first government action that allayed some of workers trepidations towards imperialism was the passing of the Hawaiian Organic Act by Congress on April 30, 1900, which officially incorporated the island into the United States as a territory under the jurisdiction of all U.S. laws – including Chinese exclusion. Second, a series of Supreme Court decisions delivered in May 1901 (known as the *Insular Cases*) differentiated between “incorporated” and “unincorporated” territories, determining that the Constitution did not necessarily follow the flag in “unincorporated” territories such as the Philippines, Guam, and Puerto Rico. Finally, the U.S. government restricted immigration from the Philippines; prohibited Chinese immigration to the islands (and from the islands to the United States); and retained a prohibitive tariff on trade from the Philippines. By the summer of 1902, organized labor's primary fears – an inundation of racially inferior Asian immigrant workers, the undercutting of white workers' wages due to competition with cheap colonial labor, and the resultant dissolution of the white Republic – had been reduced, or eliminated, in piecemeal fashion.

For union workers, the two most important issues with regards to Hawaii were the existence of contract labor in the archipelago and the possibility that Chinese “coolies” could utilize the islands as a back-door entrance into the United States. The labor movement mobilized their efforts to protest against Chinese immigration from the islands

¹⁴⁸ Cornelius Guiney, “The Fight Will Go On,” *Minnesota Union Advocate*, Nov. 9, 1900, 2.

and outlaw contract labor, which they deemed a type of slavery, in U.S. held territories. Contract labor – much despised by union workers for its link to the mass importation of cheap immigrant labor and implicit restrictions on workers' freedom – was legal in Hawaii and remained so under terms of the 1898 Newlands Resolution that annexed it to the United States. Ed Rosenberg, Secretary of the San Francisco Labor Council, was the most virulent critic of Hawaii's contract labor laws. In a letter published in labor journals across the country in the fall of 1899, Rosenberg called for all union workers to join “the fight against the slave owners and slave drivers of Hawaii.” “Not satisfied with coolie slave labor,” Rosenberg pressed, “the Hawaiian slave owners see more profit in slaves of the Caucasian race, and of late have again and again attempted to lure, under lying promises, white men into signing” labor contracts. In actuality, there was a strict racial divide between workers on the island, as whites served as “overseers” of a large non-white plantation labor force. Rosenberg, however, implored workers to “check the Hawaiian slave owners in their importation of coolie and white slaves” and then “work for the abolition of the Hawaiian penal contract labor laws.” The solution to the “dangers now threatening American liberty,” Rosenberg proclaimed, lay in organized labor “urg[ing] upon their respective Representatives in Congress...to work and vote for the application of American labor laws to Hawaii.”¹⁴⁹

Rosenberg had an ally in the AFL president. Gompers' first public words on the issue of imperialism included a directive that “it devolves upon the American workingman to see that slave labor should not exist” in Hawaii.¹⁵⁰ Under Gompers'

¹⁴⁹ Open letter from Ed Rosenberg, Secretary of San Francisco Labor Council, to Samuel Gompers, reproduced in “Old Glory,” *United Mine Workers' Journal*, Nov. 2, 1899, 1.

¹⁵⁰ “The Central Labor Union,” *New York Times*, Aug., 1, 1898, 4.

guidance, the delegates to the 1899 American Federation of Labor convention declared against “slavery within the jurisdiction of the United States” and denounced “the act admitting Hawaii to the United States domain” since it “provided for continuation of these [forced labor] contracts.”¹⁵¹ Like others within the labor movement, Gompers worried that should a case dealing with Hawaiian contract labor come before the Supreme Court, the judges would repeal prohibitions against involuntary servitude within the United States.¹⁵² The AFL president was not just being an alarmist; in 1897 the Supreme Court ruled in the *Robertson v. Baldwin* case that commercial sailors could be compelled – under penalty of imprisonment – to complete their contractual service.¹⁵³ Organized labor was already distrustful of the U.S. court system due to the repeated use of injunctions against striking workers – the *Arago* case (as the *Robertson v. Baldwin* case was popularly referenced) combined with the continued legality of contract labor under the terms of the Newlands Resolution and President McKinley's stated assumption that Congress would enact “special laws to fit the peculiar condition thereof [in Hawaii], the regulation if need be of the labor system therein,” justifiably impelled union workers to attack the ideology underpinning imperialism in the Pacific.¹⁵⁴

The labor movement's intense Congressional lobbying campaign against Hawaiian contract labor and “coolie” immigration, along with the protestations of certain politicians, succeeded – perhaps to the surprise of many workers – in achieving its

¹⁵¹ “Hawaii Contract Labor,” *Kansas City Star*, Dec. 19, 1899, 5.

¹⁵² See, for instance, Gompers speech at the Chicago Peace Jubilee on Oct. 18, 1898, reproduced in “Imperialism, Its Dangers and Wrongs,” *American Federationist*, Nov., 1898, 180.

¹⁵³ *Robertson v. Baldwin*. 165 U.S. 275 (1897).

¹⁵⁴ The “Pettigrew Amendment” to the original treaty of annexation debated in 1897 would have outlawed contract labor in Hawaii, but it was defeated in the Senate by a vote of 22-41; William McKinley, “Address of State of the Union,” *Congressional Record*, 55th Congress, 1st session, XXXI, 6.

goals.¹⁵⁵ The Hawaiian Organic Act of 1900 abolished all current contract labor in Hawaii, extended U.S. contract labor laws to the territory, and specifically prohibited Chinese immigration – both to the islands and, for those Chinese already in Hawaii, from the islands to the United States.¹⁵⁶ Organized labor immediately celebrated their victory. Walter MacArthur, editor of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, declared triumphantly, “Hawaiian Slavery Abolished.”¹⁵⁷ Samuel Gompers explicitly consigned the prohibition of contract labor and Chinese immigration in Hawaii “to the efforts of the American Federation of Labor” – though, in reality, the exclusion law was the product of more than just labor agitation. Gompers was determined to seize credit for a policy that would, ostensibly, prohibit the reinstitution of contract labor for the nation’s white working class. He assured the delegates to the 1900 AFL convention, “Had it not been for the two amendments procured through the activity of the American Federation of Labor, slavery or involuntary servitude would exist today in the Territory of Hawaii.”¹⁵⁸ Much of organized labor largely dropped their protestations to America's territorial relationship to

¹⁵⁵ The American Federation of Labor's Executive Committee thanked Senators Richard Pettigrew, George F. Hoar, and Benjamin Tillman and Speaker of the House David B. Henderson for their efforts in outlawing contract labor and prohibiting Chinese immigration in Hawaii. AFL, *Twentieth Proceedings*, 1900, 66-67.

¹⁵⁶ Section 10 of the Hawaiian Organic Act reads, in part:

“Provided, That no suit or proceedings shall be maintained for the specific performance of any contract heretofore or hereafter entered into for personal labor or service, nor shall any remedy exist or be enforced for breach of any such contract, except in a civil suit or proceeding instituted solely to recover damages for such breach: Provided further, That the provisions of this section shall not modify or change the laws of the United States applicable to merchant seamen.

That all contracts made since August twelfth, eighteen hundred and ninety-eight, by which persons are held for service for a definite term, are hereby declared null and void and terminated, and no law shall be passed to enforce said contracts in any way; and it shall be the duty of the United States marshal to at once notify such persons so held of the termination of their contracts.”; The Japanese (who would soon face their own anti-immigration attack in the United States) were not mentioned in the Organic Act – thus they continued to immigrate both to the island and from the island to the United States mainland.” Organic Act: An Act to Provide a Government for the Territory of Hawaii, *Act of April 30, 1900, C 339, 31 Stat 141*.

¹⁵⁷ Walter MacArthur, “Hawaiian Slavery Abolished,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, May 16, 1900, 6.

¹⁵⁸ AFL, *Twentieth Proceedings*, 1900, 15-16.

Hawaii after the spring of 1900 – with contract labor and “coolie” immigration prohibited, the “betrayal” of republicanism, which labor had argued characterized the seizure of the Hawaii, no longer seemed such an affront.

The seeds of organized labor's eventual acquiescence to empire had actually been apparent from the very beginning of the nationwide debate over U.S. imperialism. J.T. Flynn, a labor advocate in the West, maintained, “If the acquisition of foreign territory...will open up new and permanent avenues for the kind of labor which has made this country great both in commerce and conquest, it is a good thing, regardless of its conflict with the Constitution.” The annexation of the Philippine Islands, with their population of “savages pure and simple,” is, on the other hand, “a bad thing, and ought to be discountenanced.”¹⁵⁹ Anti-imperialist union workers demanded that the nation’s domestic and foreign policy benefit the white working class. “They may annex anything anywhere they like,” Samuel Gompers revealingly pronounced before New York's Central Labor Union on July 31, 1898, but, he called to the union men, “bear in mind and be very watchful” of “the liberty and rights of labor in the colonies that we annex, and the consequences that the treatment of labor there may produce upon the workingmen of these United States.” He demanded, moreover, that the islands not be used “as a half-way house to flood [the United States] with cheap Mongolian labor.”¹⁶⁰ Gompers' first public speech tackling the threat imperialism posed to labor revealed his sole focus on labor's cultural, racial, and material self-preservation.

Gompers subsequently broadened his critique of empire, joined the Anti-Imperialist League, and molded the American Federation of Labor into one of the

¹⁵⁹ J.T. Flynn, “The Future of the Philippines,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Aug. 1899, 6.

¹⁶⁰ “The Central Labor Union,” *New York Times*, Aug., 1, 1898, 4.

nation's strongest opponents of expansionism. He did so because he became convinced that the Constitution would follow the flag – in other words, he believed the islands would be annexed to the United States as full-fledged territories (with citizenship and immigration rights) and he feared (primarily referencing the “uniformity clause”) the re-introduction of contract labor and the removal of tariffs covering the importation of the islands' goods. Gompers responded to Francis B. Thurber's claim that the United States could erect barriers against colonial competition and immigration with a determined position on the American Constitution:

You evidently lose sight of the fact that the American Republic occupies a unique position among the nations of the world, and that its general legislation must be of a general character, applying to all the people over whom its flag floats and jurisdiction extends. The decisions of our courts necessarily apply to all the people of the United States and its territories...See Constitution of the United States.¹⁶¹

Gompers repeatedly relied on his assumptions (and many other Americans', for that matter) about the Constitution and U.S. territorial acquisitions when helping to forge labor's partial consensus opposing empire.

Other anti-imperialist labor leaders, while perhaps sharing Gompers' interpretation of U.S. history and Constitutional law, were more apt to seek out legal and procedural means for eliminating the dangers expansion held for the white working class. Cornelius Guiney, a Minnesota union representative, encouraged “members of organized labor in the United States” to “continue to make it plain at all times...that no administration can continue in power in this country which will subject its workingmen

¹⁶¹ Samuel Gompers to Francis B. Thurber, Samuel Gompers' Letter-books, Nov. 25, 1898. For other examples, see Gompers' speech, “Imperialism: Its Dangers and Wrongs” at Chicago Peace Jubilee on October 18, 1898, reproduced in *American Federationist*, Nov. 1898, 179-182; Gompers' letter to the *New York Journal*, reproduced in *American Federationist*, Jan. 1899, 222-224; Gompers annual report at the 1898 AFL convention, AFL, *Eighteenth Proceedings*, 1898, 18-20; Gompers annual report to the 1899 AFL convention, American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor*, (1899), 16.

to the competition” of “20-cents-a-day labor of the Philippines.” “Whether the prevention comes through special tariff,” Guiney added, “or in any other way” did not matter, but “the entire force of organized labor will be thrown in the scale against” imperialists if these conditions were not met.¹⁶² Among avid anti-imperialists, Guiney was hardly alone in his stated willingness to accept concessions to organized labor. Ella Ormsby, writing in April 1900, asked rhetorically, “How high must a tariff wall be built to protect us from labor...in our Asiatic possessions?”¹⁶³ A.R. Hamilton, editor of the *National Labor Tribune*, admitted in December 1898 that his greatest worry was “if Hawaii and the Philippines are to be deemed a part of the [American] Union their cheap labor – as well as its manufactured products – will be free to come and go,” which would subject “American labor to competition worse than any by which it was ever before threatened.” On the other hand, Hamilton immediately countered, if “the new territory is to be deemed as an outside dependency, it will not affect the Industrial status of American workingmen perceptibly.”¹⁶⁴ In the spring of 1900, Hamilton offered another compromise: “If we *must* have 'expansion' it will have to be with tariff, and with *sufficient tariff to protect*” American workingmen.¹⁶⁵ Imperialism was there to stay, Walter MacArthur acknowledged in 1901; labor's hope for the future, therefore, lay not in “de-imperializing” America, but in effectively “changing our system of government” so

¹⁶² Cornelius Guiney, “No Slave Labor,” *Minnesota Union Advocate*, Oct. 13, 1899, 2.

¹⁶³ Ella Ormsby, “Drifting, Drifting!,” *National Labor Standard*, April 19, 1900.

¹⁶⁴ A.R. Hamilton, “The President’s Message,” *National Labor Tribune*, Dec. 8, 1898, 1.

¹⁶⁵ A.R. Hamilton, “Labor’s New Enemy,” *National Labor Tribune*, March 22, 1900, 1. Emphasis in original.

“we can avoid competition from the millions of servile workers.”¹⁶⁶ Labor's opposition to empire was *always* conditional and *always* based upon “protecting” the white workers’ Republic.

Slowly, but surely, the majority of union officials dropped their appeals against U.S. imperialism between 1900 and 1902. Organized labor, however, did not necessarily begin trumpeting expansion abroad – their acquiescence to empire was most often one of omission. Samuel Gompers began distancing himself from the American Anti-Imperialist League in 1900. He repeatedly turned down requests to speak at League-sponsored events, responding, for instance, to the invitation of Edward W. Ordway, secretary of the Chicago Anti-Imperialist League, that he was busy and then coolly referred him to “copies of my reports to the last two conventions of the American Federation of Labor, which fully convey all that I care to express on the subject.”¹⁶⁷ When the Anti-Imperialist League turned to party politics (convening a “Liberty Congress” in Indianapolis in mid-August 1900) and endorsed William Jennings Bryan for president, Gompers – who was, at that time, opposed to the AFL aligning itself with any political party – further disengaged from the movement.¹⁶⁸ After 1900, Samuel Gompers never again spoke publicly on behalf of the Anti-Imperialist League. While the AFL

¹⁶⁶ Walter MacArthur, “Labor Pays the Piper,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, May 1, 1901, 6.

¹⁶⁷ New York Public Library, Division of Manuscripts, *Samuel Gompers Collection*, S. Gompers to E. W. Ordway, Dec. 28, 1900. For other instances of Gompers' refusal to attend League sponsored events, see Gompers to C.H. Dennis, Aug. 6, 1900, Gompers Copy Books, XXXVI, 344 and Gompers to Edwin Burritt Smith, June 20, 1900, Gompers Copy Books, XXXV, 264.

¹⁶⁸ In a October 1900 letter, Gompers refused to support the endorsement: “I propose doing my duty as I see it as a citizen, but during a political campaign I cannot give my name, advocating the election of anyone to public office.” Gompers to F.J. Wise, Oct. 5, 1900, Gompers Copy Books, XXXVII, 464. Gompers was especially wary of aligning himself politically with William Jennings Bryan, after facing internal charges within the AFL after the 1896 election cycle that he had misused his office for political purposes in support of Bryan. Gompers was acquitted of all charges, but subsequently became even more discerning when it came to political utterances.

president would continue to protest Chinese immigration from the Philippines, advocate for the protection of American workers from colonial competition, and demand union rights on the island possessions, his full-scale opposition to American imperialism disappeared.

Labor journals soon neglected to even discuss imperialism, let alone press a virulent opposition to empire – they often went months (if not years) without a *single comment* about America's colonial possessions. The 1899 AFL convention, moreover, was the last in which the representatives of the rank-and-file went on record opposing American imperialism. AFL delegates largely ignored the issue of imperialism during the subsequent conventions, only arguing for the exclusion of Chinese immigrants from the colonies and debating the extent to which the federation would fund unionization efforts in the islands.¹⁶⁹ The rhetoric of anti-imperialism did not entirely vanish from the labor movement, however, as criticism of the ethical and social costs of empire and fulminations against “coolie” labor in the colonies occasionally united union workers in the first years of the twentieth century.

Most outright denunciations of American imperialism after 1902 emanated from the old-guard “labor republicans” or more radical unionists. J.P. McDonnell, the long-time labor luminary, had supported the war against Spain but he never failed to decry the ethical and economic costs of “maintain[ing] and army of 40,000 men [in the Philippines] to keep the islanders in subjection to us.”¹⁷⁰ McDonnell's long-time friend George E. McNeill remained affiliated with the Anti-Imperialist League longer than any other union

¹⁶⁹ AFL, *Twentieth Proceedings*, 1900, 15-16, 63-64, 66-67, 115, 119; American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1902), 15, 78, 87-88, 104, 112, 133, 155, 185, 219, 226.

¹⁷⁰ J.P. McDonnell, “Our Philippine Army,” *National Labor Standard*, May 2, 1901.

leader, speaking out against U.S. actions in the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Panama until his death in 1906.¹⁷¹ C.L. Baine, editor of the *Shoe Workers' Journal*, was still bothered by U.S. ownership of the Philippines in 1904, remarking that it was “a curious anomaly that a republican government should own a foreign country and keep in subjugation an alien race by the methods of absolute monarchies.”¹⁷² Robert Randall, a member of the radical Western Federation of Miners, assailed American imperialism in June 1905:

We see the American nation entering upon a career of conquest at the behest of the capitalist class who demand foreign markets and people to exploit, a policy that places the United States among the conquering nations of the world, and pledges us to the noble and philanthropic duty of carving out our 'manifest destiny' of bringing the heathen to the feet of Jesus and John D. Rockefeller.¹⁷³

By 1905, however, the vanguards of labor republicanism had little impact on the American labor movement and labor radicals were hardly dedicated to the anti-imperialist cause. The founding convention of the International Workers of the World in June 1905 was indicative of how the labor movement had largely abandoned its anti-imperialism – despite the presence of over two-hundred Socialists, anarchists, and radical trade unionists and the promulgation of an organizational ideology dedicated to an inclusive and worldwide labor movement, not a *single word* was uttered regarding American imperialism or the plight of the colonies.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ George E. McNeill in George S. Boutwell, “The Enslavement of American Labor,” Pamphlet, (Boston: New England Anti-Imperialist League, 1902), 4; George E. McNeill, “Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the New England Anti-Imperialist League,” *Report of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the New England Anti-Imperialist League* (Boston: New England Anti-Imperialist League, 1903).

¹⁷² C.L. Baine, “Editorial Briefs,” *Shoe Workers' Journal*, July 1904, 23.

¹⁷³ Robert Randall, “The Fourth of July,” *Miners' Magazine*, June 22, 1905, 7.

¹⁷⁴ International Workers of the World, *Proceedings of the First Convention of the International Workers of the World*, (New York: Labor News Company, 1905). The only official business even touching upon the subject was the discussion of Resolution No. 20 regarding the I.W.W.'s official opposition to militarism – a position adopted easily enough, yet one that contained no specific references to American foreign policy.

Most union officials, in fact, only spoke out against U.S. actions in the colonies when they felt threatened again by “coolie” labor. J.E. Mulkey, editor of the *Advance Advocate*, reported with alarm in December 1905 that Hawaiian sugar planters planned to seek permission to import 30,000 Chinese laborers to the island. “If the petition of the sugar planters of Hawaii is granted by Congress,” Mulkey warned, “we can look for requests for similar grants from the cheaper labor advocates of this country, followed by demands for a less exclusive act and finally its repeal.”¹⁷⁵ That same month, Samuel Gompers derided Hawaiian sugar planters for trying to deceive the American people into the belief that there is “a dearth of workmen in Hawaii” and “that the only recourse is the Chinamen.” Hawaii, Gompers maintained, must remain a “barrier to protect America’s workers, America’s people and America’s civilization” from “Mongolian deterioration.”¹⁷⁶ Other labor leaders held union-specific complaints, such as Walter MacArthur, editor of the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, who condemned the hiring of Filipinos as sailors on American ships, and George W. Perkins, president of the Cigar Makers’ International Union, who assailed a plan to reduce or eliminate a tariff on Philippine cigars in order to help “the child of Nature” because it would mean “less work for...the American cigar maker.”¹⁷⁷ Organized labor realized that they were protected only through the whims of legislation – and they were determined not to let capitalists and

Most of the debate actually revolved around what the organization's policy should be regarding its' members participation in state militias.

¹⁷⁵ J.E. Mulkey, “Want to Import 30,000 Coolies,” *Advance Advocate*, Dec., 1905, 792.

¹⁷⁶ Samuel Gompers, “Report of President Samuel Gompers to the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor,” (1905), reproduced in *American Federationist*, Dec. 1905, 946-947.

¹⁷⁷ Walter MacArthur, “Filipinos in the Navy,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, May 1, 1901, 7; George W. Perkins, Editorial, *Cigar Makers' Journal*, Jan. 15, 1905, 9.

their allies in government subvert their hard-won gains and once again threaten the white Republic.

Union workers employed a variety of anti-imperialist arguments between 1898 and 1902, but the primacy of racial and class interests were revealed with labor's later assent to empire. After 1902, the "republic" had ostensibly still been abandoned in favor of empire, militarism still elevated, the economic and moral costs of expansion had not disappeared, and Filipinos, native Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans remained colonized against their will. Workers' racial and class privileges, however, had been preserved – uniting the largely discordant labor movement behind the social, cultural, and material "wages" of empire. Over the subsequent years, organized labor shifted from a passive acceptance of imperialism to an active endorsement – particularly with regards to the Panama Canal. By the first years of the twentieth century, the majority of the American labor movement was demanding that empire – formal or informal – benefit the white working class.

Epilogue – The Wages of Empire

Once union workers tentatively secured their protection from the “Asian hordes” they eschewed their fight against imperialism and accepted the proffered advantages which constituted the wages of empire. The leadership of the AFL, anxious to sustain the federation's unparalleled growth between 1899 and 1904 and achieve their long-desired acceptance into the world of American policy-makers, aligned the federation with the United States' imperial agenda. In Puerto Rico, this meant defending U.S. annexation and supporting a broad unionization campaign on the island as a means of expanding organized labor's influence in the nation's colonies. In the Philippines, on the other hand, labor's embrace of empire meant avoiding a wide-scale unionization campaign as a means of defending America's colonial control over the archipelago and protecting their relatively tenuous position at home. Finally, in Central America, union workers surged behind the United States next imperial project – the construction of the Panama Canal. AFL leaders realized, Samuel Gompers recalled (without a hint of irony) in his autobiography, “that in order to protect our standards within the states we must help the island workers to develop their higher political, social and industrial problems.”¹

The American Federation of Labor officially began an organizing campaign in Puerto Rico in 1900, urged into action by harsh anti-union laws on the island and a growing desire to benefit from, rather than oppose, U.S. colonialism in the Caribbean. Samuel Gompers, speaking at the 1902 AFL convention in New Orleans, declared the Federation should exercise influence in Puerto Rico because it would “certainly...be a

¹ Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor: An Autobiography* (1924; New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1957), 271.

permanent possession of the United States”² Significantly, Gompers and the AFL leadership worked with Santiago Iglesias – a labor leader on the island who actively supported the United States' annexation of Puerto Rico.³ The Federation provided Iglesias with funds to carry out an organizing campaign, visited the island in an effort to help mobilize the unions, and even lobbied on Iglesias' behalf to the U.S. government.⁴ Gompers even bragged to the National Civic Foundation in Chicago in the fall of 1903 about the level of influence the AFL was achieving in Puerto Rico and the other colonies.⁵ He announced in the pages of the *American Federationist* in 1902, furthermore, that it would “be to the economic, social and political advantage of all concerned, that as soon as possible the people and particularly the wage-earners of Porto Rico, shall be in full cooperation and sympathy with the citizens, and especially the working people, of the mainland of the United States.”⁶ On the one hand, the AFL’s policies in Puerto Rico entailed a broadening of the Federation’s efforts and helped

² American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Second Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1902), 16.

³ David Montgomery, “Workers' Movements in the United States Confront Imperialism: The Progressive Era Experience,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 7:1 (January 2008), 24-25.

⁴ The American Federation of Labor appropriated \$3,000 in 1900 to assist Iglesias' union campaign in Puerto Rico. American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twentieth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1900), 119. Samuel Gompers visited Puerto Rico in early 1904 in his official capacity as President of the American Federation of Labor. Later that year, Gompers reported to the AFL convention in San Francisco that 43 Puerto Rican unions had affiliated with the AFL, most of them since his visit. American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1904), 21. Gompers himself advocated on behalf of Iglesias to the White House, utilizing his fellow National Civic Foundation member George Cortelyou (personal secretary to President Theodore Roosevelt) to pass on his endorsement of Iglesias to the President. Montgomery, “Workers' Movements Confront Imperialism,” 25.

⁵ Address by President Samuel Gompers before the National Civic Foundation at Chicago, October 16, 1903, reproduced in *American Federationist*, Dec. 1903, 1300.

⁶ Samuel Gompers, “For Justice Even in Porto Rico,” *American Federationist*, Feb. 1902, 72.

establish union bargaining rights on the island. On the other hand, the AFL's organization campaign in the new American colony involved a Faustian bargain for the island's workers – the Federations' support prevented the formation of a broad and inclusive Puerto Rican labor movement and was tied firmly to the perpetuation of U.S. colonial control. For Gompers, a pro-imperial insular organizing campaign in Puerto Rico served as a medium for the expansion of the American Federation of Labor's domestic influence and as the first step in defining the AFL's self-serving relationship with workers abroad.

The AFL's deepening influence in Puerto Rico and evolving promotion of the United States' imperial policy was also part of a broader campaign to achieve a global presence for the American labor movement. Confronted with the formation of the International Workers of the World (the IWW, or “Wobblies”) in 1905, Samuel Gompers celebrated the AFL's international expansion: “Our limits are no longer from Maine to California, from the Lakes to the Gulf, but we include the whole of the United States, Canada, Hawaii, Cuba, Porto Rico, Mexico, Philippines, and British Columbia. Our international unions deserve support in this growth and in bringing...an example to the rest of the world.”⁷ Gompers may have trumpeted the AFL's place in the Philippines, but the federation's hierarchy actually approached the unionization campaign in the island wearily, fearful that the prevalence of pro-independence union workers in the Philippines would undercut their efforts of achieving stability for American trade unions at home. AFL leaders were determined to extend the federation's influence to the far-reaches of the nation's empire in order to profit from the global expansion of American business – not align with workers advocating social or political revolution in U.S. colonies.

⁷ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1905), 17. (hereafter cited as AFL, *Twenty-Fifth Proceedings*, 1905)

Ed Rosenberg, the San Francisco union organizer sent to the islands by the AFL Executive Council on a fact-finding mission, condemned the largest union federation in the Philippines for “its underlying motive to secure, through agitation along constitutional lines, from the United States independence for the Philippine people.”⁸ Luckily, Rosenberg stated optimistically, “The civil government is slowly but steadily proving to the Filipinos...that the purpose of American rule is not the exploitation of the natives, but their elevation.”⁹ Rosenberg, speaking in his official capacity as commissioner of the AFL, urged a group of four-hundred Filipino union laborers to avoid “form[ing] political parties in opposition to the government, or to support directly or indirectly a party or parties in opposition to the government.”¹⁰ Should they agree to organize “along the aforementioned trade union lines,” Rosenberg assured Filipino union workers, the American Federation of Labor would “aid the workers of the Philippine islands to attain better industrial conditions, to secure industrial peace and prosperity.”¹¹ A year later, the AFL's leadership followed through on Rosenberg's warning, refusing to entertain the unionization of Filipino cigar makers because “agitation of Philippine independence, very strong among the better class of workers...has to be taken into consideration when organizing these people.”¹² The American Federation of Labor, still officially an anti-imperialist organization, arrayed itself against the colonial independence movement in the

⁸ Edward Rosenberg, “Filipinos as Workmen,” *American Federationist*, Oct. 1903, 1029.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 1028.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1030.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 1031.

¹² From letters exchanged between Samuel Gompers, Edward Rosenberg, and George W. Perkins during 1904, located in Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York: International Publishers, 1955), 2: 437.

Philippines in the first years of the twentieth century and pursued the social benefits of conforming to the dictates of American imperialism.

The cultural benefits of the labor movement's assent to empire, while perhaps more subtle, actually radiated deeper into the lives of the average union worker. White workers achieved, greatly due to the efforts of American labor unions, the mass exclusion of Chinese workers from the United States and its colonial possessions by the fall of 1902. The American Federation of Labor boomed – doubling in size between 1900 and 1904 – at the same time it solidified its policy of excluding Asians, African-Americans, and unskilled white laborers from its ranks. The “aristocracy of labor's” escalating influence domestically had much to do with its ideology and policy of exclusion – the AFL created more stable craft unions supported through the high dues only skilled laborers could afford, rejected all attempts at promulgating a broader critique of industrial-capitalism that would have likely brought greater reprisals from government and capitalist forces, and successfully drew on the support of the white working-class majority that they no longer represented, let alone included.

AFL leaders relied upon racism – assailing the threat of the Asian hordes in the colonies, denouncing the undercutting of wages by African-Americans workers, defending the political and economic privileges of white supremacy – in order to prop up their position of power among the ranks of the white working class. The labor movement's battles against imperialism helped achieve at least a tentative class unity through racial exclusion. The success of labor's mobilization against the racial ills of empire no doubt provided union workers with a “psychological wage” – the “aristocracy of labor” replaced the broadly based “producer's republicanism” of old, but, for many

workers, they had at least preserved the white Republic. “We believe the exclusion of Chinese,” Samuel Gompers told a Congressional committee in February of 1902 in the midst of lobbying for the extension of exclusion in perpetuity for the nation and its colonies, “is no more a question of cheap labor than it is a question of American citizenship, the quality of which is largely determined by the general economic condition of the individual citizen.”¹³

Economically, skilled union workers utilized their growing numbers and authority in the first years of the twentieth century to acquire an advancement in wages far outstripping non-union and unskilled workers. The American Federation of Labor of the early twentieth century accepted the permanency of wage labor and the capitalist system, endeavoring only to protect the advantages of a small minority of workers and share in the benefits of an expanding industrial economy. The federation’s leadership joined the National Civic Federation and a multitude of employers’ associations while undertaking other conciliatory overtures in an effort to merge the interests of capital and skilled labor.¹⁴ Samuel Gompers, for example, maintained that the NCF would help “labor and capital...go hand in hand in the production of wealth of the wealth of the country.”¹⁵ These wishful exploits, however, were only partially successful. Industrialists continued to utilize the nation’s courts and legislatures (as well as military forces) in the first decade of the twentieth century to strike down organized labor’s initiatives, while also

¹³ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Immigration, *Chinese Exclusion: Testimony...on Senate Bill 2960...*, 57th Congress, 1st session, 1902, S. Rpt. 776, pt. 2, 264.

¹⁴ A typical statement along these conciliatory lines came from M.M. Garland, former president of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers, at a December 1902 meeting of the National Civic Foundation: “It is necessary for the employers and the laborers to get together as one family and to thresh out their differences.” “To Prevent Strikes,” *Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 11, 1902, 3.

¹⁵ “Hanna and Gompers,” *Dallas Morning News*, Oct. 18, 1903, 2.

commencing an “open shop” crusade meant to weaken, if not destroy, the American labor movement.¹⁶ The American Federation of Labor responded with a vigorous federal lobbying campaign and, in 1906, their first aggressive steps into electoral politics, seeking not simply the protective arms of the U.S. government and the passage of pro-labor legislation but the recognition of organized labor's permanent and vital place in the domestic economy.¹⁷

The AFL's alignment with the National Civic Federation and other corporate organizations, as well as their increasing reliance upon the machinations of an ever-growing federal bureaucracy, was part of the federation's accommodation to industrial-capitalism and the “promotional state.” The “promotional state” was the fusion of corporate and government forces around the turn of the century determined to employ, in the words of historian Emily Rosenberg, “new ways of stimulating America's foreign expansion.”¹⁸ The promotional state, moreover, was a product of the broad centralization of power that occurred during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era: a process that included the massive corporate merger movement, the extension (in size, authority and reach) of municipal, state, and federal government bureaucracies, the growing authority of the Executive branch of government, the institutionalization of social reform movements, the solidification of an “aristocracy of labor,” and the establishment of a

¹⁶ For scholarship on the “open shop” drive, see: Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 88-93; James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 49-68; David Montgomery, *Workers Control in America: Studies in the History of Work, Technology, and Labor Struggles* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 57-62.

¹⁷ Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*, 107-180.

¹⁸ The “architects” of the promotional state, Rosenberg explains, “gave more active assistance to American entrepreneurs who wished to export or invest abroad” and formulated “economic policies designed to reduce foreign barriers against American trade or capital.” Emily S. Rosenberg, *Spreading the American Dream: American Economic and Cultural Expansion, 1890-1945* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 48.

large professional military. America's foreign policy turned away from the annexation of outlying territories in the early years of the twentieth century, as corporate and government officials sought to extend American military and economic influence abroad without the trappings of colonial government. President Theodore Roosevelt's decision to provide military "support" for the Panamanian revolution – and the subsequent remittance of a strip of Panamanian land in order to construct the Panama Canal – launched America into a new foreign policy epoch of "informal empire."¹⁹

Americans had hoped to construct a trans-isthmian canal in Central American since the middle of the nineteenth century (Nicaragua, in fact, had usually been preferred to Panama for economic and logistical purposes), and Theodore Roosevelt immediately initiated negotiations with Colombia for the rights to build a canal across Panama (then under Colombian control) when he became president in 1901 following the assassination of William McKinley. When diplomacy proved unsuccessful, Roosevelt forged a convenient alliance with a collection of Panamanians pressing for independence from Colombia and sent U.S. warships to Panama in November 1903 to provide cover for their coup and prevent Colombian anti-revolutionary forces from landing on the isthmus.²⁰

¹⁹ William Appleman Williams' description of "informal empire" still rings true: "When an advanced industrial nation plays, or tries to play, a controlling and one-sided role in the development of a weaker economy, then the policy of the more powerful country can with accuracy and candor be described as imperial. The empire that results may well be informal in the sense that the weaker country is not ruled on a day-to-day basis by resident administrators, or increasingly populated by emigrants from the advanced country, but it is nevertheless an empire. The poorer and weaker nation makes its choices within limits set, either directly or indirectly, by the powerful society, and often does so by choosing between alternatives actually formulated by the outsider." William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, (1959; revised, New York: Delta Publishing, 1962), 47-48.

²⁰ When Colombian officials rejected the original canal treaty, Roosevelt was apoplectic. He dismissed the Colombian government as "foolish and homicidal corruptionists in Bogota," "contemptible little creatures," and "inefficient bandits." Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 131. Later, Roosevelt justified the coup by declaring that Colombia had "misgoverned and misruled" Panama, and when Colombian officials rejected the American canal treaty,

Despite some support within the U.S. for seizing all of Panama, Roosevelt recognized Panama's independence and “negotiated” a treaty with the new nation which ceded to the United States “titular sovereignty” of the Panama Canal Zone along with substantial economic, political, and military rights in the Panamanian Republic.²¹ Roosevelt's intervention into Panama helped define the future course of America's informal empire, as his decision to refrain from broad territorial acquisition and, instead, utilize American military might to extort economic privileges and political influence in the Caribbean nation established a precedent he – and many other U.S. presidents – would follow throughout the twentieth century and beyond.²² Roosevelt subsequently added his own “corollary” to the Monroe doctrine in 1904, defining America's self-proscribed right to intervene in world affairs for the sake of maintaining “order” – and not incidentally, the preservation or procurement of American political, military, and economic power.²³

Roosevelt's complicity in the Panamanian revolution initially received

“the people of Panama rose literally as one man.” Walter LaFeber, *The American Search for Opportunity, 1865-1913* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 194.

²¹ As historian Julie Greene and others have noted, the representative of Panama in the negotiations over the canal was himself not even Panamanian. He was, instead, a representative of the French company that owned the rights to the canal – a company that stood to benefit handsomely from the selling of the canal rights to the United States government. Julie Greene, *The Canal Builders: Making America's Empire at the Panama Canal* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 6. The United States acquired complete and perpetual control of the 10-mile wide Canal Zone, the right to purchase or otherwise control any land or buildings deemed necessary for the construction of the canal, and the right to intervene in Panama to maintain or restore public “order.”

²² In many ways, Secretary of State John Hay's Open Door Notes (1899-1900) were the first policy directives of America's “informal empire” – yet they were issued from a position of relative weakness, considering Hay had hoped to prevent the closure of trade opportunities due to European nation's hegemony in Asia and Africa, and were directed towards the other “great nations.” Roosevelt's insistence upon a protectorate status (the 1902 Platt amendment) in Cuba before he would withdrawal U.S. troops can also be seen as an opening salvo of America's twentieth-century “informal” empire.

²³ In the following years, the United States invoked that prerogative in the Dominican Republic (1905), Mexico (1911-13), Cuba (1914), Nicaragua (1916), and Haiti (1916).

considerable criticism within the United States – Democrats quickly assailed him as opportunistic, power-hungry, and ill-fit for the presidency, the *New York Times* deemed the Canal Zone “stolen property,” and the Senate hesitated to pass the canal treaty.²⁴ Yet, American opposition to the construction of the canal was relatively short-lived. The indispensability of an isthmian canal had been proven to much of the country during the Spanish-American War, when U.S. naval warships in the Pacific were forced to undertake an arduous two-month-long journey around the southern tip of South America in order to link up with the Caribbean fleet. Most importantly, however, the post-Spanish-American War economic boom seemed to justify the promotional state's drive for the expansion of U.S. trade, even as the nation became bogged down in a violent counter-revolutionary fight in the Philippines which soured even the most determined territorial imperialist. Whereas “territorial” expansion encompassing lands populated with millions of “undesirable” inhabitants had engendered intense domestic conflict, most Americans still hoped to benefit from the nation's rapidly advancing political and economic power on the world stage.²⁵

The construction and perpetual control of the Panama Canal seemed to promise Americans – including the organized working class – the benefits of trade expansion without the drawbacks of colonialism. Many within the American labor movement had already declared their support for a U.S. plan to build a trans-isthmian canal by the time

²⁴ “Stolen Property,” *New York Times*, Dec. 29, 1903, 8; originally located in Greene, *Canal Builders*, 25.

²⁵ Indeed, there is every reason to believe the statement of John W. Foster (ex-Secretary of State) in December 1900: “Whatever difference of opinion may exist among American citizens respecting the policy of territorial expansion, all seem to be agreed upon the desirability of commercial expansion. In fact it has come to be a necessity to find new and enlarged markets for our agricultural and manufactured products. We cannot maintain our present industrial prosperity without them.” John W. Foster, “The Reciprocity Treaties and the Senate,” *Independent*, Dec. 6, 1900, 2897.

Roosevelt acquired the Panama Canal Zone. Long-time Knight Henry B. Martin proclaimed in early 1897 that a canal should be built because “it would be of immense value to the whole world of commerce and especially to the commerce of the United States.” Even more importantly, maintained Martin, the canal “would put hundreds of thousands of our idle at work at useful labor,” and allow them to earn “a living for themselves” while “adding to the wealth of our nation.”²⁶ AFL president Samuel Gompers announced to Chicago union workers as early as August 1893 that he believed the U.S. government should construct a Central American canal as part of a plan to alleviate the “condition of the labor and money market” in the midst of the industrial depression.²⁷ E.E. Clark, a high-ranking railroad brotherhood official, demanded a canal in 1900 because “it is the gateway to the Orient and makes our position as a power commanding and at the same time opens a new field to commercial interests that means more to us than we can at this time foresee.”²⁸ Gompers, an original member of the American Anti-Imperialist League, and Clark, a prominent pro-empire labor leader, exemplified the breadth of organized labor's early support for a trans-isthmian canal.

AFL union leaders actually championed the advantages of a Central American canal at the same time the federation was denouncing American territorial imperialism. A.R. Hamilton, editor of the official organ of the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers of the United States and an initial opponent of territorial expansion, deemed a proposed Nicaraguan canal a “necessary improvement of international interest,

²⁶ Henry B. Martin, “Let Uncle Sam Rule the Nicaragua Canal,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Jan. 28, 1897.

²⁷ “Gompers Draws Largest Crowd,” *Chicago Tribune*, Aug. 31, 1893, 1.

²⁸ E.E. Clark, “Nicaraguan Canal Recommended,” *Railway Conductor*, Jan. 1900, 41.

whose importance has been made manifest by the [Spanish-American] war.”²⁹ J.H.F.

Mosley opposed territorial expansion on the grounds that it would have entailed placing American and colonial labor “in competition with each other,” but the editor of the *Birmingham Labor Advocate* still yearned for the construction of a trans-isthmian canal in order to “give the United States complete commercial control of the Pacific.”³⁰

Cornelius Guiney, spokesman for the twenty-thousand-member Minnesota State Federation of Labor, assailed the “craze...for territorial expansion” in the same December 1898 issue of the *Minnesota Union Advocate* that he praised a plan to forge “an open door from one ocean to the other on the American isthmus” for its potential to bring “much value to us.”³¹ Indeed, much of the leadership of the American labor movement shared the sentiments of Samuel Gompers: while rejecting territorial expansion, they did “not oppose the development of our industry, the expansion of our commerce, nor the power and influence which the United States may exert upon the destinies of the nations of the earth.”³²

Union workers and their leaders largely endorsed Roosevelt's acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone, envisioning a boost in foreign trade, the creation of thousands of jobs for skilled American laborers, and a greater role for the United States on the world stage – all without the failings of colonial government. The Panama Canal will be “a great benefit...to this country,” proclaimed B. Kelly, a New York member of the Iron

²⁹ A.R. Hamilton, “The Forthcoming Message,” *National Labor Tribune*, Dec. 1, 1898, 1.

³⁰ J.H.F. Mosley, “American Imperialism. The Meanest Grade,” *Birmingham Labor Advocate*, Aug. 25, 1900; *Ibid.*, “Labor and Industry,” April 7, 1900.

³¹ Cornelius Guiney, “Good for Gompers,” *Minnesota Union Advocate*, Dec. 16, 1898, 2; *Ibid.*, Editorial.

³² Samuel Gompers, speech delivered at the Chicago Peace Jubilee, Oct. 18, 1898; reproduced in “Imperialism. Its Dangers and Wrongs,” *American Federationist*, Nov. 1898, 182.

Molders' Union of North America.³³ C.R. Gurney, a Los Angeles locomotive engineer, maintained “the opening of the...Panama Canal” would lead to a “revolution” in the economy of the Pacific coast.³⁴ Charles L. Baine, editor of the *Shoe Workers' Journal*, praised the U.S. government for “at last really digging the big ditch” and warned union workers “to be satisfied” and avoid criticizing the administration.³⁵ Henry White, secretary of the United Garment Workers of America, asserted that it was the American Federation of Labor's duty to support “an improvement that means so much for the material growth and prosperity of the country.”³⁶ Finally, the delegates to the 1903 American Federation of Labor annual convention overwhelmingly approved a resolution declaring the construction of the Panama canal to be “the most important public work ever assumed by this or any other nation.”³⁷

Many labor leaders actually focused on the canal's potential economic benefits for their particular unions. Eugene J. Balslger, editor of the *Leather Workers' Journal*, contended there were to be great “opportunities for trade” due to the construction of the canal and expected that both workers and dredging machinery would be transported along the canal by means of “horses for which the very best [leather] saddlery work will be wanted.”³⁸ Likewise, Bruce Taylor, a union carpenter, maintained the construction of the

³³ B. Kelly, letter to the editor, *Iron Molders' Journal*, March 1904, 183.

³⁴ C.R. Gurney, letter to the editor, *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal*, Jan. 1905, 46.

³⁵ Charles L. Baine, “Eight Hour Law for Laborers and Mechanics at Panama,” *Shoe Workers' Journal*, July 1905, 17.

³⁶ “F. of L. Appeals for Fraternity of World Labor,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Nov. 16, 1902, 1.

³⁷ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor*, (1903), 205. (hereafter cited as, AFL, *Twenty-Third Proceedings*, 1903)

³⁸ Eugene J. Balslger “Trade Notes,” *Leather Workers' Journal*, Nov. 1905, 121.

canal would be advantageous to the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America: “This is a lengthy job that Uncle Sam has undertaken and, as his men must be housed, the carpenters are bound to get their share of the work.”³⁹ Robert B. Kerr, editor of the *Blacksmith's Journal*, noted expectantly that “when the work on the Panama canal reaches the great cut in the granite through which it must flow, there will be work for tool sharpeners.”⁴⁰ M.A. Smith, a New Orleans railway conductor, looked forward to the “tremendous impetus [that] will be given to our southern ports by the construction of the Isthmian canal.” New Orleans railroads, Smith concluded, were “destined to be the recipient, both going and coming, of a large portion of the vast trade that this gigantic enterprise will put in motion.”⁴¹

There were, of course, union representatives who objected to Roosevelt's actions in Panama and the government's plan to construct and control the Central American canal. John W. Hayes condemned the “dangerous exploits of our Napoleon President” in the Panama affair.⁴² Hayes further accused Roosevelt of being driven “by motives at variance with our treaty obligations, our own laws, international law, Christian morality, and enlightened self-interest.”⁴³ Andrew Furuseth, a leading figure in the International

³⁹ Bruce Taylor, letter to the editor, *The Carpenter*, Nov. 1905, 33.

⁴⁰ Robert B. Kerr, Editorial, *Blacksmith's Journal*, May 1905, 17.

⁴¹ M.A. Smith, letter to the editor, *Railway Conductor*, May 1903, 435.

⁴² John W. Hayes, “Source of the Panama Scandal,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Dec. 1903, 9.

⁴³ John W. Hayes, “The Mischief in Panama,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Dec. 1903, 1. Hayes' opposition, however, did not last long. In 1905, Hayes proclaimed his support for American construction of the Panama canal: “We favor its completion; and if any government on earth is able to build it ours is that government...We are for cutting the canal through the route selected and only disgruntled and dissatisfied croakers and growlers are opposing it and trying to embarrass the government by circulating false and malicious reports.” John W. Hayes, “Panama Canal: American Labor Can Build It,” *Journal of the Knights of Labor*, Aug. 1905, 2.

Seamen's Union of America, decried certain Americans' "greed for sovereignty over the country through which the inter-oceanic canal must pass." Furuseth contended ownership of the canal zone would lead, furthermore, to more exacting imperialistic forays: "The building of such a canal must inevitably lead to the annexation of all the territory between our Mexican border and such canal in order that it may be at all times defended."⁴⁴ George E. McNeill was perhaps organized labor's most outspoken critic towards American actions in Panama. Utilizing as his pulpit the fifth annual meeting of the New England Anti-Imperialist League, McNeill attacked U.S. foreign policy – including that in Panama – as beholden to the dictates of industrial-capitalism:

"My duty is, if possible, to stir you with some sense of the fact that we are not a free republican government – that we are monarchical, that we are imperialistic, despotic, and that you need not look upon this phenomenon in the Philippine Islands with astonishment – upon that war with Spain, upon the outrages perpetrated in Panama – but only see in these thing the development of an industrial system founded in injustice and despotism."⁴⁵

Dissenting voices within American unionism, however, failed to silence the labor movement's broader chorus in favor of the United States' construction and retention of the Panama canal. AFL president Samuel Gompers, in fact, ignored the controversial circumstances surrounding President Roosevelt's military intervention in Panama and spearheaded labor's embrace of the plan for an American-built and American-owned trans-isthmian canal. Gompers, now firmly aligned with the promotional state, sang the praises of the canal and the expansion of American trade that would come with it. The canal, Gompers promised the members of the Trades Union Social Club of New York in

⁴⁴ AFL, *Twenty-Third Proceedings*, 1903, 147.

⁴⁵ George E. McNeill, "Remarks at the Annual Meeting of the New England Anti-Imperialist League," *Report of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the New England Anti-Imperialist League* (Boston: New England Anti-Imperialist League, 1903).

July 1905, “will be an impetus to industry and commerce, bring peoples into accord who are now remote from each other and into closer proximity.” The canal “will be beneficial to the country's great commerce,” Gompers continued, and it will “make for better opportunities and conditions and tend to the uplifting of the world.” The once-anti-imperialist Gompers implored workers not to criticize the government's foreign policy as it might “revolt in harm to our own integral life and lay us open to the criticism of the peoples of other countries.” Finally, Gompers closed with labor's full endorsement of the colonial enterprise in Central America: “We want the canal built and built well, under American conceptions of right, justice, and humanity, so that when completed without tears or wails it may stand as another perpetual monument to the skill, the genius of American science, American labor, American manhood, and grit.”⁴⁶

By 1905, then, the American Federation of Labor had removed itself as an obstacle to permanent American control over Hawaii and the former Spanish colonies and endorsed the nation's coercive political and economic policies in Panama and elsewhere. The AFL, however, was a demanding and ultimately self-interested bedfellow of the promotional state. With varying degrees of success, the federation's leadership continually insisted upon special privileges for America's skilled white union workers – such as insular tariffs, immigration exclusion, union organizing rights in the colonies, eight-hour days on federally-funded works, consultation (such as audiences with the President and appointments before Congressional committees) regarding governmental policy decisions, and preferred employment on imperial projects – in return for labor's support of domestic and foreign policy. Organized labor's promotion of the Panama canal

⁴⁶ Samuel Gompers, “Organized Labor and Isthmian Canal,” *American Federationist*, Oct. 1905, 760-763.

project – and workers' demands for benefits and concessions in the construction and retention of the canal – exemplified the mainstream labor movement's alignment with the “promotional state” and wide-scale embrace of the “wages of empire.”

Union leaders were primarily concerned with assuring the employment and protection of skilled white workers on the government-funded trans-isthmian canal. In late 1898, with a Central American canal merely a possibility, delegates to the annual AFL convention passed a resolution requesting that Congress pass laws to “protect the labor employed in the building of the Canal from the evils attendant upon such work,” ensure that workmen “be supplied with all possible safeguards as to hygienic living,” and require “reasonable hours of labor and...all other safe conditions which will give them a chance to labor and live with every possible degree of comfort.”⁴⁷ Once U.S. construction efforts began in 1904, union workers were often critical of working conditions on the isthmus. James J. Richardson, a locomotive engineer working in the Canal Zone, complained in May 1905 that “conditions are bad here for enginemen” and expressed his fears regarding “yellow fever and malaria” which “now exist on the Isthmus and in all probabilities will be here for some time to come.”⁴⁸ Likewise, “L.O.B.,” a member of the International Association of Machinists, griped that mechanics “receive no sick leave” despite the fact that “one would be surprised at the amount of sickness here and the poor accommodation provided for the men.”⁴⁹ Conditions would improve over the following years – particularly once yellow fever was eradicated in the

⁴⁷ American Federation of Labor, *Report of the Proceedings of the Eighteenth Annual Convention of the American Federation of Labor* (1898), 72.

⁴⁸ James J. Richardson, letter to the editor, *Locomotive Engineers' Monthly Journal*, July 1905, 573-574.

⁴⁹ L.O.B., letter to the editor, *Machinists' Monthly Journal*, Oct. 1905, p. 954

Canal Zone after 1906 – but organized labor increasingly decried any and all deficiencies as instances of the government failing America's white union workforce.

Organized labor's deepest fear was that contract labor – especially Chinese contract labor – would be employed on what they contended should be an *American* project. Charles L. Baine, General Secretary-Treasurer of the Boot and Shoe Workers' Union, denounced those who said “the contract labor law does not apply to the canal zone, and that the Isthmian Canal Commission and its contractors are at liberty to contract for laborers to any extent.”⁵⁰ John Zaring, a representative of the Springfield (Ill.) Central Labor Union, called on union workers to “go on record as protesting against foreign labor building the canal.”⁵¹ Delegates to the 1903 AFL convention did just that, endorsing a resolution that insisted Congress “require that none but citizens of the United States be employed on the construction of the inter-oceanic canal.”⁵² Samuel Gompers, the leading anti-Chinese immigration voice within the labor movement, argued that when it came to work on the canal, “preference should be given to the laborers of America.”⁵³ Gompers, too, reproached anyone “who would hold that our American Chinese exclusion law does not apply” in the canal zone: “Inasmuch as the federal government has by solemn treaty declared that the canal strip in the Isthmus in Panama belongs to the United States, the Chinaman must not come to Panama to build the canal.”⁵⁴ America's union

⁵⁰ Charles L. Baine, “Eight Hour Law for Laborers and Mechanics,” *Shoe Workers' Journal*, July 1905, 17.

⁵¹ AFL, *Twenty-Third Proceedings*, 1903, 205.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Samuel Gompers, “Organized Labor and Isthmian Canal,” *American Federationist*, Oct. 1905, 761.

⁵⁴ AFL, *Twenty-Fifth Proceedings*, 1905, 33; *American Federationist*, Samuel Gompers, “Organized Labor and Isthmian Canal,” *American Federationist*, Oct. 1905, 762.

workers, Gompers concluded, “are just as intensely interested as any others can be in the necessity for and the advantages that will result from the construction of the Panama canal, but we equally insist that it shall be the result of American enterprise, American genius, and American labor.”⁵⁵

Ultimately, the American Federation of Labor's anti-Chinese lobbying campaign culminated with federal enforcement of national Chinese exclusion laws and the prohibition of all contract labor within the canal zone. Likewise, the federation's protests helped secure the 8-hour work day on the canal – but only for skilled white workers. The AFL's efforts to procure privileges for white union workers in Panama converged with U.S. government officials' policy of systematically segregating the workforce in the canal zone.⁵⁶ Isthmian Canal Commission chairman Theodore Shonts explained the segregation policy to Congress in 1906, arguing that relying upon a single source of labor would result in workers developing a sense of importance that would harm productivity. Moreover, Shonts contended, “a labor force composed of different races and nationalities would minimize, if it did not positively prevent, any possible combination of the entire labor force which would be disastrous to the work.”⁵⁷ Along with skilled white labor from the United States, the canal commission recruited workers from throughout Latin

⁵⁵ AFL, *Twenty-Fifth Proceedings*, 1905, 33.

⁵⁶ According to historian Julie Greene, John Stevens, the chief engineer on the Panama Canal project from 1905 to 1907, “strongly believed” that “the [U.S.] government must find workers of several different ethnicities and nationalities, so as to divide them from one another and let competition between groups spur them to work harder.” Greene, *Canal Builders*, 47.

⁵⁷ *Hearings Before the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce of the House of Representatives, on the Isthmian Canal* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 1906), 33-35; originally located in Greene, *Canal Builders*, 47-48. Greene further notes: “The need for ethnic/racial competition was articulated by officials so often that journalists covering the construction effort saw it as a central aspect of the government's strategy.” *Ibid.*, p. 407, endnote 22.

America, the Caribbean, and beyond. In practice, reveals historian Julie Greene, race-based segregation was “the most important tool the U.S. government relied on for controlling and managing the Canal Zone's workers and residents.”⁵⁸

Canal officials' determination to separate the various labor groups in order to foster competition and prevent organization – as well as white U.S. union workers' demands for class and racial privileges – consolidated a two-tiered system of enforced racial discrimination in Panama. The “gold” and “silver” payrolls eventually came to distinguish between white, American-born workers who were paid in U.S. gold currency and all other non-white, non-American-born workers who were paid with Panamanian silver. Skilled white American workers generally received high wages and great benefits, resided in superior housing, and enjoyed a robust social life – including social clubs, sporting activities, concerts and vaudeville acts – relatively free of charge. All non-white, non-American-born workers, on the other hand, received low wages and very few benefits (certainly not paid vacation time like gold roll workers enjoyed), lived in poorer, racially-segregated housing complexes, and were excluded from participation in all white workers' social activities. Julie Greene maintains that segregation, in other words, “came to shape every aspect of life in the Zone, from work to housing, leisure activities, sexual relationships, and shopping.”⁵⁹

Union workers aligned their racial, class, and national identities in defending their claims for special benefits on the American-owned Panama canal. During the first decade of the twentieth century, American union workers – particularly those within the

⁵⁸ Greene, *Canal Builders*, 62.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

American Federation of Labor – forged an “aristocracy of labor” by consolidating certain privileges based upon their race, gender, skills and comparatively high wages. In the Canal Zone, Julie Greene reveals, the “silver and gold payrolls irrefutably reinforced white skilled workers' status as aristocrats, differentiating them from other workers by granting highly visible privileges.”⁶⁰ Union workers increasingly justified these privileges, Greene explains, by affirming “their rights as American citizens, as white men, and as representatives of America's empire.”⁶¹ Union member Crawford Moore, for example, stated his case for “gold roll” employee benefits: “We are putting forth our best efforts. We are all patriotic American citizens. We will throw our hats up just as high in the air as anyone when this work is done.”⁶² Citizenship rights, however, were often envisioned as (at least partially) a matter of race. In 1909, a group of skilled American workers in Panama officially protested the U.S. government's employing “negro 'so-called' mechanics” from the West Indies as it placed them “in direct competition with white mechanics and citizens of the U.S.A.” Such a system of employment, they declared, was “Un-American” and “directly against the principles of the U.S. government as it places the white man in competition with a class, who by their mode of living and habits are on an equal with the Chinese and Japanese, and in general intelligence and mechanical ability are far beneath the Chinese and Japanese.”⁶³ Union workers'

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁶² U.S. Senate, *Investigation of Panama Canal Matters*, p. 3231; *Supplement to Hearings Concerning Estimates*, 24, 49; originally located in Greene, *Canal Builders*, 92.

⁶³ “Resolutions Proposed and Adopted by Employees of the ICC Regarding Certain Conditions Prevailing on the Canal Zone, January 1909,” ICC Records, 2-P-49/P; originally located in Greene, *Canal Builders*, 95-96.

enunciation of their rights and privileges – codified in terms of citizenship, whiteness, and their role in building and protecting the nation's empire – became, according to Greene, “inextricable from one another in the eyes of many workers and government officials.”⁶⁴

The American Federation of Labor's abandonment of anti-imperialism did not take long. Union workers had been at least partially sustained in their transition from producerism to pure-and-simple unionism by an anti-imperialist cause steeped in traditional republicanism. With racial fears abetted, however, and an “aristocracy of labor” now a certifiable reality, the leadership of the American Federation of Labor conformed white working-class narratives to the dictates of twentieth-century industrial-capitalism and, by 1905 at the latest, threw the American labor movement behind American imperialism. Throughout much of the early twentieth century, moreover, the AFL pursued contradictory impulses regarding non-white workers in Latin America, Asia and beyond. On the one hand, Samuel Gompers and other AFL leaders showed a willingness to organize craft unions abroad (particularly in Latin America) as long as low wages in the industries in question posed a challenge to U.S. dominance, control of the unions remained in the hands of the AFL hierarchy, and there existed immediate and quantifiable material benefits to white Federation members at home. On the other hand, white union workers began to compare and contrast their wages and working conditions with those of the inhabitants of U.S. colonies and other “lesser” nations. They increasingly demanded that American labor retain its privileged status and be spared the degradations seemingly “accepted” by “racially inferior” workers abroad. The AFL

⁶⁴ Greene, *Canal Builders*, 92.

maintained this international “gaze” throughout much of the twentieth century, as the “aristocracy of labor” cultivated an identity based upon race, skill-level, and nationality that held high wages and a fair share of the nation’s wealth were an absolute entitlement. Non-white workers and unions with more expansive policies, however, would clamor for a more inclusive and wide-ranging labor movement. Meanwhile, industrial-capitalists seeking higher profit-margins would increasingly shift production to nations where they could pay workers much lower wages. The AFL’s ideology of entitlement that was forged in empire, therefore, would face considerable challenges during the twentieth century.

This dissertation has followed American union workers on their turn-of-the-century path from empathy to empire. It reveals that organized labor assumed a leading position in the Cuban sympathy movement – a cross-class, non-partisan, grassroots movement dedicated to a unifying, if vaguely defined, narrative of civic virtue and American nationalism that actually forged Americans’ understanding of the Cuban revolution. Previously, when historians of the War of 1898 have turned their attention to matters of “public opinion” they have largely done so by focusing on the machinations of the so-called “yellow journals” of the era or by blaming the popular uproar regarding Cuba on a contingent of “imperialists” located in government and industry who sought to provoke a military intervention into Cuba as the first step in a wider policy of American territorial expansion. The Cuban sympathy movement, however, preceded the lurid circulation wars of the yellow journals and was hardly the result of scheming editors or

advocates for empire. The sympathy movement was undoubtedly a self-interested expression of American exceptionalism, but we must not let our prescient hindsight of the war to come alter the meaning and circumstances of Americans' initial engagement with the Cuban revolution. A broad call for belligerent rights need not have led to war. Indeed, had Cuba achieved its independence before American intervention – or had U.S. intervention been *actually* in support of Cuban independence – the collective memory of the sympathy movement could have survived as a meaningful rallying point for the nation's historically self-fashioned identity as the “defender of liberty.”

As it was, the U.S. invasion of Cuba in 1898 was the launching point for a war of colonial conquest that ended with an American overseas empire. Scholars have long noted the obvious disconnect between Americans' frequently expressed aspiration for Cuban independence and the actual reality of the war conducted by the McKinley administration – which at every step of operations sought to seize control of Spanish colonial possessions, restrict the movements and actions of the Cuban military, denigrate the worthiness of the Cuban revolutionary, and, ultimately, prevent Cuban independence. This apparent contradiction is particularly illustrative of the degree to which many Americans had appropriated “*Cuba Libre*” as a relatively undisputed mission of “*the American people*.” Disingenuous newspaper men and conniving imperialists, whatever their influence, could scarcely have instilled such a collective ownership of the “meaning” of the war. The McKinley administration's seeming negation of the “public will,” however, also illuminates a much broader paradox: that even (or, perhaps especially) in a democracy, government officials' rationale for, and conduct of, a particular war often differs considerably from the purposes internalized and promulgated

by a majority of its citizenry. Such an observation, while hardly groundbreaking, nevertheless stands as a stark reminder of what is at stake in our political discourse during times of war – alongside the unforgiving ramifications of military mobilization exists an implicit contest regarding the “purpose” of America at home and abroad.

This dissertation also corrects the claims of previous scholarship that white workers were reluctantly pulled into war against Spain. It shows that the majority of the labor movement, in fact, called for intervention into Cuba for reasons that conformed to workers’ late-nineteenth-century movement narratives. It also provides the first in-depth scholarly account of the heavily symbolic “flag-raising” that served as Americans’ public enactment of the “imagined community” at the outset of the nation’s first foreign war in fifty years. This “imagined community” of American nationalism has frequently contained rigid mental barriers – based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality for sure, but also ideology. Throughout the history of the United States, groups considered to be “outside” the current definitions of the national community have struggled for acceptance based on terms that could somehow meet their requirements for self-respect and cultural cohesion. War-time service has often operated as a hopeful means for those “on the outside, looking in” to make claims regarding the “meaning” and “purpose” of America and assert the legitimacy of their place in the national community. Spanish-American War flag-raising abounded with paeans to how this “righteous” war would unite all classes of Americans – flag raising, even more than the Cuban sympathy meetings of 1895/1896, were ritualized acts of a wistful national harmony. Union workers came to see the Spanish-American War, however naively, as a means through which to enshrine their own class-based vision for the present and future course of America.

This dissertation also demonstrates, however, that working-class racism – namely, the preservation of white racial privilege and the exclusion of “racially inferior” non-whites – was an essential component of the turn-of-the-century labor movement and resided at the heart of the controversy regarding American imperialism that followed the War of 1898. The construction of white workers’ racial and class identity, in other words, was deeply affected by American imperialism. Imperialism – like the Cuban situation and war against Spain before it – provoked schisms within the labor movement. The majority of union workers assumed an anti-imperialist stance from 1898 to 1902, but from the outset a vocal minority of labor leaders celebrated the possible cultural and economic advantages of U.S. expansion and expressed their confidence that white union labor would overcome the threat posed by the island inhabitants through the strength and ingenuity of American workers and, significantly, through government protection. Imperialist and anti-imperialist workers agreed, however, on the necessity of excluding colonial inhabitants from the American body politic. Pro-empire union workers had no interest in taking up the “white man’s burden” – they endorsed expansion, but demanded that it be to the benefit of white workers. Anti-imperialist workers, on the other hand, were doubtful of government protection and expressed reservations regarding the ability of white Americans to thrive in the tropics – they, too, denied any semblance of the “white man’s burden,” instead envisioning colonial rule bringing degradation to the white working class.

Finally, this dissertation provides insight into the manner in which racism has served as ideological scaffolding in the construction of new collective identities. American union workers experienced a defining reorientation of their worldview and

collective sense of self in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. The Cuban sympathy movement, the Spanish-American War, and the debate over American imperialism were all touchstone events amidst the permanent dissolution of workers' inherited vision for America – "producerism." The demolition of an old ideology and its replacement with the new hardly occurs overnight – and those who live through such changes often painstakingly grasp for some semblances of the "old" to help ease what can be a distressing transition. The perseverance of working-class racism – and its concomitant enshrinement of working-class whiteness – reveals how structurally essential it was to both nineteenth-century producerism and twentieth-century pure-and-simple unionism. As *almost everything* changed for turn-of-the-century white union workers, they continued to demand "privileges of citizenship" based upon their intertwined conceptions of race and class. This was, of course, to the advantage of the American Federation of Labor. AFL leaders depended upon the racially inclusive nature of their anti-imperialist cause – uniting all white workers against the colonial "Others" – to strengthen the Federation at the *exact* time they were abandoning the wider ranks of the white working class. The AFL's subsequent endorsement of empire aligned the nation's strongest labor organization with the dictates of the "promotional state" – to the detriment of the mass of American workers at home, and colonial inhabitants abroad. The AFL's early twentieth-century ascendancy – and the consolidation of its racially exclusive, narrowly constructed, conservative brand of pure-and-simple unionism – was sustained by the organization's self-serving covenant with American imperialism.

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