

# FREE LABOUR, CAPITALISM AND THE ANTI-SLAVERY ORIGINS OF CHINESE EXCLUSION IN CALIFORNIA IN THE 1870s\*

On 14 July 1877 workers on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad in Martinsburg, West Virginia, blocked the tracks in response to wage cuts. Within a week, cities from New York to San Francisco were swept into a pitched confrontation between wage earners and property owners. The Great Strike of 1877 gave vent to broad hostility towards the capitalist order that had consolidated in the fifteen years following the Civil War. The railroads had become the most visible symbol of a great transformation towards corporate power and sharp class divides in America.<sup>1</sup> In California violent confrontation with railroad authorities was averted because the managers rescinded the wage reduction, and rioters in San Francisco redirected their hostility towards the residents of Chinatown.<sup>2</sup> Yet of all the great upheavals in Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Syracuse, Chicago and Baltimore, only in California did the rebellion sparked in July 1877 take sustained political form. In the months following the Great Railroad Strike, men meeting in the vacant ‘Sand Lots’ next to San Francisco’s City Hall rallied around the newly organized Workingmen’s Party of California, led by an Irish drayman, Dennis Kearney. Welding together critiques of corporate capitalism, the role of Chinese labour and the corruption of politics in California using the language of anti-slavery, the Workingmen’s movement in the state proved pivotal in pushing the national parties to support the exclusion of Chinese labourers from further immigration in 1882. Often seen as simply racist, the Exclusion

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<sup>1</sup> David O. Stowell, *Streets, Railroads, and the Great Strike of 1877* (Chicago, 1999); Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kazin, ‘The July Days in San Francisco, 1877: Prelude to Kearneyism’, in David O. Stowell (ed.), *The Great Strikes of 1877* (Urbana, 2008).

Act was specifically aimed at barring labour migration: Chinese scholars and merchants and their minor children were still free to enter the United States.<sup>3</sup> The Workingmen's emergence from the Great Strike of 1877 marked a transition in national politics, as attention shifted away from the 'negro question' and debates about civil rights and home rule in the South to a new era dominated by the 'labor question' and open, often violent class conflict.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on anti-slavery traditions and the language of the Civil War era but advancing a critique focused on the relations of capital and labour, the Workingmen in California illuminate a critical hinge in American political history connecting the anti-slavery of the Civil War era with the labour politics of the Gilded Age, and anticipate the politics of the Knights of Labor and the Farmers' Alliance in subsequent decades.<sup>5</sup>

It was no coincidence that the first sustained class politics of the Gilded Age erupted on the Pacific Coast. Capitalism in California had transformed social and economic relations with unparalleled rapidity, drawing international attention. As Karl Marx marvelled in 1880, 'nowhere else has the upheaval most shamelessly caused by capitalist centralization taken place with such speed'.<sup>6</sup> This process of upheaval as it intersected with global labour recruitment networks will be explored in depth below, but first a résumé of the agenda and career of the Workingmen's Party provides context.<sup>7</sup> After emerging from the informal Sand Lot

<sup>3</sup> As Yong Chen argues, the act illustrates 'the salience of race and class in what was called "the Chinese Question": Yong Chen, *Chinese San Francisco, 1850–1943: A Trans-Pacific Community* (Palo Alto, 2000), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York, 2002), 582–3.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana, 1983); Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Karl Marx to George Sorge, 5 Nov. 1880, trans. Leonard E. Mins, *Science and Society*, ii (1938); also available online at <[http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/letters/80\\_11\\_05.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1880/letters/80_11_05.htm)> (accessed 16 June 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Philip S. Foner (ed.), *The Formation of the Workingmen's Party of the United States: Proceedings of the Union Congress Held at Philadelphia, July 19–22, 1876* (New York, 1976); Lucile Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation, with an Introductory Sketch of the San Francisco Labor Movement* (Berkeley, 1910); Elmer Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana, 1939); Neil L. Shumsky, *The Evolution of Political Protest and the Workingmen's Party of California* (Columbus, 1991). For local studies, see Carole Carter Mauss, 'The San Jose Branch of the Workingmen's Party of California, 1878–1880' (San José State Univ. MA thesis, 1997); Anthony J. Silva, 'The Workingmen's Party of California: Its Activities and Influence in Sonoma County', Sonoma State University, 13 Dec. 1989: Sonoma

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agitation around San Francisco's City Hall that followed the Great Strike of 1877, by the summer of California's Constitutional Convention in 1878 the Workingmen's Party of California was a mass movement in San Francisco under the leadership of Dennis Kearney, and a significant electoral force throughout California.<sup>8</sup> The party invested enormous energy in ratifying the new, controversial state constitution, an effort that was soon undermined when the judiciary struck down provisions aimed at excluding Chinese labourers.<sup>9</sup> The party remained strong through the spring and autumn elections of 1879, at which point they led many municipal governments, including Los Angeles, San José, Sacramento and San Francisco. Despite holding power locally, the means at their disposal repeatedly fell short of their political aspirations. Frustrated at the state level, and unable to influence national politics directly, the leadership fractured as the movement stalled. By the presidential election of 1880, irreparable fissures had split the party. One section, headed by Dennis Kearney, aligned itself with the national Greenback Labor Party and its candidate James Weaver, while another faction, led by William Wellock, resolved to support the Democratic candidate Winfield Scott. The party never re-emerged as a significant force after this split, but their efflorescence in California between 1877 and 1880 ensured that in 1882 both national parties would support the exclusion of Chinese labour migration.

Given the Workingmen's overt racism, historians have generally simplified their politics by labelling the party an 'anti-Chinese movement', but in fact the Workingmen advanced a broad

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County Library, Santa Rosa, California; Anthony J. Silva, 'To Overthrow the Enemy: Opposition to the California Workingmen's Party in Sonoma County, 1877–1882', Sonoma County Historical Records Commission (Peterson Prize 2006): Sonoma County Library, Santa Rosa, California.

<sup>8</sup> Workingmen's delegates included a carpenter, a sign painter, a shoemaker and minister, a rigger, a cabinetmaker, and a sailor and cook, making it among the most working-class constitutional conventions. Its peers are clearly the remarkable conventions of the Reconstruction South in which the freedpeople played an important role. Foner, *Reconstruction*, 316–20; T. J. Vivian and D. G. Waldron, *Biographical Sketches of the Delegates to the Convention to Frame a New Constitution for the State of California, 1878: Together with a Succinct Review of the Facts Leading to the Formation of the Monetary Convention of 1849, a List of its Members, and the Constitutional Act of 1878* (San Francisco, 1878).

<sup>9</sup> Harry N. Scheiber, 'Race, Radicalism, and Reform: Historical Perspective on the 1879 California Constitution', *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly*, xvii, 35 (1989).

programme. They suggested various ways to deal with large land-holding, including progressive taxation and limits on acreage. They urged that corporations should be controlled by making directors and officers responsible for their actions and debts, and that stock trading should be regulated and financial transactions taxed. According to them, democracy required a financial system controlled by the state in the interests of the people, rather than by speculators in the interests of a few. The government should provide public works with good wages during times of economic hardship, and basic necessities of food and shelter should be available to all citizens. The party demanded universal, compulsory, secular public education that would include in its curriculum lectures by labour leaders on the dignity of working people.<sup>10</sup>

Supporting this broad platform was a coherent ideology moulded by the Workingmen's appropriation of the anti-slavery tradition. Anti-slavery politics celebrated Northern 'free labour' society as an egalitarian and productive social order, in contrast to the corrupt and unproductive slave society of the South.<sup>11</sup> When Union soldiers poured their blood into the war against the 'Slave Power', it was in defence of an imagined, but still culturally resonant, republican society of patriarchal independent producers. Conditions of permanent dependence, vast inequality, aristocratic pretension and undemocratic politics were characteristic of the regime of slavery, not of free labour. Yet, in the post-Civil War decade, the rise of corporations and expansion of inequality created what the Workingmen saw as a new corporate 'Money Power', as haughty, anti-democratic and corrupt as the old 'Slave Power' that had been crushed in the rebellion. Just as African slaves had provided the basis for an anti-democratic class of planters, so too, in California, Chinese 'coolies' allowed corporate 'aristocrats' to transform society by concentrating wealth and power at the top, thereby undermining democratic institutions and destroying the dignity of labour.

<sup>10</sup> In the Workingmen's platform for 1879, of the fifty-two planks of the platform, the distribution of topics dealt with in individual planks can be summarized as follows: political corruption, 9; corporations and finance, 7; land monopoly, 7; labour rights, 6; debtors' rights, 5; democracy and elections, 5; railroads, 4; Chinese immigration, 4; education, 2 (some planks are counted under multiple headings): 'Platform of the Workingmen's Party of California, Adopted in State Convention in San Francisco, June 5, 1879', *Star*, 26 July 1879: San Francisco Public Library, Special Collections.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1995).

David Brion Davis has argued that anti-slavery politics generally gave ‘sanction to the prevailing economic order’ by condemning slavery as ‘a unique *moral* aberration’.<sup>12</sup> Yet, with the Workingmen, anti-slavery politics enabled a more generalized critique of power and social relations. Of course, their politics also reproduced prevailing conceptions of white supremacy, and thus recapitulated a powerful yet fateful tension within anti-slavery politics between a social critique of slavery as an exploitative, degrading and undemocratic institution, and a negrophobic opposition to the spread of slavery on racist grounds.<sup>13</sup> In the ideology of the Workingmen, an institutional critique illuminating capitalist exploitation of labour potently mingled with racist fears of ‘Chinese lepers’ and racist insistence on essential Chinese servility and barbarism.

Although the Workingmen have received attention from prominent scholars of race and whiteness, these foundational studies, by foregrounding long-term hierarchies of race or emphasizing individual psychology, have shifted attention away from how anti-Chinese racism was inextricably linked to specific, immediate experiences and perceptions of class relations, capitalist accumulation and the power of corporations in California in the 1870s.<sup>14</sup> Nor has the importance of the anti-slavery tradition been given due attention in this transitional moment. In his seminal study of race and working-class politics,<sup>15</sup> Alexander Saxton perceptively traces the centrality of white supremacy in American political culture from Jackson onwards, but this was not the only relevant inheritance informing understandings of capitalism in California

<sup>12</sup> David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution, 1770–1823* (Ithaca, 1975), 254, 367.

<sup>13</sup> Eric Foner, ‘Racial Attitudes of the New York Free Soilers’, in Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> The classic account is Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971); Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1990). Saxton’s influence has been enormous in whiteness studies: see David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, 1991); Peter Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America’, *Journal of American History*, lxxxix (2002). Although both Roediger and Saxton take the social relations of capitalism seriously, their work marks a turning point towards predominantly cultural interpretations, as seen in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999); Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Saxton, *Indispensable Enemy*.

during that decade. Alongside powerful conceptions of white supremacy, this interpretation draws attention to the complex legacy of anti-slavery politics in shaping understandings of race, labour and capitalism for the Workingmen's Party.<sup>16</sup>

However, what is crucial is how experiences of capitalism in California in the 1870s invigorated these cultural currents. Racism does not take on a life of its own; it is daily brought to life as inherited conceptions of hierarchy intersect with specific experiences of power relations, inequality and domination.<sup>17</sup> Against the prevailing emphasis on the cultural elaboration of race as an 'identity' or 'category' in historical studies, I argue for a more materialist approach in which racism is understood as a social process inextricably embedded within the power structures of capitalist political economy.<sup>18</sup> The denunciation of 'servile' Chinese 'coolies' by the Workingmen was an attempt to give rhetorical expression to immediate dimensions of coercion and inequality within the formally free contracts of capitalism as they confronted it in California at the time.<sup>19</sup> We can see that, placed in the context of changes in the mining and agriculture industries, the Workingmen's attack on Chinese 'coolieism' was not simply hostility to a threatening other, but was also a rejection of proletarian wage labour in what seemed to be its most essential, unmediated forms.<sup>20</sup> While urging a more materialist approach, I also want to warn against a narrow economism that explains racist

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Gyory observes that 'Saxton's failure to integrate the abolitionist legacy undercuts his analysis of working-class attitudes toward Chinese immigration', but does not elaborate this important insight. Gyory shows how anti-Chinese politics became nationalized by skilful politicians, but gives little attention to the decisive role of events in California. Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> For a summary of the prevailing trends, see France Winddance Twine and Charles Gallagher, 'The Future of Whiteness: A Map of the "Third Wave"', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, xxxi (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge, 1998). Feminist scholars have led the way in placing racism and gender at the centre of class formation processes: see Sonya O. Rose, 'Class Formation and the Quintessential Worker', in John R. Hall (ed.), *Reworking Class* (Ithaca, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Although focusing on the rather exceptional use of Chinese labourers in Louisiana sugar production, Moon-Ho Jung brilliantly explicates the national political discourse on coolieism in the post-Civil War years: Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore, 2006), ch. 4.



animosity in terms of wage competition.<sup>21</sup> It was not competition within labour markets that provoked hostility, but more so the perception that Chinese workers transformed labour markets, productive relations and politics by concentrating power at the top and eroding conditions for the working masses.

Thus, the market was the object, not the arena, of the Workingmen's struggle; they imagined triumphing over it, not in it. As liberal ideology quarantined the democratic sphere of the state from the contractual sphere of the market and property, the Workingmen asserted the supremacy of politics over the economy, the right of the sovereign people to set boundaries on accumulation and exchange.<sup>22</sup> Limiting the migration of Chinese labourers was only part of a larger Polanyian project of bounding, embedding and regulating the economy through political power.<sup>23</sup> Yet such projects, as Nancy Fraser has recently emphasized, are more often than not politically ambivalent. Polanyian movements for social protection may afford 'relief from the disintegrative effects of markets upon communities, while simultaneously entrenching domination *within* and *among* them'.<sup>24</sup> The Workingmen's critique of changes in the organization of property, labour markets and inequality in California in the 1870s was inseparable from their racist vision of Chinese workers as outsiders corrupting the social order.

The broader aim of this article is to rethink the nature of racism in its relation to the structures of capitalist political economy. If analysts dismiss racist working-class movements as merely knee-jerk xenophobia against competitors or entrenched bigotry passed down through the ages, we are in danger of overlooking the power and appeal of racism, and its vital roots in experiences of class and capitalism. To stress that racism cannot be adequately understood as an autonomous construction of either cultural

<sup>21</sup> Edna Bonacich, 'A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market', *American Sociological Review*, xxxvii (1972); Susan Olzak, *The Dynamics of Ethnic Competition and Conflict* (Stanford, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> Sven Beckert, 'Democracy and its Discontents: Contesting Suffrage Rights in Gilded Age New York', *Past and Present*, no. 174 (Feb. 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Thus, when the Workingmen's 'anti-capitalism' is discussed, it is meant in this specifically Polanyian sense of 'bounding' and 'embedding' capitalist social relations within a moral and political order: Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time* (Boston, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Nancy Fraser, 'A Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polanyi', *New Left Review*, 2nd ser., lxxi (2013), 129. See also Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers' Movements and Globalization since 1870* (New York, 2003), 20–5.

hierarchy or individual psychology, but is rooted in specific experiences and structures of capitalism, is not to discount its virulence, but to take it seriously as a social process both theoretically and politically.<sup>25</sup> If racism is treated as an abstract cultural hierarchy independent of history, or conversely if race is individualized in terms of personal psychology independent of social relations, then historians risk losing sight of racism's power, and its roots in specific experiences of class and inequality that daily produce and reproduce racist visions of the world. We still live in a world of spatially uneven capitalist development stitched over by global labour recruitment networks. In the high-wage countries of the global North, anti-immigrant populism remains a potent force. In both the social and economic conditions that gave rise to their movement, and in their vision of a local and exclusionary Polanyian political transformation of the economy, the history of the Workingmen's Party can speak powerfully to enduring tensions between national states and global markets in contemporary capitalism.

My argument proceeds through three parts. First, we must trace the actual patterns of migration and recruitment of Chinese labourers alongside the critiques and apologies of the 1870s. While Chinese migrants were not slaves or coolies, as in the rhetoric of the Workingmen, it is important to understand the power relations of this global mobilization of a labour force that brought several thousand Chinese merchants and many tens of thousands of Chinese labourers to California. Next, the argument turns towards the conjunction of Chinese workers with the changing political economy of capitalism in California,

<sup>25</sup> The conception of racism advanced here owes much to Barbara Fields, 'Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America', *New Left Review*, 1st ser., clxxxii (1990), as well as the attempt to write a 'new history of capitalism' by scholars such as Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (New York, 2001); Sven Beckert, 'From Tuskegee to Togo: The Problem of Freedom in the Empire of Cotton', *Journal of American History*, xcii (2005). Broadly, the approach is a materialist response to what have become predominantly culturalist explanations within 'whiteness studies'. For theoretical critiques, see Eric Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the Historians' Imagination', and Barbara Fields, 'Whiteness, Racism, and Identity', both in *International Labor and Working-Class History*, lx (2001). In particular this article follows Eric Foner's insistence that notions of whiteness must be historicized so that 'those calling for the rights of "white labor" or a "white man's standard of living"' can be better understood within the social, economic and cultural context of their times: Eric Foner, 'Response to Eric Arnesen', *International Labor and Working-Class History*, lx (2001).



looking at the two leading economic sectors of the state in the 1870s: gold-mining and wheat farming. Finally, the article examines the ideology of the Workingmen's Party as it emerged from this conjunction of global labour recruitment and capitalist transformation in the 1870s, tracing the unifying role of anti-slavery language and placing the party's anti-Chinese politics within the context of a larger programme to assert political supremacy over the sacrosanct sphere of the economy.

## I

Recent scholarship has clarified patterns of Chinese migration to California, and it is important to start with an understanding of how this system of migration and labour mobilization functioned.<sup>26</sup> Before we turn to Euro-American<sup>27</sup> perceptions and interpretations of the presence of Chinese workers and merchants in California in the 1870s, the actual practices, aspirations and structures that governed Chinese migration and labour in California need to be explored. 'Chinese' was itself a problematic category, and even more so were the labels 'slave' and 'coolie'.<sup>28</sup> When the patterns of Chinese labour migration to California are placed alongside the criticisms of opponents such as the Workingmen, the perceptions behind the allusive language of 'coolies' and 'slaves' become legible.

Nearly all the 'Chinese' migrants who went to California were Cantonese speakers from Guangdong province in southern China, an area surrounding British Hong Kong and Portuguese Macao, and with the treaty port of Guangzhou (Canton) at its centre.<sup>29</sup> (See Map and accompanying Table.) However, this geographical proximity of origin did not translate into unity for

<sup>26</sup> Considerable controversy has surrounded the words used to describe the Chinese who came to work and live in the United States. The descriptors 'migrants' and 'migration' are used here as the most neutral and open-ended way to describe mobility. See Paul C. P. Siu, 'The Sojourner', *American Journal of Sociology*, lviii (1952); Yuen-fong Woon, 'The Voluntary Sojourner among the Overseas Chinese: Myth or Reality?', *Pacific Affairs*, lvi (1983–4); George Anthony Peffer, 'From under the Sojourner's Shadow: A Historiographical Study of Chinese Female Immigration to America, 1852–1882', *Journal of American Ethnic History*, xi (1992); Philip Q. Yang, 'The "Sojourner Hypothesis" Revisited', *Diaspora*, ix (2000).

<sup>27</sup> I use this term in the sense 'Americans of European descent', throughout.

<sup>28</sup> Jung, *Coolies and Cane*, 136–45.

<sup>29</sup> The migrants from this region identified as people of the Tang dynasty, marking them off from other Chinese: Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 129–30.

those who ventured abroad; local dialects of spoken Cantonese were frequently mutually unintelligible.<sup>30</sup> Regional and clan loyalties defined many aspects of life for migrants in California, manifested most conspicuously in the native-place associations (*huiguan*) that Californians called the Chinese Six Companies, as well as smaller secret societies and surname associations.<sup>31</sup> Not until the twentieth century did a sense of nationalist solidarity mitigate 'interclan and regional animosities'.<sup>32</sup> Tensions between groups in Guangdong could translate into conflicts abroad, as when the Hakka–Punti Wars (1855–67) of the Pearl River delta erupted in California as the first of a long series of Tong Wars.<sup>33</sup> Californians of European descent collapsed this diversity of peoples and languages into the monolithic category of 'the Chinese', but the label in fact referred to self-consciously distinct and at times antagonistic groups.

Additionally, although white Californians tended to depict the Chinese as incomparably poor, destitute and desperate, Guangdong was in fact a relatively prosperous province in the nineteenth century, with a long tradition of cash-crop agriculture, merchant trade networks and migration overseas.<sup>34</sup> Long before they crossed the Pacific, Chinese labourers were migrating within Guangdong from Taishan, Xinhui and Enping counties to the more prosperous Sanyi counties (Panyu, Nanhai and Shunde), as well as moving to other parts of the Qing empire, such as Shanghai,

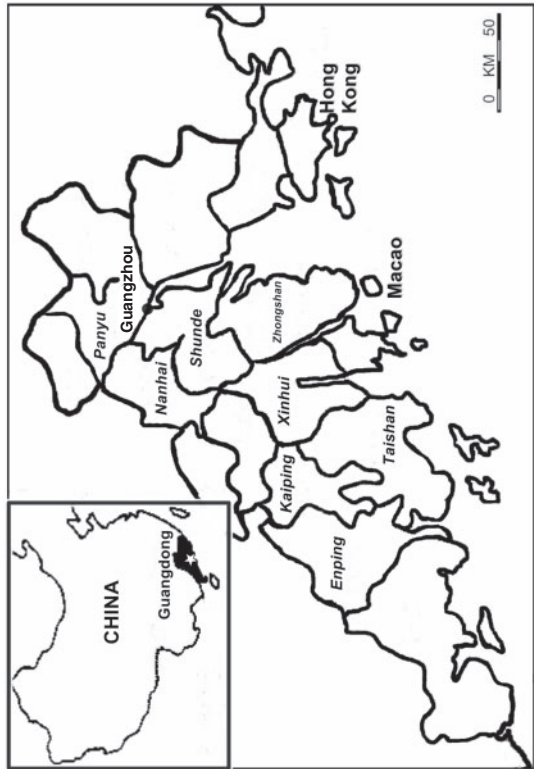
<sup>30</sup> The speakers of the distinct Keija language, or Hakka people, were 'from the perspective of most southern Chinese, physically distinctive' in terms of ethnicity and culture, and, when in California, they 'established their own segregated residential and work area within or near the main Chinatown': Sue Fawn Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West* (Urbana, 2011), 28.

<sup>31</sup> As Yucheng Qin writes, the Six Companies 'may have been the biggest and most important *huiguan* in all *huiguan* history': Yucheng Qin, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies* (Honolulu, 2009), 11. Californians of European descent would often depict the Chinese as de-socialized and atomized, but in fact a wide variety of associational life wove Chinese migrants together, ranging from the Zhigongtang association, which pursued anti-Manchu politics, to the Bing Kong Tong, which pursued the organization and provision of gambling, prostitution and opium: Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold*, 23–8.

<sup>32</sup> Him Mark Lai, *Becoming Chinese American: A History of Communities and Institutions* (Walnut Creek, 2004), 49.

<sup>33</sup> Shih-Shan Henry Tsai, *The Chinese Experience in America* (Bloomington, 1986), 53.

<sup>34</sup> Guangdong specialized in such crops as oranges, sugar cane and tobacco, importing rice from nearby Guangxi province, leading a Guangxi official to complain that the farmers in Guangdong were 'very greedy and always going after a profit': Chen, *Chinese San Francisco*, 17.



District	Percentage	
	1869	1877
Taishan (Siyi)	26	50
Xinhui, Kaiping, Enping (Siyi)	35	22
Zhongshan	21	8
Panyu, Nanhai, Shunde (Sanyi)	17	7

Source: Michael Williams, 'Destination Qiaoxiang: Pearl River Delta Villages and Pacific Ports, 1849–1949' (University of Hong Kong Ph.D. thesis, 2002), 62. See also Yucheng Qing, *The Diplomacy of Nationalism: The Six Companies and China's Policy towards Exclusion* (Honolulu, 2009), 13–14; Sue Fawn Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold: Chinese American Miners and Merchants in the American West* (Urbana, 2011), 20–2.

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where some 3,500 coastal junks had carried over eighty thousand Cantonese labourers by the time of the California gold rush.<sup>35</sup> California was a relatively minor destination in the years between 1850 and 1875, receiving just 160,000 out of a total of 1.28 million migrants who departed China.<sup>36</sup> While merchants of the Guangdong ports had centuries of experience with overseas migration, trade and labour mobilization, several factors pushed more migrants outwards in the mid to late nineteenth century than ever before.<sup>37</sup> British imperialism and the Opium Wars (1839–42, 1856–60) played a crucial role, as did natural disasters such as the famine of 1849, which claimed fifteen million lives, and the Taiping Rebellion (1850–64), which left twenty million dead.<sup>38</sup> Most migrants were not the poorest residents of Guangdong, yet they were quite poor by both relative and absolute standards. Seeking to support their families, regain their land and perhaps even become wealthy, many chose to escape difficult conditions in a society in the midst of profound social, economic and political turmoil.<sup>39</sup>

Wage differentials between Guangdong and California were significant, so the incentive to migrate was powerful. But the costs of passage to reach the 'Gold Mountain' across the Pacific were beyond the means of all but the wealthiest merchants.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 15; Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> California's 160,000 compared with East Asia (350,000 to the Malay peninsula; 250,000 to the East Indies; 45,000 to the Philippines); the Caribbean (135,000 to Cuba; 30,000 to the West Indies); and other destinations (for example, 110,000 to Peru; 55,000 to Hawai'i): Henry Yu, 'The Intermittent Rhythms of the Cantonese Pacific', in Donna R. Gabaccia and Dirk Hoerder (eds.), *Connecting Seas and Connected Ocean Rims: Indian, Atlantic, and Pacific Oceans and China Seas Migrations from the 1830s to the 1930s* (Leiden, 2011), 393.

<sup>37</sup> Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 17.

<sup>38</sup> Sing-wu Wang, *The Organization of Chinese Emigration, 1848–1888: With Special Reference to Chinese Emigration to Australia* (San Francisco, 1978). The indemnity imposed on the Qing dynasty by the European powers after the Opium Wars was enormous, amounting to nearly two decades of Chinese state revenue, 70 per cent of which was to come from Guangdong province alone. Peasants in this region, forced to bear most of the tax burden by the merchant elite, lost their land and were forced to seek other employment. Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 18.

<sup>39</sup> June Mei, 'Socioeconomic Origins of Emigration: Guangdong to California, 1850–1882', *Modern China*, v (1979); Haiming Liu, 'The Social Origins of Early Chinese Immigrants: A Revisionist Perspective', in Susie Lan Cassel (ed.), *The Chinese in America: A History from Gold Mountain to the New Millennium* (New York, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Michael Williams has calculated expected wage rates for Chinese migrants in both China and California, and converted them to comparable monthly rates in Mexican silver dollars. In California a miner or agricultural labourer could earn

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Thus, at the core of this global labour recruitment system was a political economy of debt. For those Chinese migrants sent out for plantation labour in the Caribbean and Hawai'i, a well-defined system of contract labour emerged known as the 'coolie trade', but migration to California followed patterns that had first been applied for migration to Singapore, and later for migration to Australia, New Zealand, Thailand and the Philippines.<sup>41</sup> This was the 'credit ticket' system, in which a migrant would borrow money for passage from family, friends or Guangdong, British or American merchants, steamship operators or labour recruiters, and then repay his creditors while working in the destination.<sup>42</sup> The British port of Hong Kong was the primary point of departure since migration remained technically illegal. From there passage to California cost \$50, while a return required \$40, a formidable threshold equivalent to paying transport costs of \$120,000 for an average-income twenty-first-century American.<sup>43</sup> Thus, Chinese migrants to California were divided not simply by dialect and ethnicity, but also by class. There was a fundamental line between merchants and labourers, creditors who financed migration and debtors who laboured to pay off the costs of passage.<sup>44</sup>

Drawing on earlier patterns, in the 1850s Chinese merchants commissioned and even purchased ships to take labourers to

(n. 40 cont.)

\$30; a waiter or shoemaker, \$37; a railroad worker, \$36; and a cook, \$52 per month. At the same time in China, a labourer in Guangdong could earn just \$4 per month, a labourer in Hong Kong, \$7, and a sailor in Shanghai, \$16 per month. Michael Williams, 'Destination Qiaoxiang: Pearl River Delta Villages and Pacific Ports, 1849–1949' (Univ. of Hong Kong Ph.D. thesis, 2002), 157.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 37; Wang, *Organization of Chinese Emigration*, 89.

<sup>42</sup> Sucheng Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil: The Chinese in California Agriculture, 1860–1910* (Berkeley, 1986), 21–31; Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 20–2, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Based on \$10 being per capita average annual income in mid nineteenth-century China, and \$30,000 for the United States in the 2000s.

<sup>44</sup> Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold*, pp. xviii, 16–20; Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 24–31. Class divisions within ethnic groupings meant that 'the Chinese ended up exploiting themselves and pitting one group against another': Tsai, *Chinese Experience in America*, 55; David Vaught, *Cultivating California: Growers, Specialty Crops, and Labor, 1875–1920* (Baltimore, 1999); Michael Andrew Goldstein, 'Truckee's Chinese Community: From Coexistence to Disintegration, 1870–1890' (Univ. California, Los Angeles, MA thesis, 1988), 18–22. For interesting parallels with Italian, Greek and Mexican patterns of labour mobilization, see Gunther Peck, *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880–1930* (New York, 2000).

California.<sup>45</sup> Moving labourers across the Pacific soon became big business for the Chinese, American and British merchants who financed the millions paid to the Pacific Mail Steamship Company for steerage tickets.<sup>46</sup> Chinese merchants and labour contractors often drew their main profits by providing workers with goods and services, including food, shelter, prostitutes and gambling credit. Merchants were literate and could write letters and facilitate remittances.<sup>47</sup> Labour contractors provided necessary and valuable services, but their power over Chinese workers certainly created opportunities for abuse, from encouraging indebtedness through gambling losses and opium addiction to short-changing workers on contracts. Of course, Chinese workers could rebel against their bosses. In 1878 a labour contractor was thrown in the Sacramento River after failing to deliver the promised farm work for a crew of two hundred labourers.<sup>48</sup> Given language barriers and asymmetries of information in a decentralized labour market, labour contractors played a necessary part in matching the demands of labour-hungry mining and agricultural businesses with crews of reliable labourers. Chan Pak Qwai, a Chinese migrant in the 1870s, provided a detailed description of the credit ticket system and the role of labour contractors:

Now I do not know what people mean by 'coolies'. I suppose they mean those Chinamen who have their passage money advanced . . . These poor Chinamen agree to work either so long to pay it back when they get here, or they agree to pay it and find their own work. When they first come here they are ignorant of the custom of the people, and would, perhaps, starve

<sup>45</sup> Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 25. Cornelius Koopmanschap arrived in San Francisco in 1850 and soon established a thriving labour migration business, with a base of operations in Hong Kong: *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> For the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, passenger traffic became a 'chief aspect' of their trade. The company built four of the largest wooden side-wheel steamships ever made, and carried some 125,000 Chinese migrants across the Pacific, receiving in return a revenue of \$5,800,000 from steerage fares alone. Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 27–8. Among the most prominent labour contractors was the Quong Yee Wo Company of San Francisco, reported to have set an 'army' of labourers to work with its scouts spread across California looking for jobs: Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 76.

<sup>47</sup> Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold*, 16–20. Williams provides insight into the central purpose of migration for Chinese workers: 'The high proportion of remittances devoted to basic family support . . . indicates that for most, survival was the prime purpose and major outcome of this income': Williams, 'Destination Qiaoxiang', 80, 111–12; Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 344–5.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Steven Street, *Beasts of the Field: A Narrative History of California Farmworkers, 1769–1913* (Stanford, 2004), 266.



to death if they did not have some one who understood the people here to get them work of some kind.<sup>49</sup>

Given the enormous wage differentials, Chinese workers were inclined to find work quickly in order to repay passage debts and start sending remittances to their villages, and labour contractors facilitated this process by reducing the transaction costs associated with job search and relocation.<sup>50</sup> While critics such as the Workingmen saw this form of highly disciplined, flexible labour provision as a degradation of free labour akin to slavery, for Chinese workers it meant high wages that allowed meaningful contributions to be sent home to their communities. And for Chinese merchants, by both serving and controlling these labourers, considerable accumulations of wealth could be secured.<sup>51</sup>

The central institution for Chinese migrants in California was the Six Companies. Much of the criticism of Chinese labour focused on the collaboration between the Chinese merchants who ran the Six Companies and capitalists in California. This organization was in fact an adaptation and expansion of the native-place associations, the *huiguan*, which served Chinese migrants wherever they left their villages to work. When Chinese migrants arrived in San Francisco, they were met at the dock by representatives of the Six Companies, who enrolled them in the appropriate association based on their village and clan affiliation. Enrolment was compulsory, as was the payment of an annual fee or tax, and in return the Six Companies provided housing and medical care, mediated disputes and connected newly arrived labourers with employers or labour contractors who shared their dialect.<sup>52</sup> Although the *huiguan* of the Six Companies fulfilled important community functions, as an organization led by Chinese merchants they primarily 'sought to protect the interests

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 75.

<sup>50</sup> Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 344–50.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, 'Destination Qiaoxing', 207–18.

<sup>52</sup> The Six Companies have at last received a worthy scholarly treatment by Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*: see esp. 9–11, 57–77, 140–1. See also Williams, 'Destination Qiaoxing', 199–202; Lai, *Becoming Chinese American*, 39–48; Chung, *In Pursuit of Gold*, 18–23; Paul Wong, Steven Applewhite and J. Michael Daley, 'From Despotism to Pluralism: The Evolution of Voluntary Organizations in Chinese American Communities', *Ethnic Groups*, viii (1990); Tsai, *Chinese Experience in America*, 49–55; Shane Michael Fisher, 'From "Gold Mountain" to a "Mountain of Hate": Exploring Chinese Resistance against Discrimination in California' (Univ. Oregon MA thesis, 1999), 51–66.

of Chinese creditors', an allegiance with enormous significance in a system of debt-financed labour mobilization.<sup>53</sup> Critics of the Chinese in California mistakenly believed that the Six Companies directly imported and contracted labourers, but the organization instead mostly played a more indirect role as a central clearing house providing information and connections for merchants and labour contractors.<sup>54</sup> The most controversial and visible sign of the power of the Six Companies was the departure ticket system. Any Chinese migrant wishing to return to his village in Guangdong could not purchase a ticket without a certificate from his *huiguan* of the Six Companies approving his departure and certifying that all his creditors had been repaid.<sup>55</sup>

The Six Companies were not the conspiratorial slave masters that racist rhetoric made them out to be, but the organization did represent the collective power of the merchant creditor elite in a regime of global labour mobilization based on debt. Workingmen partly perceived this power and claimed that the Six Companies had 'established a government within our government' and were thereby 'maintaining a system of slavery'.<sup>56</sup> As Frank Roney, a leader of the Workingmen's Party, explained in his autobiography:

the Chinaman was hailed by the conscienceless exploiting employers as a veritable Godsend. Chinamen of education and wealth cooperated with the white men in the importation of their countrymen and just as cheerfully and ruthlessly robbed them. The difficulty of the English language forced the Chinese to herd together, and thus placed them under the eye and management of their rapacious countrymen, the Six Companies.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 72.

<sup>54</sup> Considerable controversy has arisen over the role of the Six Companies: Patricia Cloud and David W. Galenson, 'Chinese Immigration and Contract Labor in the Late Nineteenth Century', *Explorations in Economic History*, xxiv (1987); Charles J. McClain, 'Chinese Immigration: A Comment on Cloud and Galenson', *Explorations in Economic History*, xxvii (1990); Patricia Cloud and David W. Galenson, 'Chinese Immigration: Reply to Charles McClain', *Explorations in Economic History*, xxviii (1991). On the Six Companies financing mobility through the credit ticket system, see Qin, *Diplomacy of Nationalism*, 74, 140.

<sup>55</sup> Lai, *Becoming Chinese American*, 46. No other overseas Chinese community established a similar debt enforcement mechanism: Williams, 'Destination Qiaoxiang', 199–202.

<sup>56</sup> *Daily Open Letter*, 8 Feb. 1878.

<sup>57</sup> Frank Roney, *Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader: An Autobiography*, ed. Ira B. Cross (Berkeley, 1931), 267. See also Joseph M. Kinley, *Remarks on Chinese Immigration: Governments Prosper in Proportion with the Degree of Protection Afforded her Laborers. Protection to Them Is Advancement. Neglect of their Interests Is the Forerunner of Political Ruin and Social Debasement* (San Francisco, 1877).

Descriptions of the Six Companies deployed racist tropes of servility, docility and despotism, but they also marked out important dimensions of power within the political economy of global labour mobility.<sup>58</sup> As an official of the Qing dynasty, Consul-General Huang Zunxian, noted, the Six Companies had 'large incomes' yet had 'not provided for the welfare of the membership'.<sup>59</sup> According to Huang's investigations, 'although their reputation may not be as bad as stated by the white people, yet there are areas in which they can justly be attacked' since they had 'few established rules' and their resources were 'not accountable to anyone'.<sup>60</sup> All too often, he warned, the leaders of the Six Companies could 'purchase property, profit from it, and line their pockets'.<sup>61</sup> Up to a point, Qing officials shared concerns with the Workingmen about the power of Chinese merchants and contractors over labourers in California.

The men who left their villages in Guangdong, financed their passage through the credit ticket system and laboured in California pursued strategies that were supported and legible within the context of their own families and communities. They inhabited a trans-Pacific world of migration governed by their own moral economy, but to Euro-American workers in California, this world was invisible. They saw these migrant workers only as threatening intrusions into their own social, economic and political order. Ignoring the many thousands of Chinese migrants and settlers in California who did not fit the image of debased proletarian or avaricious merchant, white workers focused on the intersection of Chinese labourers with changes in the political economy of mining and farming.<sup>62</sup>

## II

The gold rush of 1849 marked the beginning of California's dramatic economic expansion. By the 1870s miners no longer made

<sup>58</sup> American businesses could learn from the Six Companies, as one writer facetiously noted in 1876: 'the internal economy of this corporate organization offers a very worthy model to many "barbarian" stockholding bodies': 'John Chinaman in San Francisco', *Scribners Monthly*, xii (1876), 863.

<sup>59</sup> Lai, *Becoming Chinese American*, 47.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> For ample illustrations of the diversity of Chinese experiences in California, see especially Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*; Tsai, *Chinese Experience in America*.

up the majority of California workers, but gold- and silver-mining remained vital to the state's economy. As it acquired its corporate, capital-intensive form, the mining sector served as a 'catalyst for the creation of an industrial infrastructure' that drove California's broader economic growth.<sup>63</sup> Mining in California is a story of dramatic transformation. The first generation of 'Argonauts' who arrived in the years after 1849 were placer miners, adventurers who used simple tools to scrape together the easily accessible surface ores along the banks of streams. The placer era was brief but intense, and it lived on in the imaginations of Californians long after its heyday in the early 1850s, serving as a mythic past with which to critique the present. As ownership passed from the men whose hands worked the mines to absentee owners in San Francisco, New York and London, Californians were forced to come to terms with a radically new, and to many frightening, political economy of capitalist accumulation.

By the 1870s Californians were well aware of the rapid transition from placer to corporate mining, and deeply concerned about the implications for their state. As the *San Diego Union and Bee* observed, 'We are glad to see placer mines developed, as these are the mines of the people', but with 'quartz and deep mines the case is very different' since the 'great attendant expenses of such mines convert the individual into a factor in the corporation and degrades [*sic*] the sturdy miner into a drudge in the drift, toiling at so much per day, while his bosses — his owners in fact — reap the great profit of his endeavor'.<sup>64</sup> The mining industry pioneered the 'corporate form of business organization and the distribution of securities to the public', but for many Californians this concentration of power threatened to convert the proud miner into a slave.<sup>65</sup> Chinese labourers were blamed for the transformation of the mining industry, since the presence of crews of labourers for hire enabled corporations to construct the infrastructure they needed to exploit the less accessible ores. A miner in California explained that while the 'laboring man' was

<sup>63</sup> David J. St Clair, 'The Gold Rush and the Beginnings of California Industry', in James J. Rawls and Richard J. Orsi (eds.), *A Golden State: Mining and Economic Development in Gold Rush California* (Berkeley, 1999), 193.

<sup>64</sup> *San Diego Union and Bee*, 1 Mar. 1889, quoted in Richard E. Lingenfelter, *The Hardrock Miners: A History of the Mining Labor Movement in the American West, 1863–1893* (Berkeley, 1974), 3–4; 'Placer Mining', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 14 Nov. 1874.

<sup>65</sup> Marian V. Sears, *Mining Stock Exchanges, 1860–1930: An Historical Survey* (Missoula, 1973), 3.

'dead opposed to the Chinese', the mining capitalists who were 'aggregating these small claims into large mining estates . . . employ[ed] Chinese to run them'.<sup>66</sup> It was not wage competition that angered many in California, but the ways in which Chinese labour was seen as transforming social relations and empowering a new corporate elite.<sup>67</sup>

The placer past in mining proved a powerful tool for critique by the 1870s.<sup>68</sup> One nostalgic account longed for these early days when 'no chartered institutions [had] monopolized the great avenues to wealth . . . no aristocracy [could] assert supremacy' and labour was recognized as 'the real capital of the world'.<sup>69</sup> Charles Howard Shinn's work on the early mining camps exemplifies how Californians used a mythologized remembrance of these camps in the 1870s to wrestle with the implications of the new corporate order.<sup>70</sup> The placer era became a usable history for critics. According to Shinn's vision, in these early camps, miners elected officers and established rules that came to have the force of law. They generally provided for ownership based on use. If left idle, a miner's claim would be forfeited and given to another willing to work it. The camp mining codes also strictly limited the size of

<sup>66</sup> *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, February 27, 1877: Ordered to Be Printed*, serial set 1734, iii, 44th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Report 689 (Washington, DC, 1877), 1104.

<sup>67</sup> In fact, thousands of Chinese miners were independent as both miners and farmers, although by the 1870s the Chinese had also largely abandoned the placers in California: Tsai, *Chinese Experience in America*, 12–14.

<sup>68</sup> Ronald Limbaugh, 'Making Old Tools Work Better: Pragmatic Adaptation of Innovation in Gold-Rush Technology', in Rawls and Orsi (eds.), *A Golden State*, 27–9.

<sup>69</sup> Samuel Curtis Upham, *Notes on a Voyage to California via Cape Horn, in the Years 1849–50* (Philadelphia, 1878), 307–8; Maureen A. Jung, 'Capitalism Comes to the Diggings: From Gold-Rush Adventure to Corporate Enterprise', in Rawls and Orsi (eds.), *A Golden State*, 58.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Howard Shinn, *Mining Camps: A Study in American Frontier Government*, ed. Rodman Wilson Paul (New York, 1965). Shinn's fascination with the early equality and community of the mining districts was deeply romantic, ignoring the darker side of mining camps: Jung, 'Capitalism Comes to the Diggings', 58. Recent scholarship has overturned this rosy image of early mining by revealing the effects of the Gold Rush on native Americans and Americans of African descent: see, for instance, Albert L. Hurtado, 'Clouded Legacy: California Indians and the Gold Rush', and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, "'Do you think I'll lug trunks?'" African Americans in Gold Rush California', both in Kenneth N. Owens (ed.), *Riches for All: The California Gold Rush and the World* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2002). A contemporary of Frederick Jackson Turner, Shinn saw early placer mining as a frontier that dissolved the artificial accretions of civilization and allowed the Forty-Niners to return to their natural Teutonic 'race instinct' for self-government, manly independence and democratic equality: Shinn, *Mining Camps*, 135.

holdings to what an individual could work. Claims were understood to follow the incline of the lode being worked; that is, while a plot on the surface defined a miner's claim, this demarcation did not abstractly extend vertically into the ground; a miner's 'property' followed the natural geological contortions of the lode as it sunk into the earth.<sup>71</sup> For critics in the 1870s, these regulations suggested an alternative order in which ownership was rooted in labour and nature, and in which the idea 'that mining-claims should become a subject of speculation' was utterly alien.<sup>72</sup> These early camps also had a darker side: Chinese and Mexican miners were usually banned from participating. Ineligible for citizenship, the Chinese were considered outsiders, disembedded from the local moral order enforced by the mining camps.<sup>73</sup>

After the quick depletion of the placer and surface ores, two forms of capital-intensive mining came to predominate.<sup>74</sup> First, hydraulic mining used water to erode gravel banks. Requiring massive infrastructure, canals and flumes brought water to mining claims, where the water was blasted through heavy nozzles against gravel banks containing low-grade ore deposits, washing the gravel into sluices, which captured the gold. Secondly, deep-shaft, or quartz, mining involved blasting deep into the mountains along the course of the lode, bringing the debris to the surface, where it was crushed in steam-powered 'stamping' mills; gold was then removed through a chemical purification process. The passage of the General Mining Law of 1872 consolidated the rule of capital-intensive, corporate mining and instituted a property regime that 'mark[ed] the growth of the interests of capital, and large moneyed enterprises'. By the late 1870s

<sup>71</sup> The community formed by the early miners, especially their definition of property boundaries in accordance with geological formations, reflects a dialectic between 'first nature' and 'second nature' that William Cronon subtly explores in *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York, 1991).

<sup>72</sup> Shinn, *Mining Camps*, 233.

<sup>73</sup> Mining camp exclusion was motivated by racism, but locally enforced moral economies had long patterns of excluding outsiders that had little to do with racism. As Christopher Clark has written of rural Massachusetts, the pursuit of independence led towns to exclude those 'regarded as "outsiders" or subordinates' and thus 'poor, landless, often transient people [were] forced to live at the margins' of society, not because of racism, but because poverty and transience threatened the closely regulated and interdependent social order of the village community: Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780–1860* (Ithaca, 1990), 57.

<sup>74</sup> Limbaugh, 'Making Old Tools Work Better', 32.



observers of the mining industry believed that California had entered a 'new era of monopoly and capital'.<sup>75</sup>

The rise of hydraulic mining also marked a change in the relationship between work and knowledge. The technological revolution of the late 1860s created a 'new breed of mining engineer' who used science to direct the labour process.<sup>76</sup> Professional mining engineers, trained at schools like Columbia's School of Mines and Engineering, practised the science of geology and mineralogy and used sophisticated mathematical models for controlling water flow, pressure and velocity in mining infrastructure. On the new hydraulic mines, workers possessed neither knowledge of, nor control over, the labour process, but worked as machine operators or, during the construction of the massive infrastructure systems, easily dispensable manual labourers.<sup>77</sup> (See Plates 1 and 2.)

In the early 1870s the *Mining and Scientific Press* conducted a campaign to attract investment to hydraulic mining, trumpeting the fact that recent technological developments allowed 'thousands of tons of gravel [to] be removed with a single nozzle in twenty-four hours directed by one man'.<sup>78</sup> Heeding the call, enterprising capitalists soon built imposing corporate empires. One of the earliest of the powerful new hydraulic mining companies was the North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company. During the mid 1860s, while the mining industry was slack, Jules Poquillon quietly bought up idle claims until he had amassed over fifteen hundred acres of potentially rich ore-bearing ground. Having recruited a 'who's who of San Francisco's financial giants', Poquillon organized the incorporation of the firm in 1866. Expanding rapidly, in 1870 the North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company acquired a majority stake in the neighbouring Union Gravel Mining Company and a controlling interest in the Milton Mining & Water Company.<sup>79</sup> By 1874 the *Mining and Scientific Press* could report with satisfaction that 'ditches are

<sup>75</sup> Shinn, *Mining Camps*, 256, 290.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 130–1. On workers' control, see David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (Cambridge, 1989).

<sup>78</sup> 'California Gravel Mines' and 'Hard Times', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 5 July and 16 Aug. 1873 respectively.

<sup>79</sup> Powell Greenland, *Hydraulic Mining in California: A Tarnished Legacy* (Spokane, 2001), 204.

being built in every direction' and 'Capitalists are turning their attention in this direction', allowing companies to 'carry on very extensive works'.<sup>80</sup> But the labour that gave value to these Promethean efforts to conquer nature was used in ways that had profound consequences for how critics came to view the capitalist order in California.

Chinese workers provided most of the labour for the massive construction projects, including tunnelling and canal building, that created the infrastructural capital plant of the hydraulic mining corporations. Temporary, mobile and flexible, Chinese labour crews were the direct agents of capital accumulation in hydraulic mining, enabling mining corporations to complete massive construction projects cheaply while avoiding the conflicts that directly employing Chinese labour would have instigated. In an article celebrating the advance of hydraulic mining, the *Mining and Scientific Press* noted that the North Fork Company in Plumas county would soon be hiring 'a very large force of Chinamen' through a contractor, who would put them to work tunnelling, 'running night and day'.<sup>81</sup> Even though some hydraulic mine owners expressed hostility towards the Chinese, and kept promises never to employ Chinese workers as miners, these companies depended 'upon the Chinese as tunnel and ditch diggers', and thus the 'majority of the Chinese on company payrolls were construction workers'.<sup>82</sup> The North Bloomfield Gravel Mining Company, discussed above, employed eight hundred Chinese workers in addition to three hundred white labourers during the peak of construction. In summer 1875 the El Dorado Water and Deep Gravel Mining Company employed between five hundred and eight hundred Chinese labourers while excavating a tunnel.<sup>83</sup> Chinese labour was critical to the new companies in completing their massive capital investments in hydraulic infrastructure. No wonder that anti-Chinese agitators believed that by excluding the Chinese workers 'they might be able to reverse the trend toward company mining'.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>80</sup> 'Our Gravel Mines', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 1 Aug. 1874.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Ping Chiu, *Chinese Labor in California, 1850–1880: An Economic Study* (Madison, 1963), 36.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 15–16.



1. Hydraulic mining flume near Smartsville, Yuba County, 1860 or 1870. Lawrence & Houseworth Albums, image no. 580. Gift of Florence V. Flinn. Collection of the Society of California Pioneers. Permission to publish received from Natasha S. Crowley, Registrar of the California Society of Pioneers.

The response of white miners was intense, and often violent. The North Bloomfield Mining Company came under heavy attack from white miners during the construction of a major dam for hiring Chinese labourers at rates ranging from \$1.15 to \$1.25 per day compared to the standard \$3 per day for white workers. Attacking the Chinese workers and destroying the infrastructure they had built through vandalism and arson, the white miners led an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to expel the Chinese labourers.<sup>85</sup> In other cases, however, as in the town of Cherokee in Butte county, miners organized a 'Caucasian League', which successfully prevented any Chinese labour from

<sup>85</sup> Greenland, *Hydraulic Mining in California*, 204.

being hired.<sup>86</sup> By the late 1870s capitalists had invested nearly \$100 million in hydraulic mining. The industry paid annual dividends of \$11–15 million, and the labour of Chinese workers, hired in crews of hundreds, had been critical in realizing the vast infrastructure of the hydraulic mining industry.<sup>87</sup>

While hydraulic mining reached its zenith in the 1870s, deep-shaft, or quartz, mining was just rising to prominence, only reaching its full development in the 1880s and 1890s. During the 1870s deep-shaft mining achieved its most advanced form in the Comstock mines of Virginia City, Nevada. Although separated by three hundred miles, financially and economically the mines of the Comstock lode were inseparable from San Francisco and capitalism in California.<sup>88</sup> Even more capital-intensive than hydraulic mining, deep-shaft mines required investment in drills, steam engines, lifting cages, miles of steel cable, rails and carts for moving ore, timber for supporting shafts and building scaffolding, and massive stamping mills for crushing the ore into dust. Even more than hydraulic mining, the capital requirements of deep-shaft mining required the elaboration of the characteristic institutions of corporate capitalism: boards of directors distinct from ownership; finance, particularly investment banks; and securities markets, in which mining stocks were widely traded, from San Francisco to London and Paris.<sup>89</sup>

Deep-shaft mining also required a different organization of labour from hydraulic mining, and on the Comstock Lode, Cornish miners from the tin-mines of south-west England brought generations of intensive craft traditions and job solidarity to the worksite.<sup>90</sup> The Cornish miners had long been accustomed to dealing with difficult bosses, depersonalized owners and large corporations. Supported by these traditions, they fiercely resisted all attempts by management to change the labour process and

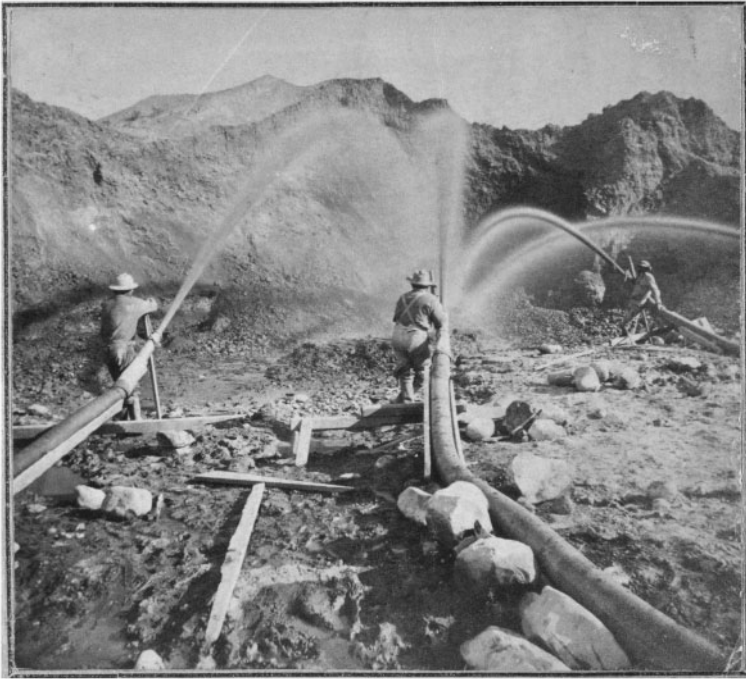
<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>88</sup> C. B. Glasscock, *Big Bonanza: The Story of the Comstock Lode* (Indianapolis, 1931), 284.

<sup>89</sup> With the massive expansion of the Comstock, a formal securities trading institution was set up in 1862, the San Francisco Stock and Exchange Board, organized by forty leading businessmen (known in San Francisco as the ‘forty thieves’): Sears, *Mining Stock Exchanges*, 3, 19.

<sup>90</sup> Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 4–6; David Cornford, ‘“We all live more like brutes than humans”’: Labor and Capital in the Gold Rush’, *California History*, lxxvii, 4 (1998–9), 97; John Rowe, *The Hard-Rock Men: Cornish Immigrants and the North American Mining Frontier* (Liverpool, 1974), 118.



2. Behind the pipes of a hydraulic mining operation, 1860 or 1870.

Source: 'Hydraulic Mining near French Corral: Piping the Bank — near view, Nevada County'. Lawrence & Houseworth Albums, image no. 1133. Gift of Florence V. Flinn. Collection of the Society of California Pioneers. Permission to publish received from Natasha S. Crowley, Registrar of the California Society of Pioneers.

undermine long-held craft solidarity, such as the introduction of labour-reducing 'black powder' and the single-handed drill in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>91</sup> Mine owners also pushed to end the tradition of 'high grading', in which miners, asserting their right to the ore they worked, simply made a 'habit of helping themselves to promising lumps of quartz' that might carry a large amount of valuable ore.<sup>92</sup> These struggles came to a head in 1869 when strikes broke out across the deep-shaft mining districts, and employers quickly turned their attention to the thousands of Chinese

<sup>91</sup> Ralph Mann, *After the Gold Rush: Society in Grass Valley and Nevada City, California, 1849–1870* (Stanford, 1982), 184.

<sup>92</sup> Cornford, 'Labor and Capital in the Gold Rush', 97.

labourers being released from the transcontinental railroad. Familiar with working for large American corporations and skilled in the use of dynamite and drills, the Chinese railroad workers appeared to be ideal strike-breakers.<sup>93</sup> Although the threat of substituting Chinese workers was more common than the actual practice, for deep-shaft miners the lesson was clear: Chinese labourers enabled corporations to dominate the labour process and undermine craft traditions of control. While hydraulic and deep-shaft mines followed distinct paths of development towards concentrated corporate control, in both sectors, it seemed to critics like the Workingmen, capitalists had exploited Chinese workers to consolidate a deeply unequal social order.

But the role of Chinese labour in mining was only one side of the coin. A crisis of legitimacy pervaded the industry during the 1870s, even infecting the perpetual optimism of the booster press. The Centennial celebrations in 1876 provoked the comment in the *Mining and Scientific Press* that alongside 'the rapid progress of the last few years there have arisen some pernicious growths. Powers have been confided to the few which belong to the many. Self interest has plumed itself . . . even to the oppression of many'.<sup>94</sup> In its new, capital-intensive form, supported by banks and stock markets, many wondered if corporate mining could be 'a Legitimate Business', since it had 'largely fallen into the hands of sharpers and speculators'.<sup>95</sup> California mine owners stood accused of having 'lost sight of legitimate labor and become gamblers — capital gamblers'.<sup>96</sup> Based on speculation, securities trading and credit, this corporate order seemed divorced from values of republican free labour. Corporations operating hydraulic and deep-shaft mines were denounced by the Workingmen as mere 'shams' and fictitious 'paper affairs'.<sup>97</sup> Along with the conniving financiers such as the men who controlled the notorious Bonanza Firm, corrupt and inept managers were blamed

<sup>93</sup> Mann, *After the Gold Rush*, 188; Lingenfelter, *Hardrock Miners*, 111; Chiu, *Chinese Labor in California*, 32.

<sup>94</sup> 'The Centennial Fourth', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 1 July 1876.

<sup>95</sup> 'Mining as a Legitimate Enterprise' and 'Is Mining a Legitimate Business?', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 18 Aug. and 12 Sept. 1874 respectively.

<sup>96</sup> 'Riches vs. Poverty: or, California as She Is and Should Be', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 26 July 1873.

<sup>97</sup> *Debates and Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of California, Convened at the City of Sacramento, September 28, 1878* (Sacramento, 1881), 397.



for the disrepute of the industry.<sup>98</sup> Even the *Mining and Scientific Press*, ever the booster of capitalist progress, was concerned for the fate of the republic:

We, as a people, have reached a point where corporate monopolies, rings and individual speculators have by united and persistent effort obtained such a control over the government . . . as to seriously threaten the general welfare and prosperity of the people . . . the tendency of these movements is to foster and build up among us a moneyed aristocracy of wealth.<sup>99</sup>

Emerging at a time of considerable uncertainty about the legitimacy of the new corporate social order, the Workingmen's Party drew together these diverse strands of discontent and forged them into a coherent ideology. As the Workingmen's *Daily Open Letter* asserted, the mining capitalists of the Bonanza Firm were

but the leading type of a class which has eaten into the very vitals of the community — a class which has by dark and tortuous ways arrived at its dirty elevation, a class which accumulates wealth by representations which are, to say the least, doubtful, if not dishonest — a class which exercises its unscrupulous ingenuity . . . eternally rolling up their vast accumulations, heedless of the duty they owe to their fellow men . . .<sup>100</sup>

When they spoke of 'monopoly' and 'Money Power', the Workingmen indicated not an abstract fear, but a concrete new reality in the political economy of capitalism in California. Yet the new corporate order did not obliterate the mythologized memory of the placer mining era. These changes spanned a single generation; many Californians reflected, examined their world, and rejected the necessity of the prevailing tendencies of capitalist development.

### III

While mining in California went through a spectacular transformation from the 1850s to the 1870s, from 1849 onwards settlers in California's fertile valleys confronted a rural regime of

<sup>98</sup> 'Is Mining a Legitimate Business?', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 12 Sept. 1874. Minority shareholders led by Squire P. Dewey led a revolt against the management of the Consolidated Virginia Company, provoking widespread discussion of the relative power of managers and owners, particularly the corrupt use of insider trading: S. P. Dewey, *The Bonanza Mines of Nevada: Gross Frauds in the Management Exposed* (San Francisco, 1878); Lynn R. Baily, *Supplying the Mining World: The Mining Equipment Manufactures of San Francisco, 1850–1900* (Tucson, 1996), 14; Glasscock, *Big Bonanza*, 275.

<sup>99</sup> 'Monopolies and the People' and 'Riches vs. Poverty', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 8 Nov. and 26 July 1873 respectively.

<sup>100</sup> *Daily Open Letter*, 8 Feb. 1878.

large-scale landholding, rural wage labour and capital-intensive agricultural production that signalled the rise of agribusiness in the West and the demise of republican traditions of agrarian independence and virtue. Although conceptions of the yeoman republic of universal landed independence were always mythologies, the ideal still had resonance, and in California it was violated most visibly and violently. Land was held in vast estates, farmed by the powerful 'Wheat Kings' or engrossed for speculative purposes. The widely denounced evil of 'land monopoly' in California violated a long tradition of agrarian independence, reaching back to Jeffersonian republicanism and developed further by the radicals and land reformers of the antebellum era.<sup>101</sup> The Homestead Act of 1862 put the power of federal policy solidly behind the ideal of small-scale farming, and during this period anti-monopoly land politics became entwined with anti-slavery politics.<sup>102</sup> Yet despite the 'deeply seated conviction . . . that any system which tend[ed] towards . . . the aggregation of very large tracts of valuable land into the hands of a single person [was] not only unrepublican, but [was] essentially unjust', already in 1880 it was apparent to the Public Land Commissioners that 'occasional failures' had marred federal policy.<sup>103</sup> By the turn of the century it was clear to investigators that 'speculators and corporations' had effectively monopolized the public lands.<sup>104</sup> Even more alarming to the commission was the way in which land monopoly had expanded a 'tenant or hired-labor system' that was 'politically, socially, and economically . . . indefensible'.<sup>105</sup> As in mining, where the rise of corporate power was linked to Chinese labour, so too in agriculture the consolidation of land

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York, 1964), 157; Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980); Mark A. Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Urbana, 2005), 130.

<sup>102</sup> See the speech of Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy of Kansas, *Congressional Globe*, Senate, 37th Congress, 2nd Session (1862), 1938–40; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 28; Heather Cox Richardson, *The Greatest Nation on Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 142.

<sup>103</sup> *Report of the Public Lands Commission*, Congressional Serial Set, 46th Congress, 2nd Session (1880), p. viii.

<sup>104</sup> *Report of the Public Lands Commission*, Congressional Serial Set, 58th Congress, 3rd Session (1905), p. xxiii.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiv. Of course, the rural South was by far the most important example of a 'tenant or hired-labor system', but it was only 'politically, socially, and economically . . . indefensible' if the subjects of the labour regime were white.

monopoly was blamed on the availability of Chinese labourers. Breaking with the patriarchal autonomy of the independent farmer, the rural order of the Wheat Kings in California required a labour regime that according to many would 'never make a man anything but an outcast and a slave'.<sup>106</sup>

The causes of land monopoly in California were complex and widely debated, including corruption in the distribution of public lands, the heritage of massive Mexican land grants and, significantly, the presence of a flexible Chinese labour force that could be mobilized to work the vast tracts of the Wheat Kings.<sup>107</sup> In critiquing the power of land monopolists, the Workingmen expanded on traditions of protest pioneered in the state by the Settlers' Leagues of the mid 1850s, which defended the rights of squatters and other actual occupants against large absentee owners.<sup>108</sup> Embracing political traditions reaching back to the American Revolution, as well as local rural struggles in California, the Workingmen critiqued land monopoly and Chinese labour as two faces of a single, deeply unjust rural social order.<sup>109</sup>

In the 1870s a rapidly expanding agribusiness sector made California a leading exporter of wheat. During the early 1880s the ports of the Pacific Coast exported more wheat to Great Britain than those of the Atlantic. In the 1870s the valleys of Alameda, Contra Costa, Santa Clara, Napa, San Joaquin, Solano and Yolo counties were endless seas of golden wheat, stretching unbroken over tens of thousands of acres.<sup>110</sup> The capitalists who operated these agribusinesses were notorious figures, denounced as 'a lot of land sharks gobbling the fairest and best of God's green earth'.<sup>111</sup> The most prominent grower, the King of

<sup>106</sup> 'Thoughts for Farm Laborers', *Pacific Rural Press*, 30 June 1877.

<sup>107</sup> Paul W. Gates, 'California's Embattled Settlers', in Allan G. and Margaret Beattie Bogue (eds.), *The Jeffersonian Dream: Studies in the History of American Land Policy and Development* (Albuquerque, 1996), 56–7.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Cletus E. Daniel, *Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers, 1870–1941* (Ithaca, 1981).

<sup>110</sup> Rodman W. Paul, 'The Wheat Trade between California and the United Kingdom', *Mississippi Valley History Review*, xlv (1958), 393.

<sup>111</sup> Los Angeles *Evening Post*, 8 Jan. 1878. Isaac Friedlander was known as the Grain King. Both an exporting merchant and a grower, he harvested wheat on ten thousand acres of land. William Chapman combined land speculation on holdings of over five hundred thousand acres with wheat farming on twenty thousand acres near Sacramento. Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 182–4.

the Wheat Kings, Dr Hugh Glenn, controlled miles of prime wheat land along the Sacramento River, on which he built a metalworking shop, thirty-two houses and seventy-seven barns; he owned six steam threshers and sixty header wagons. (See Plate 3.) In 1880 he chartered his own fleet of ships to deliver his crop of twenty-seven thousand tons to Liverpool, earning £80,000 for a single crop.<sup>112</sup> Farmers in California were leading employers. Glenn employed two hundred hands all the year round, and during the harvest seasons he hired five to six hundred more men with an annual payroll of £30,000.<sup>113</sup> It was said that Dr Glenn's MD stood for 'Mule Driver', and many believed that 'if he could have used slaves . . . he would have done so'.<sup>114</sup>

California was distinctive not only for the scale of its agricultural operations, but also for its rapid technological progress in farming equipment. Steam engines, tractors, threshing machines, headers, bagging machines, planters, harrows, gang ploughs and other implements were widely deployed on California's large wheat farms, while most farmers in the United States continued to rely on less complex and capital-intensive means of cultivation and production.<sup>115</sup> As census data indicate, large farms and investment in machinery were closely correlated in California counties.<sup>116</sup> (See Figure.) The pages of the *Pacific Rural Press*, California's leading agricultural journal, regularly featured reports and advertisements informing rural capitalists of the latest in agricultural machinery, such as a 'combined header and thresher', Holly and Magoon's 'improved cultivator' and an 'improved broadcast seeder'.<sup>117</sup> The capital-intensive nature of cultivation on large wheat farms in California reinforced the inegalitarian rural order, creating significant barriers to entry into the agricultural sector. As one small farmer

<sup>112</sup> Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 192.

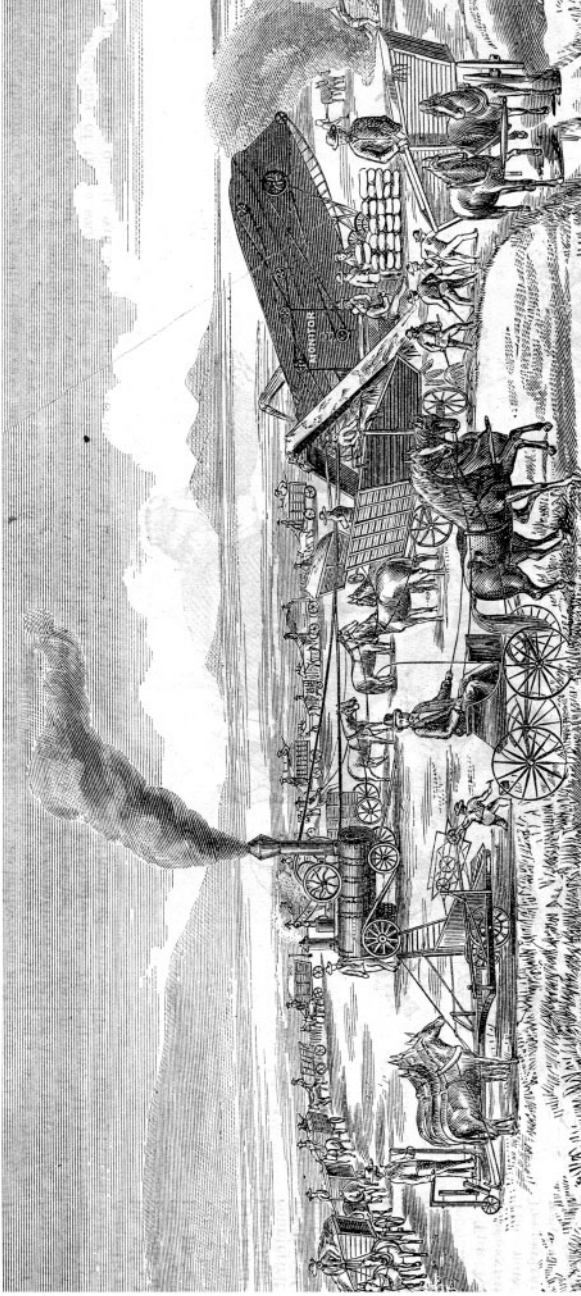
<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–90.

<sup>116</sup> Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Productions of Agriculture as Returned in the Tenth Census* (Washington, DC, 1883), 34, 106.

<sup>117</sup> 'Header and Thresher Combined', 'Straw Burning Engines', 'An Improved Cultivator' and 'An Improved Broadcast Seeder', *Pacific Rural Press*, 7, 11 and 14 July, 29 Sept. 1877, respectively. Every week the *Rural Press* featured an advertisement for 'Hoadley's Threshing Engines', powered by steam and offered in a twelve horsepower model for \$1,250 and a fifteen horsepower model for \$1,450, an enormous capital investment in the 1870s. See also 'Systematic Test of Farming Machinery', *Pacific Rural Press*, 18 Aug. 1877.



3. *California Harvest Scene*, Dr Hugh Glenn's wheat farm, 1876  
Source: 'California Harvest Scene: Dr. Glenn's Farm in Colusa County', *Mining and Scientific Press*, 1 July 1876. Author's personal collection.



from Sonoma county observed, the 'poor farmer . . . cannot buy headers, threshers, mowing machines, gang plows' and the other costly implements of agribusiness.<sup>118</sup> These new barriers to entry meant that the small farmer who 'd[id] all his work' was getting pushed out by a 'mushroom aristocracy' relying on 'Gold' and a rural proletariat.<sup>119</sup>

Although the *Pacific Rural Press* occasionally offered space in its columns for critics of land monopoly, more generally the editors embraced the 'California system of farming' and defended the hierarchical rural order against critics.<sup>120</sup> Farmers were urged to adopt more 'modern', business-oriented approaches to production and marketing. According to the *Rural Press*, agriculture was held back because 'so many engaged in it do not look upon it as . . . a business enterprise to be developed and pushed forward as other enterprises are'.<sup>121</sup> Agriculture in California had reached the 'highest stage of farming', and thus it was necessary for capitalist farmers to invest 'their surplus' so that 'their incomes are continually increasing' and 'their property is constantly increasing in real value'.<sup>122</sup> In California's advanced agribusiness economy, in order for men to 'grow rich upon their farms' they must exercise the same 'high commercial skill' in the 'art and science of money gathering' as merchants and manufacturers.<sup>123</sup> Too many farmers clung to traditional and old-fashioned values and thus were 'not good business men'. Like factories producing for the market, farmers were urged to embrace 'more of this business-like wisdom and ingenuity . . . and turn every whim and taste of his consumers to his profit'. Like other capitalists, the farmer must become 'a busy, progressive man' and adopt the techniques of

<sup>118</sup> 'Reflections of a Poor Farmer', *Pacific Rural Press*, 16 Nov. 1878.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.* A *Rural Press* correspondent claimed that 'The introduction of steam and labor-saving machinery has wrought a fundamental change in human society . . . If it is the inevitable result of machinery, both humanity and self-preservation will compel us to break up our looms and engines and go back to the old way; but this is not to be, for there is a better way . . . simply reduce the hours of labor by law till all may have a chance to work; and then come down heavily on all idlers. What work there is *must* be divided among *all* if we are ever to see prosperous times again': 'Correspondence: The Labor Problem', *Pacific Rural Press*, 23 Feb. 1878.

<sup>120</sup> 'Farming on a Small Scale', 'Classes in Society' and 'Wealth: A Few Thoughts for the Times', *Pacific Rural Press*, 26 Sept. and 7 Nov. 1874, 22 Dec. 1877.

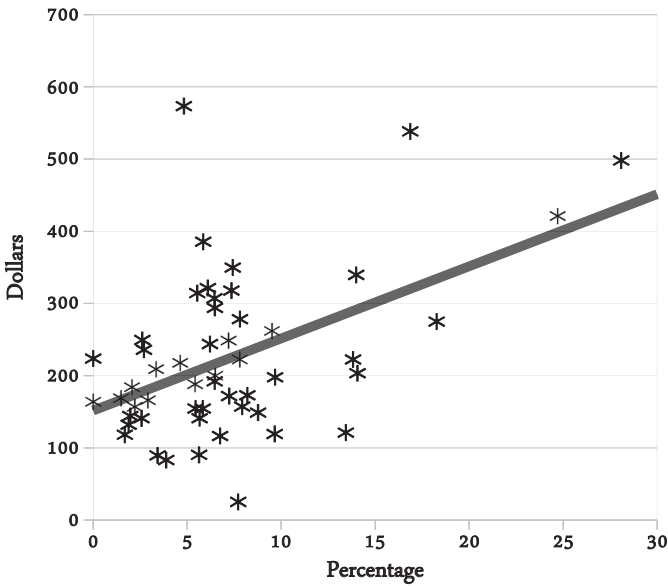
<sup>121</sup> 'The Farm as an Investment', *Pacific Rural Press*, 18 Aug. 1877.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>123</sup> 'The Farmer as a Business Man', *Pacific Rural Press*, 22 Sept. 1877.



AVERAGE INVESTMENT IN FARM MACHINERY BY COUNTY AS A FUNCTION OF THE PERCENTAGE OF FARMS OVER 1,000 ACRES, 1880\*



\* Source: Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Productions of Agriculture as Returned in the Tenth Census* (Washington, 1883), 34, 106.

‘manufacturers and speculators’.<sup>124</sup> The rural order of California in the 1870s not only broke with patterns of smallholding by owner–operators, but also smashed the ethical claims of republican political economy. As the editors of the *Pacific Rural Press* made clear, the ‘highest stage of farming’ required a radical realignment of rural values.<sup>125</sup>

As farming became agribusiness in rural California, a new kind of proletariat emerged to meet the labour demands of the wheat farmers.<sup>126</sup> During harvests, growers were susceptible to strikes,

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* William Hollister boldly announced that not only was he a landowner and farmer, but also ‘I am like other men, a speculator’: *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 779.

<sup>125</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 40–1.

<sup>126</sup> The classic account remains Carey McWilliams, *Factories in the Fields: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California* (Boston, 1939). On wage labour, see Los Angeles *Evening Express*, 26 July 1878; Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 23.

and they struggled to impose labour discipline. According to a farmer in San Diego county, if any of his men threatened to go on strike during harvest he ‘would be perfectly justified in “shooting them on the spot”, and would do it at once’.<sup>127</sup> During a California wheat harvest in the 1870s, there were several distinct jobs, few of which required considerable training or experience.<sup>128</sup> The pace of work was relentless; in one week in June 1876 seven wheat threshers perished in Colusa county alone.<sup>129</sup> Harvest workers, regardless of racist labels, were routinely described as demoralized, degraded and enslaved. For instance, according to the San Francisco *Morning Chronicle*, the farm labourers of California were trapped in a system that ‘in many respects . . . is even worse than old-time slavery’ because at least slaves had been ‘certain at all times of shelter, clothing, food, and fire’.<sup>130</sup> Much of the language applied to Chinese labourers resonated with a broader critique of the bleak social conditions of rural proletarians.

Nevertheless, racist categories were deeply embedded in how the rural political economy of labour in California was understood. White labourers were considered by many farm employers to be too troublesome and difficult, likely to walk off the job or demand higher wages, while Chinese labourers were often praised for their perceived reliability and flexibility.<sup>131</sup> When questioned on their employment practices, landowners often emphasized the moral failings of the white labour force. According to one employer, white farm labourers were a ‘bad class’ and he wished the state were ‘rid of them’ since poor white people were nothing but an ‘idle class that throng the street’, causing trouble.<sup>132</sup> William Hollister, a large wheat farmer, testified

<sup>127</sup> ‘Correspondence: The Labor Season’, *Pacific Rural Press*, 25 Aug. 1877.

<sup>128</sup> Spike pitches unloaded the grain from wagons; feeders put the grain into the threshing machine; straw bucks and firemen fed the steam engine; a roustabout performed general tasks; adult tankmen or -boys called watermonkeys supplied water to the steam engine; and the doghouse crew consisted of sack tenders who filled bags with grain, sack sewers who sealed the bags in the field and sack bucks who loaded the 120 pound bags into wagons: Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 195.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 210–11.

<sup>130</sup> San Francisco *Morning Chronicle*, 5 Sept. 1875.

<sup>131</sup> There is disagreement in the literature on the prevalence of Chinese labourers in California’s agriculture. For a more traditional account stressing their importance, see Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 29. Sucheng Chan argues that Chinese workers composed only a small fraction of the rural labour force: Chan, *This Bittersweet Soil*, 144–5, 303–20.

<sup>132</sup> *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 55.

that, except for the Chinese, ‘the character of labor generally in California is very bad’. According to this rural capitalist, the American labourer was no longer willing ‘to perform his labors in a kindly, submissive, good way’.<sup>133</sup> Hollister blamed demands for ‘big wages’ with short hours, and ‘labor leagues’ generally, for this insubordination.<sup>134</sup> He testified that he absolutely refused to contract with white workers, since he knew they would ‘leave me in twenty-four hours after contracting for a year’.<sup>135</sup> Year after year, agricultural capitalists in California recited a litany of complaints against the white labourers of the state.

While they heaped opprobrium on the whites who worked in their fields, wheat growers were equally effusive in their praise of Chinese workers. Some have cited these positive assessments of Chinese labour as revealing a ‘diversity’ of opinion, but rather such perceptions reflect two sides of the same coin.<sup>136</sup> As early as 1862, the *Alta California* reported Chinese labourers in Sonoma to be ‘industrious, obedient, and easily taught to perform every description of labor required of them’.<sup>137</sup> Behind the relentlessly repeated claims of docility, obedience and pliability, which cannot be understood apart from racist tropes of Asian effeminacy and submissiveness, it is important to recognize the specific social relations of power with which these racist categories intersected. The Fresno *Republican* observed that through the system organized by Chinese labour contractors, the Chinese could be ‘bought like any other commodity, at so much a dozen or hundred’, and this ‘elimination of the human element reduces the labor problem to something the employer can understand’.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 767.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 775. According to a grower in San Diego county, ‘many of the “itinerant day laborers” are so unreliable that they are not worth their salt’: ‘Correspondence: The Labor Season’, *Pacific Rural Press*, 25 Aug. 1877. Agricultural employers, the San Francisco *Chronicle* intoned, should not have to ‘tolerate grumpy whites and their tendency to walk off the job’: *Chronicle*, 31 May 1877. Recognizing this propensity, the Colusa *Sun* dismissed complaints against the Chinese by observing that ‘the character of white labor . . . has been anything but reliable’: quoted in ‘Thoughts for Farm Laborers’, *Pacific Rural Press*, 30 June 1877.

<sup>136</sup> Liu, ‘Social Origins of Early Chinese Immigrants’, 22–4.

<sup>137</sup> *Alta California*, 12 Sept. 1866, quoted in Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 254.

<sup>138</sup> Chester Rowell [editor of the *Fresno Republican*], ‘Chinese and Japanese Immigrants: A Comparison’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, xxxiv (Sept. 1909), quoted in Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 274.

Thus, to the large landholder, the 'Chinese labor machine' was 'perfect'.<sup>139</sup> Chinese labourers could be treated, the *Pacific Rural Press* assured readers, 'like beasts of the field, and like them could be removed by their drivers or herders when no longer needed'.<sup>140</sup> According to testimony before a congressional committee, praise for the Chinese workers reflected the perspective of 'the land-owner who wishes to monopolize that business so as to exclude the small farmer', for if agricultural employers needed labour, 'they can always find a Chinaman, who, they say, owns Chinamen'.<sup>141</sup> While the witness conceded that the labour contractors might not actually 'own' their labourers, his hyperbole spoke to the fact that contractors mobilized workers with remarkable efficiency.<sup>142</sup> It was this mobility and availability during harvests that farmers appreciated. Unlike the obstinate and unreliable white workers whom growers resented, the crews of Chinese labourers 'readily move, like armies, come when called for, and depart when their mission is accomplished'.<sup>143</sup>

In rural California, much as in mining, debates about power in the labour process were transfigured and mapped onto the racist categories of the 'white bummer' and the 'docile Chinese'. From absconding, to striking, to voting, American workers could articulate cultural claims and engage in forms of collective action and political protest that proved difficult or impossible for Chinese workers. And this was precisely why employers found Chinese labourers so amenable.<sup>144</sup> Linguistically and culturally fluent, American labourers were seen as more 'tenacious as of their rights; more sensitive to oppression; quick to resent an insult or injury from an employer'.<sup>145</sup> The advantage of Chinese labour was not simply 'cheapness' but that Chinese labourers were 'more patient and easily managed than the American laborer'.<sup>146</sup> A grower from Courtland, California, gave a concise

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Pacific Rural Press*, 11 Feb. 1888, quoted in Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 274.

<sup>141</sup> *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 1091, 1093.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 1093.

<sup>143</sup> Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 275.

<sup>144</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 27. Some employers justified their employment system by claiming that 'the laborers of China are born to servitude': William C. Blackwood, 'A Consideration of the Labor Problem', *Overland Monthly*, iii (1884).

<sup>145</sup> 'Savings and Savings Banks', *Argonaut*, 27 Oct. 1877.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

explanation for his preference for Chinese labour. 'White labor', he explained, 'was too independent, took too little interest, and dictated too much'.<sup>147</sup> Articulated in a racist idiom, this language nonetheless captured how the structural position of Chinese labourers 'made their fight against exploitation difficult, because they had to confront both Chinese subcontractors and white employers'.<sup>148</sup>

Like the corporate mining industry in the 1870s, the rural order came under 'incessant criticism' in the 1870s.<sup>149</sup> The California State Agricultural Society persistently derided the established regime and called for the creation of small farms. The society declared in 1880 that 'large farming is not farming at all. It is mining for wheat . . . it is a manufacturing business in which clods are fed to the mill and grain appears in carloads. Such farming holds the same relation to society as does a manufacturing corporation'.<sup>150</sup> Henry George, the agrarian radical, having formed his ideas about political economy as a journalist in California in the 1870s, made the same connection.<sup>151</sup> In a public lecture in San Francisco, George reiterated the connection between land monopoly and Chinese labour: 'The lords of the soil want cheap labor, and they rule the state. Abolish land monopoly and short work will be made of the Chinese question'.<sup>152</sup>

The Workingmen responded to the widespread condemnation of land monopoly and agribusiness by promising a radical

<sup>147</sup> 'City Boys as Hop-Pickers', *Pacific Rural Press*, 25 Aug. 1877.

<sup>148</sup> Peter Kwong and Dušanka Mišević, *Chinese America: The Untold Story of America's Oldest New Community* (New York, 2005), p. xiii. Attacks on these workers were 'blatantly racist and chauvinistic', Cletus E. Daniel argues, but they were also attempts to critique a rural political economy that 'threatened to make a large, dependent wage-labor force a permanent fixture of agricultural life in California': Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 30.

<sup>149</sup> Street, *Beasts of the Field*, 182.

<sup>150</sup> Daniel, *Bitter Harvest*, 21.

<sup>151</sup> Henry George's post-California career is well known since he rose to international fame when *Progress and Poverty* was published in 1880. On George's transatlantic agitation, see Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), ch. 7. The close parallels between George and the Workingmen have been largely missed owing to George's rejection of the movement: Henry George, 'The Kearney Agitation in California', *Popular Science Monthly*, xvii (1880); Charles A. Barker, *Henry George* (New York, 1955), 137.

<sup>152</sup> San Francisco *Bulletin*, 27 Mar. 1878. See also Los Angeles *Evening Express*, 26 July 1878; Los Angeles *Evening Express*, 15 July 1878.

redistribution of land. Their movement followed the ‘universal cry from the people that these immense landed estates should be broken up, and such legislation as would forever thereafter prevent their existence be had’.<sup>153</sup> This went beyond the more mainstream demand of dispossessing those who had acquired the holdings through corrupt or illegal dealings. Landholding was to be strictly limited, ‘regardless of the manner in which [it] had been acquired; the principle being accepted that such accumulations of lands were wrong in fact, dangerous in practice, and subversive to the best interests of the nation’.<sup>154</sup> Clitus Barbour, a Workingmen’s delegate from San Francisco, defended the party’s programme of ‘dividing up the property of this State’.<sup>155</sup> The Workingmen asserted that property was subject to political control by the sovereign people and concentrations of accumulated wealth should be broken up for the common good. Drawing on deep traditions connecting republican virtue and land ownership as well as local movements for land reform, the Workingmen also drew on the Christian Bible in preaching their message in the rural districts. The party leader Dennis Kearney would take a reading from the Gospel of James 5: 1–5 as the basis of his speeches when he addressed rural audiences, railing against the ‘land sharks’ of ‘Land Monopoly’.<sup>156</sup> The Workingmen emerged from the same social context that produced the radical agrarian philosophy of Henry George. In an ideology forged through the experiences of capitalist agribusiness in the 1870s, the Workingmen saw land monopoly and Chinese labour as two faces of a single, corrupt, rural social order.

<sup>153</sup> Dennis Kearney, *California Workingmen’s Party: An Epitome of its Rise and Progress* (San Francisco, 1878), 12.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Debates and Proceedings of the Constitutional Convention of the State of California*, 1155.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Kearney’s Trip: The Agitator at Monterey’: California State Library, Special Collections, Scrapbook and Clippings of the Workingmen’s Party of California, vol. 1. The Gospel warned, ‘Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter’: James 5: 1–5.



## IV

In California in the 1870s the concentration of capitalist power and Chinese labourers became closely intertwined symbols of a new social order. Confronting the transformation of mining, the Workingmen critiqued speculation and the rise of corruptly managed corporations that relied upon massive crews of proletarian workers. Faced with a rural regime of rapacious profit-seeking and large-scale landholding, the Workingmen denounced the landholders who consolidated a hierarchical rural labour system based on the exploitation of wage labour. Drawing on the ideas and language of the anti-slavery tradition, the Workingmen saw their struggle as a sequel to the Civil War. They claimed the anti-slavery mantle as the new abolitionists, fighting against a corrupt combination of exploited Chinese labour and aristocratic corporations that was threatening to revive a social order akin to Southern slavery, thereby obliterating political democracy, the dignity of labour and freedom of speech.

Envisioned as utterly isolated proletarians with no social, cultural or political bonds to California, Chinese labourers were blamed for following the logic of the market too assiduously: the 'coolie comes here with the sole purpose of accumulating all the money he can'.<sup>157</sup> Treated by American capitalists as mere commodities, the Chinese labourer was extremely dangerous, for 'a class of laborers admitted to have no social standing' threatened the economic and political assumptions of a republican society in which the labourer-producer was also the virtuous citizen.<sup>158</sup> As in slavery, the citizen and the worker were becoming disaggregated. Chinese workers could be exploited by capitalists, who made 'this very absence of responsibilities' the basis for a harsh labour regime.<sup>159</sup> The gendered construction of the masculine republican citizen, in which virtuous independence rested on the exploitation of feminized household labour, further disqualified Chinese labourers, whose families were invisible to Euro-American critics. Of course, for Chinese workers, their labour and remittances were the essence of responsibility and duty, for

<sup>157</sup> [The Representative Assembly of Trades and Labor Unions of the Pacific Coast], *An Appeal from the Pacific Coast to the Workingmen and Women of the United States* ([San Francisco], 1879?), 1.

<sup>158</sup> Kinley, *Remarks on Chinese Immigration*, 3.

<sup>159</sup> Kearney, *California Workingmen's Party*, 11.

they understood themselves within a trans-Pacific community with ties back to families and villages in Guangdong. The racism of the Workingmen emerged from the uneven spatial patterning of global labour recruitment networks in which 'community' and 'duty' reflected distinct social realities for Chinese and Euro-American workers in California in the 1870s.

In sociological and economic analyses of racism, labour market competition is usually given as the primary structural source of hostility.<sup>160</sup> But with the Workingmen's critique of Chinese labour, although competition was acknowledged, the emphasis was not on competition within markets but rather on fundamental changes in the capitalist order, a radical restructuring of work, power and property. As one critic explained, 'lower wages' were 'one of the incidents, but not the primary reason' that Chinese immigration should be opposed; the more fundamental threat was that Chinese labourers brought 'nothing except muscle' and did 'not aspire . . . to be American citizens' and participate in the republic 'as men, citizens, and voters, having ideas, principles, and thoughts of their own, and not content to be mere machines driven by their employers'. Hostility to the Chinese was deeply imbricated with changes in the labour process: 'We do not want the worker to have the muscle and the employer the brains. Such a system of labor is semi-slavery or serfdom'.<sup>161</sup> Chinese labourers became symbols of a process of proletarianization that reduced workers to mere bones and muscle in motion. While employers of Chinese labour defended the self-regulating free market, the Workingmen insisted that markets must function within, rather than above, the political order: 'labor and capital, commerce and trade, production and consumption, are only self-regulating when each is subjected to similar rules, and actuated by common impulses'.<sup>162</sup> The question of Chinese labour was not about wage rates in the labour market, but about fundamental problems of power and politics relating to freedom, citizenship and sovereignty within global networks of uneven capitalist development.

<sup>160</sup> Edna Bonacich, 'A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market', *American Journal of Sociology*, xxxvii (1972); Terry E. Boswell, 'A Split Labor Market Analysis of Discrimination against Chinese Immigrants, 1850–1882', *American Sociological Review*, li (1986).

<sup>161</sup> Los Angeles *Evening Express*, 4 Jan. 1878.

<sup>162</sup> Kinley, *Remarks on Chinese Immigration*, 3.

The corruption of the social order, by corporate elites above the law and exploited labourers beneath it, went hand in hand with the corruption of politics. The laws favoured the rich, and the courts allowed the wealthy to violate the law at will. The Workingmen asserted that the laws had to be equalized so that the people could 'hang thieves of high as well as low degree'.<sup>163</sup> The corrupt 'courts, under whose protecting aegis thieves plundered the people' had to be 'hurled from power'.<sup>164</sup> Dennis Kearney promised his followers that he would 'burn every book that has a particle of law in it, and then enact new laws for the workingmen'.<sup>165</sup> When authorities attempted to prevent large gatherings and incendiary speech against any 'class' in the community, the Workingmen denounced the attempts as new 'Gag Laws' reminiscent of the efforts to thwart abolitionist petitions in Congress.<sup>166</sup> The new 'Money Power' had betrayed the promise of the Civil War by resurrecting laws that 'enabled one class of men to oppress and degrade another'.<sup>167</sup> Anti-slavery traditions, entangled with racism from their inception, provided the language by which the Workingmen's ideology encompassed labour, politics and power within a single vision of the world.

The Workingmen's programme demanded a radical reconfiguration of the relationship between the polity and economy that would put the sovereign people in democratic control. When an elite-supported taxpayers' ticket emerged, the party asked, evoking the language of the infamous Dred Scott case, 'Have not we, the people, some rights that monopolists are bound to respect?'<sup>168</sup> The Workingmen's anti-capitalism was of a distinctly Polyanian cast, for while it accepted the basic institutions of property, the

<sup>163</sup> Workingmen's Party, *The Labor Agitators: or, The Battle for Bread. The Party of the Future, the Workingmen's Party of California: Its Birth and Organization; its Leaders and its Purposes; Corruption in our Local and State Governments; Venality of the Press* (San Francisco, [1879?]), 5.

<sup>164</sup> C. C. O'Donnell, 'The People and the Corporate Aristocrats: Reason vs. Fanaticism. Celestial Empires and Modern Republics', broadside, n.p.: California State Library, Special Collections, Scrapbook and Clippings of the Workingmen's Party of California, vol. 1.

<sup>165</sup> Kearney, *California Workingmen's Party*, 26. See also O'Donnell, 'People and the Corporate Aristocrats', n.p.

<sup>166</sup> Kearney, *California Workingmen's Party*, 46–7.

<sup>167</sup> *Daily Open Letter*, 3 Feb. 1878.

<sup>168</sup> *Los Angeles Star*, quoted in the *Los Angeles Evening Express*, 5 Sept. 1878. On the 'tyrannies of money' corrupting politics, see *Daily Sandlot*, [8 Apr. 1879], n.p.: California State Library, Special Collections, Scrapbook and Clippings of the Workingmen's Party of California, vol. 1.

market and profits, the party demanded that boundaries, restraints and limits should be imposed to maintain equality and preserve democracy. The restriction of Chinese labour migration was but a part of this larger programme to assert sovereignty over the economy: Capital 'must . . . be more content with moderate accumulations' and

an eternal quietus must be put to the malignant dream of the monopoly land owners and capitalists, of building up on the Pacific Coast a State whose prosperity and wealth . . . should be controlled by a comparative few; whose lands should be held in large tracts, to be worked by . . . alien peons as laborers.<sup>169</sup>

To employers and opponents of the Workingmen, it seemed that the 'mob sets up the preposterous claim that it will dictate to people what kind of labor they shall employ'.<sup>170</sup> And this is exactly what the party believed: 'It is a mistaken idea', the *Daily Open Letter* warned, 'to suppose that the right of a man to do what he likes with his own, is absolute in its application'.<sup>171</sup> The Civil War had shown that, when the nation was 'imperilled', the state had 'the right to seize the lands of any private citizen under the law of Eminent Domain'.<sup>172</sup> But such incursions on property were not limited to military crisis; for 'in like manner if the fabric of society is shaken to its center and threatens to collapse, the possessions of the rich become theirs only in a modified form and partial manner', because the nation is charged with 'the preservation of civilization', a duty far more sacred than preserving 'the hoards of a score of men who claim protection for their riches'.<sup>173</sup> As liberal ideology attempted to quarantine property, markets and contracts from the democratic interference of the state, the Workingmen drew on the revolutionary transformations of the Civil War and asserted the supremacy of the polity over the economy.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>169</sup> Kearney, *California Workingmen's Party*, 92.

<sup>170</sup> J. G. Kerr, *The Chinese Question Analyzed: A Lecture Delivered in the Hall of the Young Men's Christian Association, November 13th, 1877. With an Appendix on Chinese Emigration* (San Francisco, 1877), 5.

<sup>171</sup> *Daily Open Letter*, 8 Feb. 1878.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> This Polyanian movement was framed as a radical extension of the American revolution: 'The victory over "divine-right" rulership must be supplemented by a victory over property-right rulers': 'Address of the Workingmen's Party, California', adopted in State Convention, 17 May 1878, 'Workingmen's Party of California': Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, Frank Roney Papers, box 1, folder 21.

Pairing an assault on ‘corporate aristocrats’ and the ‘Chinese slave’ in a single vision of social transformation, the Workingmen believed they were the new abolitionists. They claimed the mantle of John Brown (the radical abolitionist who led a direct assault on slavery at Harpers Ferry in 1859) and the struggle of the Union army against the encroachments of the ‘Slave Power’. The Workingmen argued that California was on the brink of a momentous choice between becoming a ‘free or slave State; in five years her labor will be servile and degraded, or honorable and free’.<sup>175</sup> The rise of corporations and the use of Chinese labour marked ‘a transition from freedom to slavery’, and thus the Workingmen were forced to take ‘their lives in [their] hands and fight the battle of freedom over again, upon the shores of the Pacific’.<sup>176</sup> This sequel to the Civil War was the ‘sad alternative forced upon’ the people of California ‘by corporate aristocrats’: ‘that same battle was fought out during a six years’ rebellion, in the States east of the Rocky Mountains, and it will be fought over again on this Pacific Coast’.<sup>177</sup> Like slavery in the South, capitalism in California produced an ‘inevitable tendency’ towards ‘the virtual enslavement of the free laborer’ and threatened a ‘social revolution by force of arms’.<sup>178</sup>

The Workingmen often invoked the memory of John Brown. When Dennis Kearney and other leaders of the party were arrested for making incendiary speeches, the Workingmen of Sacramento passed a resolution in support, declaring that:

Whereas, Once more the people of the Republic are called upon to repel the shadow of slavery, therefore, Be it resolved, That we sympathize with the friends of freedom, whether they be found in the full glory of the day, or chained in that familiar tool of the tyrant, the dungeon; and that we regard Messrs. Kearney and Knight, each, as a John Brown in this the second irrepressible conflict.<sup>179</sup>

It was no coincidence that the Workingmen’s party anthem, ‘Song of the Sand Lot’, was set to the tune of ‘John Brown’s Body’, a Union Army marching song during the Civil War.<sup>180</sup> And in case listeners missed the implication of the tune, the words made the

<sup>175</sup> O’Donnell, ‘People and the Corporate Aristocrats’, n.p.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> Kearney, *California Workingmen’s Party*, 63–4.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>180</sup> ‘Song of the Sandlot’, n.p.: California State Library, Special Collections, Scrapbook and Clippings of the Workingmen’s Party of California, vol. 1.

connection between anti-slavery politics and the Workingmen explicit.<sup>181</sup> The cause of California's wealthy in suppressing the Workingmen was 'like that of Southern Chivalry | When they hung up old John Brown', while the Workingmen's movement hailed 'the bugle blast of freedom . . . sounding through the land'.<sup>182</sup> The memory of the Civil War still loomed large in the politics of the late 1870s, with potentially radical implications.<sup>183</sup>

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We still live in a world of uneven capitalist development and intersecting networks of global labour mobilization. As in California in the 1870s, it is clear that, for capital, all workers are 'instruments of labor, more or less expensive to use'. Yet, as Giovanni Arrighi notes, workers, rather than acting as an undifferentiated mass, have 'seized upon or created anew whatever combination of distinctive traits (age, sex, color, assorted geo-historical specificities) they could to use to impose on capital some kind of special treatment', and thus 'patriarchalism, racism and national-chauvinism have been integral to the making of the world labor movement' across the 'long twentieth century'.<sup>184</sup> The Workingmen's racism did not cut against 'class consciousness', but constituted an attempt to impose on capital locally specific political and moral claims, a spatially bounded Polanyian movement to re-embed the economy. The legacy of long-term cultural hierarchies privileging whiteness were of undoubted importance, but race does not take on a life of its own. Rather, racism must be continually animated by the specific experiences of particular political economies and configurations of power. In a world of global markets and flows of capital and labour patched over by particularistic nation states, racist working-class politics and localized Polanyian projects remain central trajectories shaping the unfolding of capitalism in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>183</sup> Kearney, *California Workingmen's Party*, 57.

<sup>184</sup> Giovanni Arrighi, 'Marxist Century, American Century: The Making and Remaking of the World Labour Movement', *New Left Review*, 1st ser., clxxix (1990), 61.