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Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919

HERBERT G. GUTMAN

THE WORK ETHIC remains a central theme in the American experience, and to study this subject afresh means to re-examine much that has been assumed as given in the writing of American working-class and social history. Such study, moreover, casts new light on yet other aspects of the larger American experience that are usually not associated with the study of ordinary working men and women. Until quite recently, few historians questioned as fact the ease with which most past Americans affirmed the "Protestant" work ethic.¹ Persons much more prestigious and influential than mere historians have regularly praised the powerful historical presence of such an ethic in the national culture. A single recent example suffices. In celebrating Labor Day in 1971, the nation's president saluted "the dignity of work, the value of achievement, [and] the morality of self-reliance. None of these," he affirmed, "is going out of style." And yet he worried somewhat. "Let us also recognize," he admitted, "that the work ethic in America is undergoing some changes."² The tone of his concern strongly suggested that it had never changed before and even that men like Henry Ford and F. O. Taylor had been among the signers of the Mayflower Compact or, better still, the Declaration of Independence.

It was never that simple. At all times in American history—when the country was still a preindustrial society, while it industrialized, and after it had become the world's leading industrial nation—quite diverse Americans, some of them more prominent and powerful than others, made it

Earlier versions of this paper were delivered at the Anglo-American Colloquium in Labour History sponsored by the Society for the Study of Labour History in London, June 1968; and at the meeting of the Organization of American Historians in Philadelphia, April 1969. Several friends and colleagues made incisive and constructive criticisms of these drafts, and I am in their debt: Eric Foner, Gregory S. Kealey, Christopher Lasch, Val Lorwin, Stephan Thernstrom, Alfred F. Young, and especially Neil Harris and Joan Wallach Scott. So, too, it has profited much from comments by graduate seminar students at the University of Rochester. My great debt to E. P. Thompson should be clear to those who even merely skim these pages.

¹ See especially the splendid essays by Edmund S. Morgan, "The Labor Problem at Jamestown, 1607-18," *AHR*, 76 (1971): 595-611, and C. Vann Woodward, "The Southern Ethic in a Puritan World," in his *American Counterpoint, Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston, 1971), 13-46.

² Quoted in the *New York Times*, Apr. 2, 1972.

clear in their thought and behavior that the Protestant work ethic was not deeply engrained in the nation's social fabric. Some merely noticed its absence, others advocated its imposition, and still others represented an entirely different work ethic. During the War of Independence a British manufacturer admitted that the disloyal colonists had among them many "good workmen from the several countries of Europe" but insisted that the colonists needed much more to develop successful manufactures. "It is not enough that a few, or even a great number of people, understand manufactures," he said; "the spirit of manufacturing must become the general spirit of the nation, and be incorporated, as it were, into their very essence. . . . It requires a long time before the personal, and a still longer time, before the national, habits are formed." This Englishman had a point. Even in the land of Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, and Henry Ford, nonindustrial cultures and work habits regularly thrived and were nourished by new workers alien to the "Protestant" work ethic. It was John Adams, not Max Weber, who claimed that "manufactures cannot live, much less thrive, without honor, fidelity, punctuality, and private faith, a sacred respect for property, and the moral obligations of promises and contracts." Only a "decisive, as well as an intelligent and honest, government," Adams believed, could develop such "virtues" and "habits." Others among the Founding Fathers worried about the absence of such virtues within the laboring classes. When Alexander Hamilton proposed his grand scheme to industrialize the young republic, an intimate commented, "Unless God should send us saints for workmen and angels to conduct them, there is the greatest reason to fear for the success of the plan." Benjamin Franklin shared such fears. He condemned poor relief in 1768 and lamented the absence among contemporaries of regular work habits. "Saint Monday," he said, "is as duly kept by our working people as *Sunday*; the only difference is that instead of employing their time cheaply at church they are wasting it expensively at the ale house." Franklin believed that if poorhouses shut down "Saint Monday and Saint Tuesday" would "soon cease to be holidays."³

Franklin's worries should not surprise us. The Founding Fathers, after all, lived in a preindustrial, not simply an "agrarian" society, and the prevalence of premodern work habits among their contemporaries was natural. What matters here, however, is that Benjamin Franklin's ghost haunted later generations of Americans. Just before the First World War the International Harvester Corporation, converted to "scientific

³ "A Manufacturer," *London Chronicle*, Mar. 17, 1778, quoted in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 7 (1883): 198-99. John Adams to Tench Coxe, May 1792, quoted in *National Magazine*, 2 (1800): 253-54, in Joseph Davis, *Essays in the Earlier History of the American Corporation* (New York, 1917) 1: 500; Thomas Marshall to Alexander Hamilton, Sept./Oct. 1971, in Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 9 (New York, 1965): 250-52; Benjamin Franklin, *Writings, 1767-1772*, ed. A. H. Smith (New York, 1907), 5: 122-27, 534-39.

management” and “welfare capitalism,” prepared a brochure to teach its Polish common laborers the English language; “Lesson One,” entitled “General,” read:

I hear the whistle. I must hurry.
 I hear the five minute whistle.
 It is time to go into the shop.
 I take my check from the gate board and hang it
 on the department board.
 I change my clothes and get ready to work.
 The starting whistle blows.
 I eat my lunch.
 It is forbidden to eat until then.
 The whistle blows at five minutes of starting time.
 I get ready to go to work.
 I work until the whistle blows to quit.
 I leave my place nice and clean.
 I put all my clothes in the locker.
 I must go home.

This document illustrates a great deal. That it shows the debasement of the English language, a process closely related to the changing ethnic composition of the American working population and the social need for simplified English commands, is a subject for another study. Our immediate interest is in the relationship it implies between Americanization, factory work habits, and improved labor efficiency.⁴

Nearly a century and a half separated the International Harvester Corporation from Benjamin Franklin, but both wanted to reshape the work habits of others about them. Machines required that men and women adapt older work routines to new necessities and strained those wedded

⁴Gerd Korman, “Americanization at the Factory Gate,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 18 (1965): 402. See also his *Industrialization, Immigrants, and Americanization: The View from Milwaukee* (Madison, 1967). These instructions should be compared to those issued in February 1971 by LaGrange, Illinois, General Motors officials to engine division supervisory personnel: “BELL TO BELL POLICY: It is the policy of the [electromotive] division that all employe[e]s be given work assignments such that all will be working effectively and efficiently during their scheduled working hours except for the time required for allowable personal considerations. EACH EMPLOYEE WILL BE INSTRUCTED ON THE FOLLOWING POINTS: 1. Be at their work assignment at the start of the shift. 2. Be at their work assignment at the conclusion of their lunch period. 3. All employe[e]s will be working effectively and efficiently until the bell of their scheduled lunch period and at the end of their scheduled shift. 4. Employe[e]s are to work uninterrupted to the end of the scheduled shift. In most instances, machines and area clean-up can be accomplished during periods of interrupted production prior to the last full hour of the shift.” These instructions came to my attention after I read an earlier version of this paper to students and faculty at Northern Illinois University. Edward Jennings, a student and a member of Local 719, United Automobile Workers, delivered the document to me the following day. See also the copy of the work rules posted in 1888 in the Abbot-Downing Factory in Concord, New Hampshire, and deposited in the New Hampshire Historical Society. Headed “NOTICE! TIME IS MONEY!” the rules included the following factory edict: “There are conveniences for washing, but it must be done outside of working hours, and not at our expense.” I am indebted to Harry Scheiber for bringing this document to my attention.

to premodern patterns of labor. Half a century separated similar popular laments about the impact of the machine on traditional patterns of labor. In 1873 the Chicago *Workingman's Advocate* published "The Sewing Machine," a poem in which the author scorned Elias Howe's invention by comparing it to his wife:

Mine is not one of those stupid affairs
 That stands in the corner with what-nots and chairs . . .
 Mine is one of the kind to love,
 And wears a shawl and a soft kid glove . . .
 None of your patent machines for me,
 Unless Dame Nature's the patentee!
 I like the sort that can laugh and talk,
 And take my arm for an evening walk;
 And will do whatever the owner may choose,
 With the slightest perceptible turn of the screws.
 One that can dance—and possibly flirt—
 And make a pudding as well as a shirt;
 One that can sing without dropping a stitch,
 And play the housewife, lady, and witch . . .
 What do you think of my machine,
 Ain't it the best that ever was seen?
 'Tisn't a clumsy, mechanical toy,
 But flesh and blood! Hear that my boy.

Fifty years later, when significant numbers of Mexicans lived in Chicago and its industrial suburbs and labored in its railroad yards, packing houses, and steel mills (in 1926, thirty-five per cent of Chicago Inland Steel's labor force had come from Mexico), "El Enganchado" ("The Hooked One"), a popular Spanish tune, celebrated the disappointments of immigrant factory workers:

I came under contract from Lorelia.
 To earn dollars was my dream,
 I bought shoes and I bought a hat
 And even put on trousers.
 For they told me that here the dollars
 Were scattered about in heaps
 That there were girls and theatres
 And that here everything was fun.
 And now I'm overwhelmed—
 I am a shoemaker by trade
 But here they say I'm a camel
 And good only for pick and shovel.
 What good is it to know my trade
 If there are manufacturers by the score
 And while I make two little shoes
 They turn out more than a million?
 Many Mexicans don't care to speak
 The language their mothers taught them

And go about saying they are Spanish
 And denying their country's flag . . .
 My kids speak perfect English
 And have no use for Spanish,
 They call me "fadder" and don't work
 And are crazy about the Charleston.
 I am tired of all this nonsense
 I'm going back to Michigan.

American society differed greatly in each of the periods when these documents were written. Franklin personified the successful preindustrial American artisan. The "sewing girl" lived through the decades that witnessed the transformation of preindustrial into industrial America. Harvester proved the nation's world-wide industrial supremacy before the First World War. The Mexican song served as an ethnic Jazz Age pop tune. A significant strand, however, tied these four documents together. And in unraveling that strand at particular moments in the nation's history between 1815 and 1920, a good deal is learned about recurrent tensions over work habits that shaped the national experience.⁵

The traditional imperial boundaries (a function, perhaps, of the professional subdivision of labor) that have fixed the territory open to American labor historians for exploration have closed off to them the study of such important subjects as changing work habits and the culture of work. Neither the questions American labor historians usually ask nor the methods they use encourage such inquiry. With a few significant exceptions, for more than half a century American labor history has continued to reflect both the strengths and the weaknesses of the conceptual scheme sketched by its founding fathers, John R. Commons and others of the so-called Wisconsin school of labor history.⁶ Even their most severe critics, including the orthodox "Marxist" labor historians of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and the few New Left historians who have devoted attention to American labor history, rarely questioned that conceptual

⁵ "The Sewing Machine," *Workingman's Advocate* (Chicago), Aug. 23, 1873; "El Enganchado," printed in Paul Taylor, *Mexican Labor in the United States: Chicago and the Calumet Region* (Berkeley, 1932), vi-vii.

⁶ Helpful summaries of recent scholarship in American labor history are Thomas A. Kruger, "American Labor Historiography, Old and New," *Journal of Social History*, 4 (1971): 277-85; Robert H. Zieger, "Workers and Scholars: Recent Trends in American Labor Historiography," *Labor History*, 13 (1972): 245-66; and Paul Faler, "Working Class Historiography," *Radical America*, 3 (1969): 56-68. Innovative works in the field that have broken away from the traditional conceptual framework include especially Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946); David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Non-Union Era* (Cambridge, 1960); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, 1964); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (New York, 1967); Montgomery, "The Working Class of the Preindustrial American City, 1780-1830," *Labor History*, 9 (1968): 1-22; Montgomery, "The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the Kensington Riots of 1844," *Journal of Social History*, 5 (1972): 411-46; Alfred F. Young, "The Mechanics and the Jeffersonians: New York, 1789-1801," *Labor History*, 5 (1964): 247-76; and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971).

framework.⁷ Commons and his colleagues asked large questions, gathered important source materials, and put forth impressive ideas. Together with able disciples, they studied the development of the trade union as an institution and explained its place in a changing labor market. But they gave attention primarily to those few workers who belonged to trade unions and neglected much else of importance about the American working population. Two flaws especially marred this older labor history. Because so few workers belonged to permanent trade unions before 1940, its overall conceptualization excluded most working people from detailed and serious study. More than this, its methods encouraged labor historians to spin a cocoon around American workers, isolating them from their own particular subcultures and from the larger national culture. An increasingly narrow "economic" analysis caused the study of American working-class history to grow more constricted and become more detached from larger developments in American social and cultural history and from the writing of American social and cultural history itself. After 1945 American working-class history remained imprisoned by self-imposed limitations and therefore fell far behind the more imaginative and innovative British and Continental European work in the field. In Great Britain, for example, the guideposts fixed by Sidney and Beatrice Webb have been shattered by labor and social historians such as Asa Briggs, Eric Hobsbawm, Henry Pelling, Sidney Pollard, George Rudé, E. P. Thompson, and Brian, J. F. C., and Royden Harrison, among other scholars who have posed new questions, used new methods, and dug deeply into largely neglected primary materials.⁸ As a consequence, a rich and subtle new history of the British common people is now being written. Much of value remains to be learned from the older American labor historians, but the time has long been overdue for a critical re-examination of their

⁷ The best example of orthodox "Marxist" labor history is Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, (New York, 1947-65). Emphasis in so-called New Left history on the relationship between "corporate liberalism" and American labor is found in James Weinstein, *Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* (Boston, 1968), and in Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969). A different approach is found in Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 25 (1968): 371-407.

⁸ This essay draws especially on the methods of analysis in the following works: E. P. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963); Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present*, 38 (1967): 56-97; Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, 50 (1971): 76-136; Sidney Pollard, *Genesis of Modern Management* (Cambridge, 1965); Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution," *Economic History Review*, 16 (1963): 254-71; Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels and Social Bandits* (Manchester, 1959); Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London, 1964) and especially the essay on "Custom Wages and Workload," 344-70; George Rudé, *Crowd in History* (New York, 1964); George Rudé and Eric Hobsbawm, *Captain Swing* (New York, 1968); Brian Harrison, "Religion and Recreation in Nineteenth Century England," *Past and Present*, 38 (1967): 98-125; Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians* (Pittsburgh, 1971); Asa Briggs, ed., *Chartist Studies* (New York, 1954); Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists* (London, 1965); J. F. C. Harrison, *The Quest for the New Moral World: Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America* (New York, 1969).

framework and their methodology and for applying in special ways to the particularities of the American working-class experience the conceptual and methodological break-throughs of our colleagues across the ocean.

The pages that follow give little attention to the subject matter usually considered the proper sphere of labor history (trade-union development and behavior, strikes and lockouts, and radical movements) and instead emphasize the frequent tension between different groups of men and women new to the machine and a changing American society. Not all periods of time are covered: nothing is said of the half century since the First World War when large numbers of Spanish-speaking and rural Southern white and black workers first encountered the factory and the machine.⁹ Much recent evidence describing contemporary dissatisfactions with factory work is not examined.¹⁰ Neither are bound workers (factory slaves in the Old South) or nonwhite free laborers, mostly blacks and Asian immigrants and their descendants, given notice. These groups, too, were affected by the tensions that will be described here, a fact that emphasizes the central place they deserve in any comprehensive study of American work habits and changing American working-class behavior.

Nevertheless the focus in these pages is on free white labor in quite different time periods: 1815-43, 1843-93, 1893-1919. The precise years serve only as guideposts to mark the fact that American society differed

⁹ The best recent work is Robert Coles, *South Goes North* (Boston, 1972).

¹⁰ The publication in late 1972 of "Work in America" by the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, a study financed by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, revealed widespread dissatisfactions with work among contemporary blue- and white-collar workers and even their supervisors. The dispute over this finding in government circles is described in *Newsweek*, Jan. 1, 1973, pp. 47-48, and Howard Muson, "The Ranks of the Discontent," *New York Times*, Dec. 31, 1972. Other evidence of dissatisfaction among factory workers with work routines is reported in the *New York Times* Jan. 23, Apr. 2, and Sept. 3, 1972. The April dispatch reported that a University of Michigan survey team described twenty-five aspects of their jobs to factory workers and then asked the workers to rank them in order of importance. Interesting work ranked first; pay was listed second. Absenteeism, the three large Detroit automobile manufacturers reported, had doubled between 1965 and 1972, "increasing from two to three percent . . . to 5 to 6 percent." In some plants, up to fifteen per cent of the workers were absent "on Fridays and Mondays." Quite interesting discussions of contemporary work dissatisfactions are found in Bennett Kremen, "No Pride in This Dust. Young Workers in the Steel Mills," *Dissent* (Winter 1972), 21-28, and Steve Kline, "Henry and His Magic Kabonk Machine," *Boston Globe Magazine*, July 16, 1972, pp. 8-10, 20-24. See also Rochester *Times-Union* (N.Y.), Nov. 29, 1971, for a discussion of obstinate work and leisure habits among Southern white workers fresh to Northern-owned factories. And a brief feature story in the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* (N.Y.), Apr. 30, 1972, told about an artisan Santo Badagliacca who seemed to belong to another era. He had moved to Rochester from Sicily in 1956 with his wife and five-year-old daughter. He was then forty and worked for nearly twelve years as a "tailor" for the National Clothing Company, Timely Clothes, and Bond Clothes, Inc. He quit the clothing factories in 1968 and opened a small custom tailoring shop in his home. In four years, not a single order came for a custom-made suit. Three or four persons visited his place weekly but only to have alterations made. Badagliacca explained his decision to quit the factory: "Each day, it's just collars, collars, collars. I didn't work forty years as a tailor just to do that." See also Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York, 1972), and William Serrin, *The Company and the Union: The 'Civilized Relationship' of the General Motors Corporation and the United Auto Workers* (New York, 1973).



Fig. 1. Tagging immigrants in railroad waiting room. Ellis Island, 1926. This family's tags, marked "P.R.R." and "L.V.R.R.," for Pennsylvania Railroad and Lehigh Valley Railroad, suggest they are headed for the anthracite coal region of Pennsylvania. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. (A fuller collection of Hine's work together with a critical biography and analysis of his place as an artist can be found in Judith Mara Gutman, *The Eyes of Lewis Hine* [scheduled for publication in the fall of 1973] and *Lewis W. Hine and the American Social Conscience* [New York, 1967].) Photograph courtesy George Eastman House Collection.

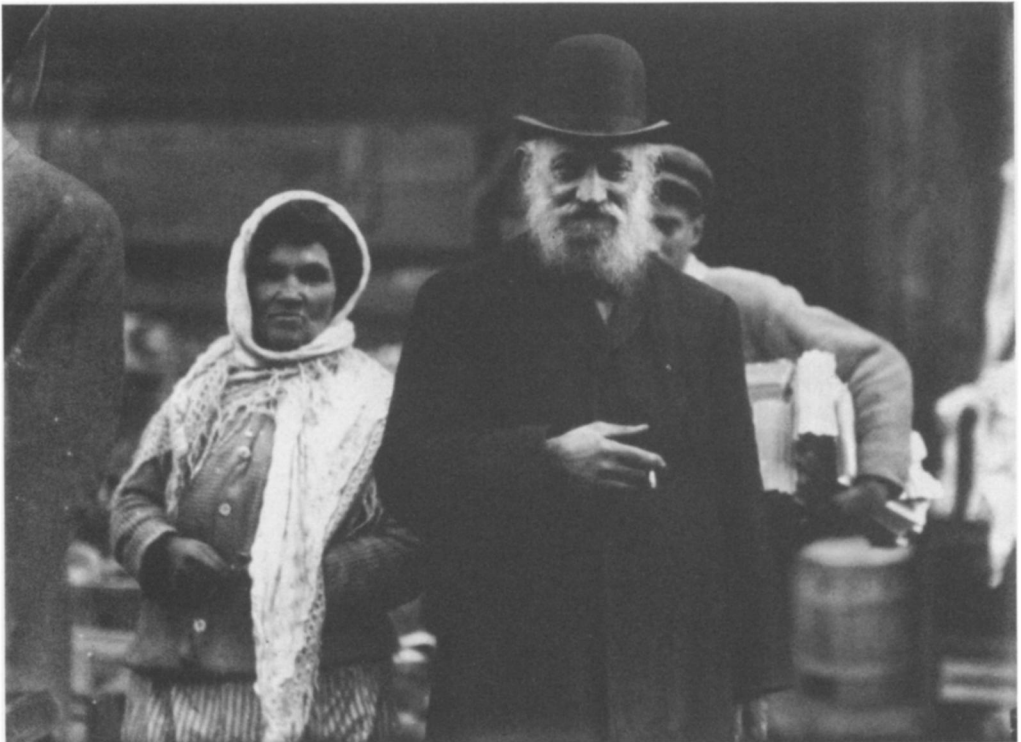


Fig. 2. Jewish immigrant. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine.
Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.



Fig. 3. Italian immigrants. Ellis Island, 1905. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.

greatly in each period. Between 1815 and 1843 the United States remained a predominantly preindustrial society and most workers drawn to its few factories were the products of rural and village preindustrial culture. Preindustrial American society was not premodern in the same way that European peasant societies were, but it was, nevertheless, premodern. In the half century after 1843 industrial development radically transformed the earlier American social structure, and during this Middle Period (an era not framed around the coming and the aftermath of the Civil War) a profound tension existed between the older American preindustrial social structure and the modernizing institutions that accompanied the development of industrial capitalism. After 1893 the United States ranked as a mature industrial society. In each of these distinctive stages of change in American society, a recurrent tension also existed between native and immigrant men and women fresh to the factory and the demands imposed upon them by the regularities and disciplines of factory labor. That state of tension was regularly revitalized by the migration of diverse premodern native and foreign peoples into an industrializing or a fully industrialized society. The British economic historian Sidney Pollard has described well this process whereby "a society of peasants, craftsmen, and versatile labourers became a society of modern industrial workers." "There was more to overcome," Pollard writes of industrializing England,

than the change of employment or the new rhythm of work: there was a whole new culture to be absorbed and an old one to be traduced and spurned, there were new surroundings, often in a different part of the country, new relations with employers, and new uncertainties of livelihood, new friends and neighbors, new marriage patterns and behavior patterns of children within the family and without.¹¹

That same process occurred in the United States. Just as in all modernizing countries, the United States faced the difficult task of industrializing whole cultures, but in this country the process was regularly repeated, each stage of American economic growth and development involving different first-generation factory workers. The social transformation Pollard described occurred in England between 1770 and 1850, and in those decades premodern British cultures and the modernizing institutions associated primarily with factory and machine labor collided and interacted. A painful transition occurred, dominated the ethos of an entire era, and then faded in relative importance. After 1850 and until quite recently, the British

¹¹ Pollard, "The Adaptation of the Labour Force," in *Genesis of Modern Management*, 160-208. Striking evidence of the preindustrial character of most American manufacturing enterprises before 1840 is found in Allen Pred, "Manufacturing in the American Mercantile City, 1800-1840," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 56 (1966): 307-25. See also Richard D. Brown, "Modernization and Modern Personality in Early America, 1600-1865: A Sketch of a Synthesis," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1972): 201-28.

working class reproduced itself and retained a relative national homogeneity. New tensions emerged but not those of a society continually busy (and worried about) industrializing persons born out of that society and often alien in birth and color and in work habits, customary values, and behavior. "Traditional social habits and customs," J.F.C. Harrison reminds us, "seldom fitted into the patterns of industrial life, and they had . . . to be discredited as hindrances to progress." That happened regularly in the United States after 1815 as the nation absorbed and worked to transform new groups of preindustrial peoples, native whites among them. The result, however, was neither a static tension nor the mere recurrence of similar cycles, because American society itself changed as did the composition of its laboring population. But the source of the tension remained the same, and conflict often resulted. It was neither the conflict emphasized by the older Progressive historians (agrarianism versus capitalism, or sectional disagreement) nor that emphasized by recent critics of that early twentieth-century synthesis (conflict between competing elites). It resulted instead from the fact that the American working class was continually altered in its composition by infusions, from within and without the nation, of peasants, farmers, skilled artisans, and casual day laborers who brought into industrial society ways of work and other habits and values not associated with industrial necessities and the industrial ethos. Some shed these older ways to conform to new imperatives. Others fell victim or fled, moving from place to place. Some sought to extend and adapt older patterns of work and life to a new society. Others challenged the social system through varieties of collective associations. But for all—at different historical moments—the transition to industrial society, as E. P. Thompson has written, "entailed a severe restructuring of working habits—new disciplines, new incentives, and a new human nature upon which these incentives could bite effectively."¹²

Much in the following pages depends upon a particular definition of culture and an analytic distinction between culture and society. Both deserve brief comment. "Culture" as used here has little to do with Oscar Lewis's inadequate "culture of poverty" construct and has even less to do with the currently fashionable but nevertheless quite crude behavioral social history that defines class by mere occupation and culture as some kind of a magical mix between ethnic and religious affiliations.¹³ Instead

¹² J. F. C. Harrison, *Learning and Living* (London, 1961), 268; Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 57.

¹³ Valuable and convincing theoretical criticisms of the culture of poverty construct appear in detail in Eleanor Burke Leacock, ed., *The Culture of Poverty: A Critique* (New York, 1971). See also William Preston's withering comments on the faulty application of the culture of poverty to a recent study of the Industrial Workers of the World: William Preston, "Shall This Be All? U. S. Historians versus William D. Haywood *et al.*," *Labor History*, 12 (1971): 435-71. The use of crude definitions of class and culture in otherwise sophisticated behavioral social history is as severely criticized in James Green, "Behavioralism and Class Analysis," *Labor History*, 13 (1972): 89-106.

this paper has profited from the analytic distinctions between culture and society made by the anthropologists Eric Wolf and Sidney W. Mintz and the exiled Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Mintz finds in culture "a kind of resource" and in society "a kind of arena," the distinction being "between sets of historically available alternatives or forms on the one hand, and the societal circumstances or settings within which these forms may be employed on the other." "Culture," he writes, "is used; and any analysis of its use immediately brings into view the arrangements of persons in societal groups for whom cultural forms confirm, reinforce, maintain, change, or deny particular arrangements of status, power, and identity." Bauman insists that for analytic purposes the two (culture and society) need always be examined discretely to explain behavior:

Human behavior, whether individual or collective, is invariably the resultant of two factors: the cognitive system as well as the goals and patterns of behavior as defined by culture systems, on the one hand, and the system of real contingencies as defined by the social structure on the other. A complete interpretation and apprehension of social processes can be achieved only when both systems, as well as their interaction, are taken into consideration.

Such an analytic framework allows social historians to avoid the many pitfalls that follow implicit or explicit acceptance of what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls "the theoretical dichotomies of classical sociology—*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, mechanic and organic solidarity, [and] folk and urban cultures." Too often, the subtle historical processes that explain particular patterns of working-class and other behavior have been viewed as no more than "the expansion of one at the expense of the other."¹⁴ An analytic model that distinguishes between culture and society reveals that even

¹⁴ Eric Wolf, "Specific Aspects of Plantation Systems in the New World: Community Sub-Cultures and Social Class," in *Plantation Systems of the New World* (Washington, 1949), 142; Sidney W. Mintz, "Foreword," in Norman Whitten and John F. Szwed, eds., *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York, 1970), 1–16 but especially 9–10; Zygmunt Bauman, "Marxism and the Contemporary Theory of Culture," *Co-Existence*, 5 (1968): 171–98; Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (Glencoe, 1963), 32–54, 109–10, 154–55. See also Emilio Willems, "Peasantry and City: Cultural Persistence and Change in Historical Perspective, A European Case," *American Anthropologist*, 72 (1970): 528–43, in which Willems disputes the proposition that "peasant culture is incompatible with industrialization" and shows that in the German Rhineland town of Neyl there existed significant "cultural continuity of urban lower class and peasantry rather than cultural polarity between the two segments." A brilliant article which focuses on West Indian slaves but is nevertheless methodologically useful to students of all lower-class cultures is S. W. Mintz, "Toward an Afro-American History," *Journal of World History*, 13 (1971): 317–33. The confusion between race and culture greatly marred early twentieth-century American labor history, and no one revealed that more clearly than John R. Commons in *Races and Immigrants in America* (New York, 1907), 7, 11–12, 153–54, 173–75, *passim*. "Race differences," Commons believed, "are established in the very blood and physical condition" and "most difficult to eradicate." Changes might take place in language and other behavioral patterns, "but underneath all these changes there may continue the physical, mental, and moral incapacities which determine the real character of their religion, government, industry, and literature." The behavior of the recent immigrants confused historians like Commons. His racial beliefs and the crude environmentalism he shared with other Progressive reformers encouraged that confusion. "Ireland and Italy," he could write, "have nothing to compare to the trade-union movement

in periods of radical economic and social change powerful cultural continuities and adaptations continued to shape the historical behavior of diverse working-class populations. That perspective is especially important in examining the premodern work habits of diverse American men and women and the cultural sanctions sustaining them in an alien society in which the factory and the machine grew more and more important.

Men and women who sell their labor to an employer bring more to a new or changing work situation than their physical presence. What they bring to a factory depends, in good part, on their culture of origin, and how they behave is shaped by the interaction between that culture and the particular society into which they enter. Because so little is yet known about preindustrial American culture and subcultures, some caution is necessary in moving from the level of generalization to historical actuality. What follows compares and contrasts working people new to industrial society but living in quite different time periods. First, the expectations and work habits of first-generation predominantly native American factory workers before 1843 are compared with first-generation immigrant factory workers between 1893 and 1920. Similarities in the work habits and expectations of men and women who experienced quite different premodern cultures are indicated. Second, the work habits and culture of artisans in the industrializing decades (1843–93) are examined to indicate the persistence of powerful cultural continuities in that era of radical economic change. Third, evidence of premodern working-class behavior that parallels European patterns of premodern working-class behavior in the early phases of industrialization is briefly described to suggest that throughout the entire period (1815–1920) the changing composition of the American working class caused the recurrence of “premodern” patterns of collective behavior usually only associated with the early phases of industrialization. And, finally, attention is given to some of the larger implications resulting from this recurrent tension between work, culture, and society.

THE WORK HABITS and the aspirations and expectations of men and women new to factory life and labor are examined first. Common work habits rooted in diverse premodern cultures (different in many ways but never-

of England, but the Irish are the most effective organizers of the American unions, and the Italians are becoming the most ardent unionists. Most remarkable of all, the individualistic Jew from Russia, contrary to his race instinct, is joining the unions.” “The American unions, in fact,” Commons concluded, “grow out of American conditions, and are an American product.” But he could not explain how these “races” so easily adapted to American conditions. How could he when he believed that “even the long series of crimes against the Indians, to which the term ‘Century of Dishonor’ seems to have attached itself with no protest, must be looked upon as a mob spirit of a superior race bent on despoiling a despised and inferior race”?

theless all ill fitted to the regular routines demanded by machine-centered factory processes) existed among distinctive first-generation factory workers all through American history. We focus on two quite different time periods: the years before 1843 when the factory and machine were still new to America and the years between 1893 and 1917 when the country had become the world's industrial colossus. In both periods workers new to factory production brought strange and seemingly useless work habits to the factory gate. The irregular and undisciplined work patterns of factory hands before 1843 frustrated cost-conscious manufacturers and caused frequent complaint among them. Textile factory work rules often were designed to tame such rude customs. A New Hampshire cotton factory that hired mostly women and children forbade "spirituous liquor, smoking, nor any kind of amusement . . . in the workshops, yards, or factories" and promised the "immediate and disgraceful dismissal" of employees found gambling, drinking, or committing "any other debaucheries." A Massachusetts firm nearby insisted that young workers unwilling to attend church stay "within doors and improve their time in reading, writing, and in other valuable and harmless employment." Tardy and absent Philadelphia workers paid fines and could not "carry into the factory nuts, fruits, etc.; books or paper." A Connecticut textile mill owner justified the twelve-hour day and the six-day week because it kept "workmen and children" from "vicious amusements." He forbade "gaming . . . in any private house." Manufacturers elsewhere worried about the example "idle" men set for women and children. Massachusetts family heads who rented "a piece of land on shares" to grow corn and potatoes while their wives and children labored in factories worried one manufacturer. "I would prefer giving constant employment at some sacrifice," he said, "to having a man of the village seen in the streets on a rainy day at leisure." Men who worked in Massachusetts woolen mills upset expected work routines in other ways. "The wool business requires more man labour," said a manufacturer, "and this we study to avoid. Women are much more ready to follow good regulations, are not captious, and do not clan as the men do against the overseers." Male factory workers posed other difficulties, too. In 1817 a shipbuilder in Medford, Massachusetts, refused his men grog privileges. They quit work, but he managed to finish a ship without using further spirits, "a remarkable achievement." An English visitor in 1832 heard an American complain that British workers in the Paterson cotton and machine shops drank excessively and figured as "the most beastly people I have ever seen." Four years later a New Jersey manufacturer of hats and caps boasted in a public card that he finally had "4 and 20 good, permanent workmen," not one infected with "the brutal leprosy of blue Monday habits and the moral gangrene of 'trades union' principles." Other manufacturers had less good fortune. Absenteeism occurred frequently among the Pennsylvania iron workers at

the rural Hopewell Village forge: hunting, harvesting, wedding parties, frequent “frolicking” that sometimes lasted for days, and uproarious Election and Independence Day celebrations plagued the mill operators. In the early nineteenth century, a New Jersey iron manufacturer filled his diary with notations about irregular work habits: “all hands drunk”; “Jacob Ventling hunting”; “molders all agree to quit work and went to the beach”; “Peter Cox very drunk and gone to bed. Mr. Evans made a solemn resolution any person or persons bringing liquor to the work enough to make drunk shall be liable to a fine”; “Edward Rutter off a-drinking. It was reported he got drunk on cheese.”¹⁵

Employers responded differently to such behavior by first-generation factory hands. “Moral reform” as well as what Sidney Pollard calls carrot-and-stick policies meant to tame or to transform such work habits. Fining was common. Hopewell Furnace managers deducted one dollar from Samuel York’s wages “for getting intoxicated [*sic*] with liquer [*sic*] and neglecting hauling 4 loads wash Dird at Joneses.” Special material rewards encouraged steady work. A Hopewell Village blacksmith contracted for nineteen dollars a month, and “if he does his work well we are to give him a pair of coarse boots.” In these and later years manufacturers in Fall River and Paterson institutionalized traditional customs and arranged for festivals and parades to celebrate with their workers a new mill, a retiring superintendent, or a finished locomotive. Some rewarded disciplined workers in special ways. When Paterson locomotive workers pressed for higher wages, their employer instructed an underling: “Book keeper, make up a roll of the men . . . making *fulltime*; if they can’t support their families on the wages they are now getting, they must have more. But the other men, who are drunk every Monday morning, I don’t want them around the shop under any circumstances.” Where factory work could be learned easily, new hands replaced irregular old ones. A factory worker in New England remembered that years before the Civil War her employer had hired “all American girls” but later shifted to immigrant laborers because “not coming from country homes, but living as the Irish do, in the town, they take no vacations, and can be relied on at the mill all year round.” Not all such devices worked to the satisfaction of workers or their employers. Sometime in the late 1830s

¹⁵ *Mechanic’s Free Press* (Philadelphia), Jan. 17, 1829; Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry* (New York, 1910), 374–75; Silesia Factory Rules, *Germantown Telegraph*, Nov. 6, 1833, reprinted in William Sullivan, *Industrial Worker in Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, 1955), 34; letters of Smith Wilkinson and Jedidiah Tracy to George White, n.d., printed in George White, *Memoir of Samuel Slater* (Philadelphia, 1836), 125–32; Carroll D. Wright, *Industrial Evolution of the United States* (New York, 1901), 296; Rowland T. Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America* (Cambridge, 1953), 146; Card of H. B. Day, 1836, printed in *Paterson Guardian* (N.J.), Aug. 6, 1886; J. E. Walker, *Hopewell Village* (Philadelphia, 1966), 115–16, 256, 265–68, 282–83, 331, 380–84; “The Martha Furnace Diary,” in A. D. Pierce, *Iron in the Pines* (New Brunswick, 1957), 96–105; Sidney Pollard, “Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution,” *Economic History Review*, 16 (1963): 254–71.

merchant capitalists sent a skilled British silk weaver to manage a new mill in Nantucket that would employ the wives and children of local whalers and fishermen. Machinery was installed, and in the first days women and children besieged the mill for work. After a month had passed, they started dropping off in small groups. Soon nearly all had returned "to their shore gazing and to their seats by the sea." The Nantucket mill shut down, its hollow frame an empty monument to the unwillingness of resident women and children to conform to the regularities demanded by rising manufacturers.¹⁶

First-generation factory workers were not unique to premodern America. And the work habits common to such workers plagued American manufacturers in later generations when manufacturers and most native urban whites scarcely remembered that native Americans had once been hesitant first-generation factory workers.¹⁷ To shift forward in time to East and South European immigrants new to steam, machinery, and electricity and new to the United States itself is to find much that seems the same. American society, of course, had changed greatly, but in some ways it is as if a film—run at a much faster speed—is being viewed for the second time: primitive work rules for unskilled labor, fines, gang labor, and subcontracting were commonplace. In 1910 two-thirds of the workers in twenty-one major manufacturing and mining industries came from Eastern and Southern Europe or were native American blacks, and studies of these "new immigrants" record much evidence of preindustrial work habits among the men and women new to American industry. According to Moses Rischin, skilled immigrant Jews carried to New York City town and village employment patterns, such as the *landsmannschaft* economy and a preference for small shops as opposed to larger factories, that sparked frequent disorders but hindered stable trade unions until 1910. Specialization spurred anxiety: in Chicago Jewish glovemakers resisted the subdivision of labor even though it promised better wages. "You shrink from doing either kind of work itself, nine hours a day," said two observers of these immigrant women. "You cling to the variety . . . , the mental luxury of first, finger-sides, and then, five separate leather pieces, for relaxation, to play with! *Here* is a luxury worth fighting for!" American work rules also conflicted with religious imperatives. On the eighth day after the birth of a son, Orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe held a festival, "an occasion of much rejoicing." But the American work

¹⁶ Walker, *Hopewell Village*, *passim*; Walker, "Labor-Management Relations at Hopewell Village," *Labor History*, 14 (1973): 3-18; *Voice of Industry* (Lowell), Jan. 8, 1847; *New York Tribune*, June 29, July 4, Aug. 20, 1853; *Paterson Guardian*, Sept. 13, 1886; Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics, *First Annual Report, 1869-1870* (Boston, 1870), 119; *Paterson Evening News*, Nov. 21, 1900.

¹⁷ Fining as means of labor discipline, of course, remained common between 1843 and 1893. See, for examples, *Illinois Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fourth Annual Report, 1886* (Springfield, 1887), 501-26; *Pennsylvania Bureau of Labor Statistics, Fourteenth Annual Report, 1886* (Harrisburg, 1887), 13-14.

week had a different logic, and if the day fell during the week the celebration occurred the following Sunday. "The host . . . and his guests," David Blaustein remarked, "know it is not the right day," and "they fall to mourning over the conditions that will not permit them to observe the old custom." The occasion became "one for secret sadness rather than rejoicing." Radical Yiddish poets, like Morris Rosenfeld, the presser of men's clothing, measured in verse the psychic and social costs exacted by American industrial work rules:

The Clock in the workshop,—it rests not a moment;
 It points on, and ticks on: eternity—time;
 Once someone told me the clock had a meaning,—
 In pointing and ticking had reason and rhyme. . . .
 At times, when I listen, I hear the clock plainly;—
 The reason of old—the old meaning—is gone!
 The maddening pendulum urges me forward
 To labor and still labor on.
 The tick of the clock is the boss in his anger.
 The face of the clock has the eyes of the foe.
 The clock—I shudder—Dost hear how it draws me?
 It calls me "Machine" and it cries [to] me "Sew"!¹⁸

Slavic and Italian immigrants carried with them to industrial America subcultures quite different from that of village Jews, but their work habits were just as alien to the modern factory. Rudolph Vecoli has reconstructed Chicago's South Italian community to show that adult male seasonal construction gangs as contrasted to factory labor were one of many traditional customs adapted to the new environment, and in her study of South Italian peasant immigrants Phyllis H. Williams found among them men who never adjusted to factory labor. After "years" of "excellent" factory work, some "began . . . to have minor accidents" and others "suddenly give up and are found in their homes complaining of a vague indisposition with no apparent physical basis." Such labor worried early twentieth-century efficiency experts, and so did Slavic festivals, church holidays, and "prolonged merriment." "Man," Adam Smith wisely observed, "is, of all sorts of luggage, the most difficult to be transported." That was just as true for these Slavic immigrants as for the early nineteenth-century native American factory workers. A Polish wedding in a Pennsylvania mining or mill town lasted between three and five days. Greek and Roman Catholics shared the same jobs but had different holy days, "an annoyance to many employers." The Greek Church had "more than eighty festivals in the year," and "the Slav religiously observes the days on which the saints are commemorated and invariably takes a holiday." A celebration of the

¹⁸ Moses Rischin, *Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 1962), 19-33, 144-99 but especially 181-82; *New York Tribune*, Aug. 16, 1903; William Herd and Rheta C. Dorr, "The Women's Invasion," *Everybody's Magazine*, Mar. 1909, pp. 375-76; Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in the United States* (New York, 1950), 280-85, 290-91.



Fig. 4, above. Italian canal construction workers in western New York playing cards in a shack. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.

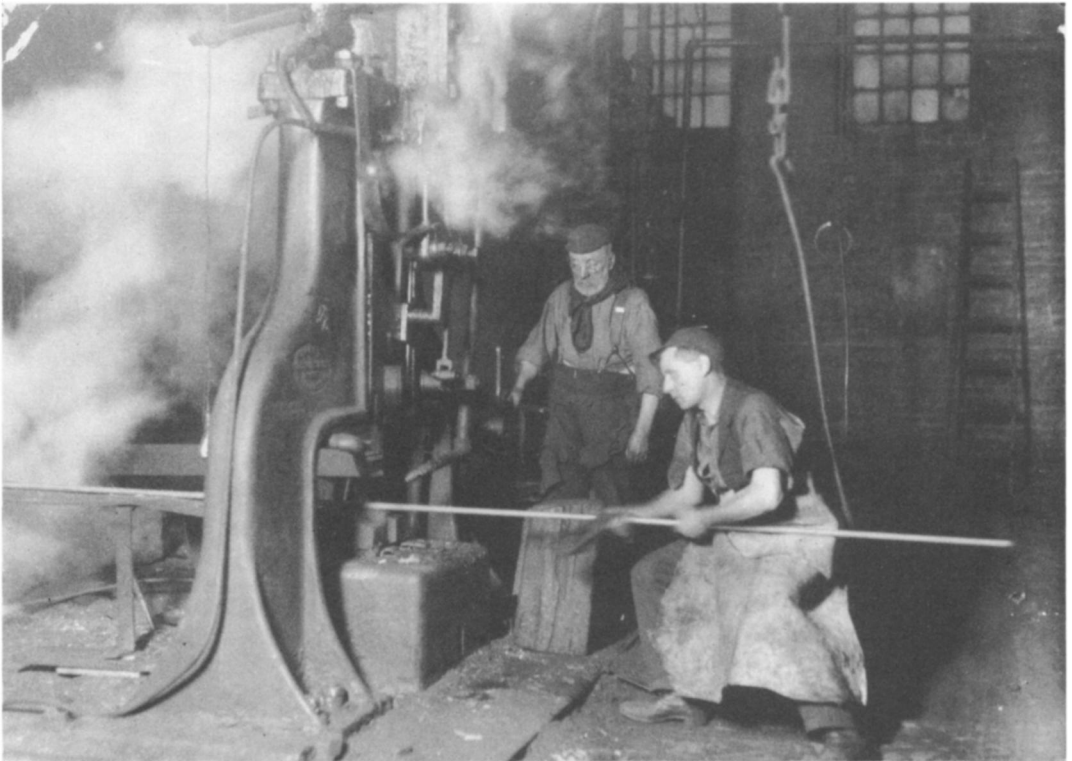
Fig. 5, below. Native white textile-mill worker in the South, 1912. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.





Fig. 6, above. Italian workers in a New York tenement-house sweatshop, 1909. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.

Fig. 7, below. Shaping rods under a trip hammer in an iron or steel mill in the Pittsburgh area. Note the absence of machine processes. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.



American Day of Independence in Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania, caught the eye of a hostile observer. Men parading the streets drew a handcart with a barrel of lager in it. Over the barrel "stood a comrade, goblet in hand and crowned with a garland of laurel, singing some jargon." Another sat and played an accordion. At intervals, the men stopped to "drink the good beverage they celebrated in song." The witness called the entertainment "an imitation of the honor paid Bacchus which was one of the most joyous festivals of ancient Rome" and felt it proof of "a lower type of civilization." Great Lakes dock workers "believed that a vessel could not be unloaded unless they had from four to five kegs of beer." (And in the early irregular strikes among male Jewish garment workers, employers negotiated with them out of doors and after each settlement "would roll out a keg of beer for their entertainment of the workers.") Contemporary betters could not comprehend such behavior. Worried over a three-day Slavic wedding frolic, a woman concluded: "You don't think they have souls, do you? No, they are beasts, and in their lust they'll perish." Another disturbed observer called drink "un-American, . . . a curse worse than the white plague." About that time, a young Italian boy lay ill in a hospital. The only English words he knew were "boots" and "hurry up."¹⁹

More than irregular work habits bound together the behavior of first-generation factory workers separated from one another by time and by the larger structure of the society they first encountered. Few distinctive American working-class populations differed in so many essentials (their sex, their religions, their nativity, and their prior rural and village cultures) as the Lowell mill girls and women of the Era of Good Feelings and the South and East European steel workers of the Progressive Era. To describe similarities in their expectations of factory labor is not to blur these important differences but to suggest that otherwise quite distinctive men and women interpreted such work in similar ways. The Boston Associates, pioneer American industrialists, had built up Lowell and other towns like it to overcome early nineteenth-century rural and village prejudices and fears about factory work and life and in their regulation of working-class social habits hoped to assure a steady flow of young rural women ("girls") to and from the looms. "The sagacity of self-interest as well as more disinterested considerations," explained a Lowell clergyman in 1845, "has led to the adoption of a strict system of moral police." Without "sober, orderly, and moral" workers, profits would be "absorbed by cases of irregularity, carelessness, and neglect." The Lowell capitalists

¹⁹ William M. Leiserson, *Adjusting Immigrant and Industry* (New York, 1924), ch. 1; R. J. Vecoli, "Contadini in Chicago: A Critique of 'The Uprooted,'" *Journal of American History*, 51 (1964): 404-27; Phyllis H. Williams, *South Italian Folkways in Europe and America* (New Haven, 1938), 30-32; A. Rosenberg, *Memoirs of a Cloak Maker* (New York, 1920), 42, quoted in Louis Levine, *Women's Garment Workers* (New York, 1924), 42; Peter Roberts, *New Immigration* (New York, 1912), 79-97, 118-19; Roberts, *Anthracite Communities* (New York, 1904), 49-56, 219, 236, 291, 294-95.

thrived by hiring rural women who supplemented a distant family's income, keeping them a few years, and then renewing the process. Such steady labor turnover kept the country from developing a permanent proletariat and so was meant to assure stability. Lowell's busy cotton mills, well-ordered boarding houses, temples of religion and culture, factory girls, and moral police so impressed Anthony Trollope that he called the entire enterprise a "philanthropic manufacturing college." John Quincy Adams thought the New England cotton mills "palaces of the Poor," and Henry Clay marveled over places like the Lowell mills. "Who has not been delighted with the clock-work movements of a large cotton factory?" asked the father of the American System. The French traveler Michel Chevalier had a less sanguine reaction. He found Lowell "neat and decent, peaceable and sage," but worried, "Will this become like Lancashire? Does this brilliant glare hide the misery and suffering of the working girls?"²⁰

Historians of the Lowell mill girls find little evidence before 1840 of organized protest among them and attribute their collective passivity to corporation policing policies, the frequent turnover in the labor force, the irregular pace of work (after it was rationalized in the 1840s, it provoked collective protest), the freedom the mill girls enjoyed away from rural family dominance, and their relatively decent earnings. The women managed the transition to mill life because they did not expect to remain factory workers too long. Nevertheless frequent inner tension revealed itself among the mobile mill women. In an early year, a single mill discharged twenty-eight women for such reasons as "misconduct," "captiousness," "disobedience," "impudence," "levity," and even "mutiny." The difficult transition from rural life to factory work also caused tensions outside the mills. Rural girls and women, Harriet Robinson later recalled, came to Lowell in "outlandish fashions" and with "queer names," "Samantha, Triphena, Plumy, Kezia, Aseneth, Elgardy, Leafy, Ruhamah, Almaretta, Sarpeta, and Florilla . . . among them." They spoke a "very peculiar" dialect ("a language almost unintelligible"). "On the broken English and Scotch of their ancestors," said Robinson, "was engrafted the nasal Yankee twang." Some soon learned the "city way of speaking"; others changed their names to "Susan" or "Jane"; and for still others new clothing, especially straw hats, became important. But the machines they worked still left them depressed and with feelings of anxiety. "I never cared much for machinery," Lucy Larcom said of her early Lowell years. "I could not see into their complications or feel interested in them. . . . In sweet June weather I would lean far out of the window, and

²⁰ Anthony Trollope, quoted in Howard Gitelman, "The Waltham System and the Coming of the Irish," *Labor History*, 8 (1967): 227-54; John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay quoted in Seth Luther, *An Address to the Workingmen of New England* (Boston, 1832), title page; Michel Chevalier, *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States* (Boston, 1939; reprinted New York, 1969), 133-44; Henry Miles, *Lowell As It Is and Was* (Lowell, 1845), 128-46.

try not to hear the unceasing clash of sound inside." She kept a plant beside her and recollected an overseer who confiscated newspaper clippings and even the pages of a "torn Testament" some women had slipped into the factory. Years after she had left the textile mills, Lucy Larcom ridiculed her mill-girl poems: "I continued to dismalize myself at times quite unnecessarily." Their titles included "The Early Doomed" and "The Complaint of a Nobody" (in which she compared herself to "a weed growing up in a garden"). When she finally quit the mill, the paymaster asked, "Going where you can earn more money?" "No," she remembered answering, "I am going where I can have more time." "Ah, yes!" he responded, "time is money."²¹

Even the *Lowell Offering* testified to the tensions between mill routines and rural rhythms and feelings. Historians have dismissed it too handily because the company sponsored it and refused to publish prose openly critical of mill policies. But the fiction and poetry of its contributors, derivative in style and frequently escapist, also often revealed dissatisfactions with the pace of work. Susan, explaining her first day in the mill to Ann, said the girls awoke early and one sang, "Morning bells, I hate to hear./Ringing dolefully, loud and clear." Susan went on:

You cannot think how odd everything seemed to me. I wanted to laugh at everything, but did not know what to make sport of first. They set me to threading shuttles, and tying weaver's knots and such things, and now I have improved so that I can take care of one loom. I could take care of two if I only had eyes in the back of my head. . . . When I went out at night, the sound of the mill was in my ears, as of crickets, frogs, and Jew-harps, all mingled together in strange discord. After, it seemed as though cotton-wool was in my ears. But now I do not mind it at all. You know that people learn to sleep with the thunder of Niagara in their ears, and the cotton mill is no worse.

Ellen Collins quit the mill, complaining about her "obedience to the ding-dong of the bell—just as though we were so many living machines." In "A Weaver's Reverie," Ella explained why the mill women wrote "so much about the beauties of nature."

Why is it that the delirious dreams of the famine-stricken are of tables loaded with the richest viands? . . . Oh, tell me why this is, and I will tell you why the factory girl sits in the hours of meditation and thinks, not of the crowded, clattering mill, nor of the noisy tenement which is her home.

Contemporary labor critics who scorned the *Lowell Offering* as little more than the work of "poor, caged birds," who "while singing of the roses . . . forget the bars of their prison," had not read it carefully. Their

²¹ Roll Book of the Hamilton Company, 1826–27, printed in Carolina Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (Boston, 1924), 266–67; Harriet Robinson, *Loom and Spindle* (New York, 1898), 62–69; Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* (Boston, 1889), 138–43, 152–55, 174–76, 180–85, 209–19, 226–31.

attachment to nature was the concern of persons working machines in a society still predominantly “a garden,” and it was not unique to these Lowell women. In New Hampshire five hundred men and women petitioned the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company’s proprietors in 1853 not to cut down an elm tree to allow room for an additional mill: “It was a beautiful and goodly tree” and belonged to a time “when the yell of the red man and the scream of the eagle were alone heard on the banks of the Merimack, instead of two giant edifices filled with the buzz of busy and well-remunerated industry.” Each day, the workers said, they viewed that tree as “a connecting link between the past and the present,” and “each autumn [it] remind[s] us of our own mortality.”²²

Aspirations and expectations interpret experience and thereby help shape behavior. Some Lowell mill girls revealed dissatisfactions, and others made a difficult transition from rural New England to that model factory town, but that so few planned to remain mill workers eased that transition and hampered collective protest. Men as well as women who expect to spend only a few years as factory workers have little incentive to join unions. That was just as true of the immigrant male common laborers in the steel mills of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (when multi-plant oligopoly characterized the nation’s most important manufacturing industry) as in the Lowell cotton mills nearly a century earlier. David Brody has explained much about the common laborers. In those years, the steel companies successfully divorced wages from productivity to allow the market to shape them. Between 1890 and 1910, efficiencies in plant organization cut labor costs by about a third. The great Carnegie Pittsburgh plants employed 14,359 common laborers, 11,694 of them South and East Europeans. Most, peasant in origin, earned less than \$12.50 a week (a family needed fifteen dollars for subsistence). A staggering accident rate damaged these and other men: nearly twenty-five per cent of the recent immigrants employed at the Carnegie South Works were injured or killed each year between 1907 and 1910, 3,723 in all. But like the Lowell mill women, these men rarely protested in collective ways, and for good reason. They did not plan to stay in the steel mills long. Most had come to the United States as single men (or married men who had left their families behind) to work briefly in the mills, save some money, return home, and purchase farm land. Their private letters to European relatives indicated a realistic awareness of

²² William Scoresby, *American Factories and Their Mill Operatives* (Boston, 1845), 21–23, 58–66, *passim*; Norman Ware, *Industrial Worker, 1840–1860* (New York, 1924), 85; “New York Industrial Exhibition,” *Sessional Papers* (Commons) 1854, vol. 26, p. 10; Ray Ginger, “Labor in a Massachusetts Cotton Mill,” *Business History Review*, 28 (1954): 67–91 (a brilliant study of mobility among New England factory women). Useful works on the early New England cotton mills and their female workers include Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture*; Hannah Josephson, *Golden Threads, Mill Girls and Magnates* (New York, 1949); Vera Shlakman, “Economic History of a Factory Town: A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts,” *Smith College Studies in History*, 20, nos. 1–4 (1934–35); Edith Abbott, *Women in Industry*.

their working life that paralleled some of the Lowell fiction: "if I don't earn \$1.50 a day, it would not be worth thinking about America"; "a golden land so long as there is work"; "here in America one must work for three horses"; "let him not risk coming, for he is too young"; "too weak for America." Men who wrote such letters and avoided injury often saved small amounts of money, and a significant number fulfilled their expectations and quit the factory and even the country. Forty-four South and East Europeans left the United States for every one hundred that arrived between 1908 and 1910. Not a steel worker, a young Italian boy living in Rochester, New York, summed up the expectations of many such immigrant men in a poem he wrote after studying English just three months:

Nothing job, nothing job,
I come back to Italy;
Nothing job, nothing job,
Adieu, land northerly. . . .

Nothing job, nothing job,
O! sweet sky of my Italy;
Nothing job, nothing job,
How cold in this country. . . .

Nothing job, nothing job,
I return to Italy;
Comrades, laborers, good-bye;
Adieu, land of "Fourth of July."²³

Immigrant expectations coincided for a time with the fiscal needs of industrial manufacturers. The Pittsburgh steel magnates had as much good fortune as the Boston Associates. But the stability and passivity they counted on among their unskilled workers depended upon steady work and the opportunity to escape the mills. When frequent recessions caused recurrent unemployment, immigrant expectations and behavior changed. What Brody calls peasant "group consciousness" and "communal loyalty" sustained bitter wildcat strikes after employment picked up. The tenacity of these immigrant strikes for higher wages amazed contemporaries, and brutal suppression often accompanied them (Cleveland, 1899; East Chicago, 1905; McKees Rock, 1909; Bethlehem, 1910; and Youngstown in 1915 where, after a policeman shot into a peaceful parade, a riot caused an estimated one million dollars in damages). The First World War and its aftermath blocked the traditional route of overseas outward mobility, and the consciousness of immigrant steel workers changed. They sparked the 1919 steel strike. The steel mill had become a way of life for

²³ David Brody, *Steelworkers in America: The Non-Union Era* (Cambridge, 1960), 26-28, 36, 96-111, 119-20, 125-46, 180-86, *passim*; Brody, *Labor in Crisis* (Philadelphia, 1965), 15-45; "Song of an Italian Workman," Rochester *Post-Express* (N.Y.), n.d., reprinted in *Survey*, 21 (1908): 492-93.

them and was no longer the means by which to reaffirm and even strengthen older peasant and village life-styles.²⁴

LET US SHARPLY shift the time perspective from the years before 1843 and those between 1893 and 1919 to the decades between 1843 and 1893 and also shift our attention to the artisans and skilled workers who differed so greatly in the culture and work-styles they brought to the factory from men and women bred in rural and village cultures. The focus, however, remains the same—the relationship between settled work habits and culture. This half century saw the United States (not small pockets within it) industrialize as steam and machinery radically transformed the premodern American economic structure. That so much attention has been given to the Civil War as a crucial divide in the nation's history (and it was, of course, for certain purposes) too frequently has meant neglect by historians of common patterns of behavior that give coherence to this period. Few contemporaries described these large structural changes more effectively if indirectly than the Boston labor reformer Jennie Collins in 1871:

If you should enter a factory and find the water-wheels in the garret, the heaviest machinery in the seventh story, and the dressing and weaving in the basement, you would find the machinery and system less out of joint than at present it seems to be in this strange country of ours. The structure of our society is like a building for which the stones were carefully designed and carved, but in the construction of which the masons seized upon whatever block came handiest, without regard to design or fitness, using window-sills for partition walls, capstones for the foundation, and chink-pieces for the corner-stone.

The magnitude of the changes noticed by Collins cannot be understated. In 1869 half of the country's manufacturing enterprises still managed on water power. The nation in 1860 counted more slaves than factory workers. In his unpublished study of six upstate New York counties Richard L. Ehrlich has found that in five counties during that same year employment in manufacturing plants having at least fifty workers accounted for thirty-seven per cent or less of their respective labor forces. In the six counties (Albany, Erie, Monroe, Oneida, Onondaga, and Rensselaer) the average number of persons employed by firms engaging fewer than fifty employees was less than nine. In the year of Abraham Lincoln's election as president, the United States ranked behind England, France, and Germany in the value of its manufactured product. In 1894 the United States led the field: its manufactured product nearly equalled in value that of Great Britain, France, and Germany together. But such profound economic changes did not entirely shatter the older American social structure and the settled cultures of premodern native and immigrant American artisans.

²⁴ Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, *passim*; Brody, *Labor in Crisis*, 15–45.

“There is no such thing as economic growth which is not, at the same time, growth or change of a culture,” E. P. Thompson has written. Yet he also warns that “we should not assume any automatic, or over-direct, correspondence between the dynamic of economic growth and the dynamic of social or cultural life.” That significant stricture applies as much to the United States as to England during its Industrial Revolution and especially to native and immigrant artisans between 1843 and 1893.²⁵

It is not surprising to find tenacious artisan work habits before the Civil War, what Thompson calls “alternate bouts of intense labour and of idleness wherever men were in control of their working lives.” An English cabinetmaker shared a New York City workplace with seven others (two native Americans, two Germans, and one man each from Ireland, England, and France), and the readers of *Knight's Penny Magazine* learned from him that “frequently . . . after several weeks of real hard work . . . a simultaneous cessation from work took place.” “As if . . . by tacit agreement, every hand” contributed “loose change,” and an apprentice left the place and “speedily returned laden with wine, brandy, biscuits, and cheese.” Songs came forth “from those who felt musical,” and the same near-ritual repeated itself two more times that day. Similar relaxations, apparently self-imposed, also broke up the artisans’ work day in the New York City shipyards, and a ship carpenter described them as “an indulgence that custom had made as much of a necessity in a New York shipyard as a grind-stone”:

In our yard, at half-past eight a.m., Aunt Arlie McVane, a clever kind-hearted, but awfully uncouth, rough sample of the “Ould Sod,” would make her welcome appearance in the yard with her two great baskets, stowed and checked off with crullers, doughnuts, ginger-bread, turnovers, pieces, and a variety of sweet cookies and cakes; and from the time Aunt Arlie’s baskets came in sight until every man and boy, bosses and all, in the yard, had been supplied, always at one cent a piece for any article on the cargo, the pie, cake and cookie trade was a brisk one. Aunt Arlie would usually make the rounds of the yard and supply all hands in about an hour, bringing the forenoon up to half-past nine, and giving us from ten to fifteen minutes “breathing spell” during lunch; no one ever hurried during “cake-time.”

Nor was this all:

After this was over we would fall to again, until interrupted by Johnnie Gogean, the English candyman, who came in always at half-past ten, with his great board, the size of a medium extension dining table, slung before him, covered with all sorts of “stick”, and several of sticky candy, in one-cent lots. Bosses, boys and men—all hands, everybody—invested one to three cents in Johnnie’s sweet wares,

²⁵ Jennie Collins, *Nature's Aristocracy* (Boston, 1871), 4; Richard L. Ehrlich, “The Development of Manufacturing in Selected Counties in the Erie Canal Corridor, 1815–1860,” (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York, Buffalo, 1972); Stuart Bruchey, *Roots of American Economic Growth* (New York, 1965), 139; George Rogers Taylor, *Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York, 1951), 249; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 97, 192.

and another ten to fifteen minutes is spent in consuming it. Johnnie usually sailed out with a bare board until 11 o'clock at which time there was a general sailing out of the yard and into convenient grog-shops after whiskey; only we had four or five men among us, and one apprentice—not quite a year my senior—who used to sail out pretty regularly ten times a day on the average; two that went for whiskey only when some one invited them to drink, being too mean to treat themselves; and two more who never went at all.

In the afternoon, about half-past three, we had a cake-lunch, supplied by Uncle Jack Gridder, an old, crippled, superannuated ship carpenter. No one else was ever allowed to come in competition with our caterers. Let a foreign candy-board or cake basket make their appearance inside the gates of the yard, and they would get shipped out of that directly.

At about five o'clock p.m., always, Johnnie used to put in his second appearance; and then, having expended money in another stick or two of candy, and ten minutes in its consumption, we were ready to drive away again until sundown; then home to supper.

Less well-ordered in their daily pleasures, the shoemakers in Lynn, Massachusetts, nevertheless surrounded their way of work with a way of life. The former cobbler David Johnson recorded in minute detail in *Sketches of Old Lynn* how fishermen and farmers retained settled ways first as part-time shoemakers in small shops behind their homes. The language of the sea was adapted to the new craft:

There were a good many sea phrases, or "salt notes" as they were called, used in the shops. In the morning one would hear, "Come Jake, hoist the sails," which simply was a call to roll up the curtains. . . . If debate ran high upon some exciting topic, some veteran would quietly remark, "Squally, squally, today. Come better luff and bear away."

At times a shoemaker read from a newspaper to other men at work. Festivals, fairs, games ("trolling the tog"), and excursions were common rituals among the Lynn cobblers. So was heavy drinking with the bill often incurred by "the one who made the most or the fewest shoes, the best or the poorest." That man "paid 'the scot.'" "These were the days," Johnson reminded later and more repressed New England readers, "when temperance organizations were hardly known."²⁶

Despite the profound economic changes that followed the American Civil War, Gilded Age artisans did not easily shed stubborn and time-honored work habits. Such work habits and the life-styles and subcultures related to them retained a vitality long into these industrializing decades.

²⁶ Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 73; "A Workingman's Recollections of America," *Knight's Penny Magazine*, 1 (1846): 97-112; Richard D. Trevellick, in *Fincher's Trades Review*, n.d., reprinted in George E. McNeill, ed., *The Labor Movement: the Problem of To-day* (New York, 1887), 341-42; David Johnson, *Sketches of Old Lynn* (Lynn, 1880), 30-31, 36-49. The relationship between drink, work, and other artisanal communal activities was described inadvertently in unusual detail for dozens of British crafts and trades on nearly every page of John Dunlop's *The Philosophy of Artificial and Compulsory Drinking Usage in Great Britain and Ireland* (6th ed.; London, 1839), a 331-page temperance tract. There is good reason to believe that the craft customs described in this volume were known to American artisans and workers, too.

Not all artisans worked in factories, but some that did retained traditional craft skills. Mechanization came in different ways and at different times to diverse industries. Samuel Gompers recollected that New York City cigarmakers paid a fellow craftsman to read a newspaper to them while they worked, and Milwaukee cigarmakers struck in 1882 to



Fig. 8. "Reader" in a cigar factory (probably in New York City), 1909. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.

retain such privileges as keeping (and then selling) damaged cigars and leaving the shop without a foreman's permission. "The difficulty with many cigarmakers," complained a New York City manufacturer in 1877, "is this. They come down to the shop in the morning; roll a few cigars and then go to a beer saloon and play pinnocio or some other game, . . . working probably only two or three hours a day." Coopers felt new machinery "hard and insensate," not a blessing but an evil that "took a great deal of joy out of life" because machine-made barrels undercut a subculture of work and leisure. Skilled coopers "lounged about" on Saturday (the regular pay day), a "lost day" to their employers. A historian of American cooperage explained:

Early on Saturday morning, the big brewery wagon would drive up to the shop. Several of the coopers would club together, each paying his proper share, and one of them would call out the window to the driver, "Bring me a Goose Egg," meaning a half-barrel of beer. Then others would buy "Goose Eggs," and there

would be a merry time all around. . . . Little groups of jolly fellows would often sit around upturned barrels playing poker, using rivets for chips, until they had received their pay and the "Goose Egg" was dry.

Saturday night was a big night for the old-time cooper. It meant going out, strolling around the town, meeting friends, usually at a favorite saloon, and having a good time generally, after a week of hard work. Usually the good time continued over into Sunday, so that on the following day he usually was not in the best of condition to settle down to the regular day's work.

Many coopers used to spend this day [Monday] sharpening up their tools, carrying in stock, discussing current events, and in getting things in shape for the big day of work on the morrow. Thus, "Blue Monday" was something of a tradition with the coopers, and the day was also more or less lost as far as production was concerned.

"Can't do much today, but I'll give her hell tomorrow," seemed to be the Monday slogan. But bright and early Tuesday morning, "Give her hell" they would, banging away lustily for the rest of the week until Saturday which was pay day again, and its thoughts of the "Goose Eggs."

Such traditions of work and leisure—in this case, a four-day work week and a three-day weekend—angered manufacturers anxious to ship goods as much as it worried sabbatarians and temperance reformers. Conflicts over life- and work-styles occurred frequently and often involved control over the work process and over time. The immigrant Staffordshire potters in Trenton, New Jersey, worked in "bursts of great activity" and then quit for "several days at a time." "Monday," said a manufacturer, "was given up to debauchery." After the potters lost a bitter lockout in 1877 that included torchlight parades and effigy burnings, the *Crockery and Glass Journal* mockingly advised:

Run your factories to please the crowd. . . . Don't expect work to begin before 9 a.m. or to continue after 3 p.m. Every employee should be served hot coffee and a boquet at 7 a.m. and allowed the two hours to take a free perfumed bath. . . . During the summer, ice cream and fruit should be served at 12 p.m. to the accompaniment of witching music.

Hand coopers (and potters and cigarmakers, among others) worked hard but in distinctly preindustrial styles. Machine-made barrels pitted modernizing technology and modern habits against traditional ways. To the owners of competitive firms struggling to improve efficiency and cut labor costs, the Goose Egg and Blue Monday proved the laziness and obstinacy of craftsmen as well as the tyranny of craft unions that upheld venerable traditions. To the skilled cooper, the long weekend symbolized a way of work and life filled with almost ritualistic meanings. Between 1843 and 1893, compromise between such conflicting interests was hardly possible.²⁷

²⁷ Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labor*, (New York, 1925), 1: 42–53, 63–82; Thomas Gavett, *Development of the Labor Movement in Milwaukee* (Madison, 1965), 43 ff.; New York *Herald*, Nov. 17, 1877; Franklin E. Coyne, *The Development of the Cooperage Industry in the United States* (Chicago, 1940), 7–26 but especially 21–22; *Crockery and Glass Journal*, n.d., reprinted in *Labor Standard* (N.Y.), Sept. 9, 1877; Frank Thistlethwaite, "Atlantic Migration of the Pottery Industry," *Economic History Review*, 10 (1957–58): 264–73.

Settled premodern work habits existed among others than those employed in nonfactory crafts. Owners of already partially mechanized industries complained of them, too. "Saturday night debauches and Sunday carousels though they be few and far between," lamented the *Age of Steel* in 1882, "are destructive of modest hoardings, and he who indulges in them will in time become a striker for higher wages." In 1880 a British steel worker boasted that native Americans never would match immigrants in their skills: "'adn't the 'ops, you know." Manufacturers, when able, did not hesitate to act decisively to end such troubles. In Fall River new technology allowed a print cloth manufacturer to settle a long-standing grievance against his stubborn mule spinners. "On Saturday afternoon after they had gone home," a boastful mill superintendent later recollected, "we started right in and smashed a room full of mules with sledge hammers. . . . On Monday morning, they were astonished to find that there was not work for them. That room is now full of ring frames run by girls." Woolen manufacturers also displaced hand-jack spinners with improved machinery and did so because of "the disorderly habits of English workmen. Often on a Monday morning, half of them would be absent from the mill in consequence of the Sunday's dissipation." Blue Monday, however, did not entirely disappear. Paterson artisans and factory hands held a May festival on a Monday each year ("Labor Monday") and that popular holiday soon became state law, the American Labor Day. It had its roots in earlier premodern work habits.²⁸

The persistence of such traditional artisan work habits well into the nineteenth century deserves notice from others besides labor historians, because those work habits did not exist in a cultural or social vacuum. If modernizing technology threatened and even displaced such work patterns, diverse nineteenth-century subcultures sustained and nourished them. "The old nations of the earth creep on at a snail's pace," boasted Andrew Carnegie in *Triumphant Democracy* (1886), "the Republic thunders past with the rush of an express." The articulate steelmaster, however, had missed the point. The very rapidity of the economic changes occurring in Carnegie's lifetime meant that many, unlike him, lacked the time, historically, culturally, and psychologically, to be separated or alienated from settled ways of work and life and from relatively fixed beliefs. Continuity not consensus counted for much in explaining working-class and especially artisan behavior in those decades that witnessed the coming of the factory and the radical transformation of American society. Persistent work habits were one example of that significant continuity. But these elements of continuity were often revealed among nineteenth-century American workers cut off by birth from direct contact with the

²⁸ *Age of Steel*, Aug. 5, 1882 (courtesy of Lynn Mapes); Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America*, 54-55, 146; announcement of "Great Festival" on "Labor Monday," Paterson *Labor Standard*, May 29, 1880.

preindustrial American past, a fact that has been ignored or blurred by the artificial separation between labor history and immigration history. In Gilded Age America (and afterwards in the Progressive Era despite the radical change in patterns of immigration), working-class and immigration history regularly intersected, and that intermingling made for powerful continuities. In 1880, for example, 63 of every 100 Londoners were native to that city, 94 coming from England and Wales, and 98 from Great Britain and Ireland. Foreign countries together contributed only 1.6 per cent to London's massive population. At that same moment, more than 70 of every 100 persons in San Francisco (78), St. Louis (78), Cleveland (80), New York (80), Detroit (84), Milwaukee (84), and Chicago (87) were immigrants or the children of immigrants, and the percentage was just as high in many smaller American industrial towns and cities. "Not every foreigner is a workingman," noticed the clergyman Samuel Lane Loomis in 1887, "but in the cities, at least, it may almost be said that every workingman is a foreigner." And until the 1890s most immigrants came from Northern and Western Europe, French- and English-speaking Canada, and China. In 1890, only three per cent of the nation's foreign-born residents—290,000 of 9,200,000 immigrants—had been born in Eastern or Southern Europe. (It is a little recognized fact that most North and West European immigrants migrated to the United States after, not before, the American Civil War.) When so much else changed in the industrializing decades, tenacious traditions flourished among immigrants in ethnic subcultures that varied greatly among particular groups and according to the size, age, and location of different cities and industries. ("The Irish," Henry George insisted, "burn like chips, the English like logs.") Class and occupational distinctions within a particular ethnic group made for different patterns of cultural adaptation, but powerful subcultures thrived among them all.²⁹

Immiserization and poverty cut deeply into these ethnic working-class worlds. In reconstructing their everyday texture there is no reason to neglect or idealize such suffering, but it is time to discard the notion that the large-scale uprooting and exploitative processes that accompanied industrialization caused little more than cultural breakdown and social anomie. Family, class, and ethnic ties did not dissolve easily. "Almost as a matter of definition," the sociologist Neil Smelzer has written, "we associate the factory system with the decline of the family and the onset of anonymity." Smelzer criticized such a view of early industrializing England, and it has just as little validity for nineteenth-century industrializing America. Family roles changed in important ways, and strain was widespread, but the immigrant working-class family held together.

²⁹ Andrew Carnegie quoted in Henry Pelling, *America and the British Left* (New York, 1957), 52; Samuel Lane Loomis, *Modern Cities and Their Religious Problems* (New York, 1887), 68–73; Henry George quoted in Carl Wittke, *Irish in America* (Baton Rouge, 1956), 193.

Examination of household composition in sixteen census enumeration districts in Paterson in 1880 makes that clear for this predominantly working-class immigrant city, and while research on other ethnic working-class communities will reveal significant variations, the overall patterns should not differ greatly. The Paterson immigrant (and native white) communities were predominantly working class, and most families among

TABLE 1. MALE OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION
BY ETHNIC GROUP, PATERSON, NEW JERSEY, 1880,
ENUMERATION DISTRICTS 150-53, 161-72^a

	<i>British</i>	<i>German</i>	<i>Irish</i>	<i>Native White</i>
Total Males 20 and Older	2090	927	2841	1461
Total Females 20 and Older	1941	804	3466	1689
<i>Male Occupational Structure</i>				
Unskilled Laborer	8.2%	9.8%	43.6%	20.8%
Skilled Worker	75.5%	64.3%	44.8%	62.5%
Nonlaborer	16.3%	25.9%	11.6%	16.7%
<i>Household Composition</i>				
Number of Kin-related Households	1402	686	2142	905
Number of Subfamilies ^b	117	41	158	125
Nuclear Households	73.9%	78.1%	73.1%	65.7%
Extended Households	13.5%	10.3%	13.6%	18.7%
Augmented Households ^c	14.6%	13.1%	15.3%	19.0%
<i>Per cent of Households and Subfamilies with a Husband and/or Father Present</i>				
	87.2%	91.6%	81.1%	78.9%

^a I am indebted to Carol W. Allison for gathering the raw Paterson data from the 1880 federal manuscript census schedules.

^b A subfamily is defined as a complete or incomplete nuclear family residing with another nuclear family.

^c Augmented households include lodgers. The sum of nuclear, augmented, and extended households is greater than 100 per cent because some households included both relatives and lodgers and have been counted twice.

them were intact in their composition. For this population, at least (and without accounting for age and sex ratio differences between the ethnic groups), a greater percentage of immigrant than native white households included two parents. Ethnic and predominantly working-class communities in industrial towns like Paterson and in larger cities, too, built on these strained but hardly broken familial and kin ties. Migration to another country, life in the city, and labor in cost-conscious and ill-equipped factories and workshops tested but did not shatter what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has described as primordial (as contrasted to civic) attachments, "the 'assumed' givens . . . of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connections mainly, but beyond them, the

givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, and following particular social patterns." Tough familial and kin ties made possible the transmission and adaptation of European working-class cultural patterns and beliefs to industrializing America. As late as 1888, residents in some Rhode Island mill villages still figured their wages in British currency. Common rituals and festivals bound together such communities. Paterson silk weavers had their Macclesfield wakes, and Fall River cotton-mill workers their Ashton wakes. British immigrants "banded together to uphold the popular culture of the homeland" and celebrated saints' days: St. George's Day, St. Andrew's Day, and St. David's Day. Even funerals retained an archaic flavor. Samuel Sigley, a Chartist house painter, had fled Ashton-under-Lyne in 1848, and built American trade unions. When his wife died in the late 1890s a significant ritual occurred during the funeral: some friends placed a chaff of wheat on her grave. Mythic beliefs also cemented ethnic and class solidarities. The Irish-American press, for example, gave Martin O'Brennan much space to argue that Celtic had been spoken in the Garden of Eden, and in Paterson Irish-born silk, cotton, and iron workers believed in the magical powers of that town's "Dublin Spring." An old resident remembered:

There is a legend that an Irish fairy brought over the water in her apron from the Lakes of Killarney and planted it in the humble part of that town. . . . There were dozens of legends connected with the Dublin Spring and if a man drank from its precious depository . . . he could never leave Paterson [but] only under the fairy influence, and the wand of the nymph would be sure to bring him back again some time or other.

When a "fairy" appeared in Paterson in human form, some believed she walked the streets "as a tottering old woman begging with a cane." Here was a way to assure concern for the elderly and the disabled.³⁰

Much remains to be studied about these cross-class but predominantly working-class ethnic subcultures common to industrializing America. Relations within them between skilled and unskilled workers, for example, remain unclear. But the larger shape of these diverse immigrant communities can be sketched. More than mythic beliefs and common work habits sustained them. Such worlds had in them what Thompson has called "working-class intellectual traditions, working-class community patterns,

³⁰ Neil Smelzer, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago, 1959), 193; Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (Glencoe, 1963), 109–10; Lillie B. Chace Wyman, "Studies in Factory Life," *Atlantic Monthly*, 62 (1888): 17–29, 215–21, 605–21 and 63 (1889): 68–79; Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America*, 147–81, *passim*; Paterson *Labor Standard*, Oct. 2, 1897; Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism* (Philadelphia, 1966), 32; Paterson *Evening News*, Oct. 27, 1900. Except for the fact that nuclear households declined greatly at the expense of households containing lodgers (augmented households), examination of the household composition among immigrant Jews and Italians in Lower Manhattan in 1905 shows that powerful familial and kin ties bound together later immigrant communities, too. The data are summarized briefly in table 3 (see appendix).

and a working-class structure of feeling," and men with artisan skills powerfully affected the everyday texture of such communities. A model subculture included friendly and benevolent societies as well as friendly local politicians, community-wide holiday celebrations, an occasional library (the Baltimore Journeymen Bricklayer's Union taxed members one dollar a year in the 1880s to sustain a library that included the collected works of William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels), participant sports, churches sometimes headed by a sympathetic clergy, saloons, beer-gardens, and concert halls or music halls and, depending upon circumstance, trade unionists, labor reformers, and radicals. The Massachusetts cleric Jonathan Baxter Harrison published in 1880 an unusually detailed description of one such ethnic, working-class institution, a Fall River music hall and saloon. About fifty persons were there when he visited it, nearly one-fourth of them young women. "Most of those present," he noticed, were "persons whom I had met before, in the mills and on the streets. They were nearly all operatives, or had at some time belonged to that class." An Englishman sang first, and then a black whose songs "were of many kinds, comic, sentimental, pathetic, and silly. . . . When he sang 'I got a mammy in the promised land,' with a strange, wailing refrain, the English waiter-girl, who was sitting at my table, wiped her eyes with her apron, and everybody was very quiet." Harrison said of such places in Fall River:

All the attendants . . . had worked in the mills. The young man who plays the piano is usually paid four or five dollars per week, besides his board. The young men who sing receive one dollar per night, but most of them board themselves. . . . The most usual course for a man who for any reason falls out of the ranks of mill workers (if he loses his place by sickness or is discharged) is the opening of a liquor saloon or drinking place.

Ethnic ties with particular class dimensions sometimes stretched far beyond local boundaries and even revealed themselves in the behavior of the most successful practitioners of Gilded Age popular culture. In 1884, for example, the pugilist John L. Sullivan and the music-hall entertainers Harrigan and Hart promised support to striking Irish coal miners in the Ohio Hocking Valley. Local ties, however, counted for much more and had their roots inside and outside of the factory and workshop. Soon after Cyrus H. McCormick, then twenty-one, took over the management of his father's great Chicago iron machinery factory (which in the early 1880s employed twelve hundred men and boys), a petition signed by "Many Employees" reached his hands:

It only pains us to relate to you . . . that a good many of our old hands is not here this season and if Mr. Evarts is kept another season a good many more will leave. . . . We pray for you . . . to remove this man. . . . We are treated as though we were dogs. . . . He has cut wages down so low they are living on nothing but

bread. . . . We can't talk to him about wages if we do he will tell us to go outside the gate. . . . He discharged old John the other day he has been here seventeen years. . . . There is Mr. Church who left us last Saturday he went about and shook hands with every old hand in the shop . . . this brought tears to many mens eyes. He has been here nineteen years and has got along well with them all until he came to Mr. Evarts the present superintendent.

Artisans, themselves among those later displaced by new technology, signed this petition, and self-educated artisans (or professionals and petty enterprisers who had themselves usually risen from the artisan class) often emerged as civic and community leaders. "Intellectually," Jennie Collins noticed in Boston in the early 1870s, "the journeymen tailors . . . are ever discussing among themselves questions of local and national politics, points of law, philosophy, physics, and religion."³¹

Such life-styles and subcultures adapted and changed over time. In the Gilded Age piece rates in nearly all manufacturing industries helped reshape traditional work habits. "Two generations ago," said the Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics in 1885, "time-work was the universal rule." "Piece-work" had all but replaced it, and the Connecticut Bureau called it "a moral force which corresponds to machinery as a physical force." Additional pressures came in traditional industries such as shoe, cigar, furniture, barrel, and clothing manufacture, which significantly mechanized in these years. Strain also resulted where factories employed large numbers of children and young women (in the 1880 manuscript census 49.3 per cent of all Paterson boys and 52.1 per cent of all girls aged eleven to fourteen had occupations listed by their names) and was especially common among the as yet little-studied pools of casual male laborers found everywhere. More than this, mobility patterns significantly affected the structure and the behavior of these predominantly working-class communities. A good deal of geographic mobility, property mobility (home ownership), and occupational mobility (skilled status in new industries or in the expanding building trades, petty retail enterprise, the professions, and public employment counted as the most important ways to advance occupationally) reshaped these ethnic communities as Stephan Thernstrom and others have shown. But so little is yet known about the society in which such men and women lived and about the cultures which had produced them that it is entirely premature to infer "consciousness" (beliefs and values) only from mobility rates. Such patterns and rates of mobility, for example, did not entirely shatter working-class capacities for self-protection. The fifty-year period between 1843 and 1893 was not conducive to permanent, stable trade unions,

³¹ Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 194; Richard T. Ely, *Labor Movement in America* (New York, 1886), 125; Jonathan Baxter Harrison, *Certain Dangerous Tendencies in American Life and Other Essays* (Boston, 1880), 178-88; *National Labor Tribune* (Pittsburgh), Dec. 13, 1884; Robert Ozanne, *Century of Labor-Management Relations at McCormick and International Harvester* (Madison, 1967), 10-28; Collins, *Nature's Aristocracy*, 94.

but these decades were a time of frequent strikes and lockouts and other forms of sustained conflict.³²

Not all strikes and lockouts resulted in the defeat of poorly organized workers. For the years 1881 to 1887, for example, the New Jersey Bureau of Labor Statistics collected information on 890 New Jersey industrial disputes involving mostly workers in the textile, glass, metal, transportation, and building trades: six per cent ended in compromise settlements; employers gained the advantage in forty per cent; strikers won the rest (fifty-four per cent). In four of five disputes concerning higher wages and shorter hours, New Jersey workers, not their employers, were victorious. Large numbers of such workers there and elsewhere were foreign-born or the children of immigrants. More than this, immigrant workers in the mid-1880s joined trade unions in numbers far out of proportion to their place in the labor force. Statistical inquiries by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in Illinois in 1886 and in New Jersey in 1887 make this clear. Even these data may not have fully reflected the proclivity of immigrants to seek self-protection. (Such a distortion would occur if, for example, the children of immigrants apparently counted by the bureaus as native-born had remained a part of the ethnic subcultures into which they had been born and joined trade unions as regularly as the foreign-born.) Such information from Illinois and New Jersey suggests the need to treat the meaning of social mobility with some care. So does the sketchy outline of Hugh O'Donnell's career. By 1892, when he was twenty-nine years old, he had already improved his social status a great deal. Before the dispute with Andrew Carnegie and Henry Clay Frick culminated in the bitter Homestead lockout that year, O'Donnell had voted Republican, owned a home, and had in it a Brussels carpet and even a piano. Nevertheless

TABLE 2. ORGANIZED WORKERS, MALE WHITES IN NONAGRICULTURAL PURSUITS, ILLINOIS (1886) AND NEW JERSEY (1887)

Nativity	Illinois 1886		New Jersey 1887	
	Breadwinners	Organized	Breadwinners	Organized
<i>Number</i>				
Native-born	423,290	25,985	243,093	24,463
Foreign-born	308,595	57,163	137,385	26,704
<i>Per cent</i>				
Native-born	57.8%	31.3%	63.9%	47.8%
Foreign-born	42.2%	68.7%	36.1%	52.2%

³² Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, *First Annual Report, 1885* (Hartford, 1885), 70-73; Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress, Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, 1964), *passim*; and Thernstrom and Richard Sennett, eds., *Nineteenth Century Cities* (New Haven, 1969), *passim*.

this Irish-American skilled worker led the Homestead workers and was even indicted under a Civil War treason statute never before used. The material improvements O'Donnell had experienced mattered greatly to him and suggested significant mobility, but culture and tradition together with the way in which men like O'Donnell interpreted the transformation of Old America defined the value of those material improvements and their meaning to him.³³

Other continuities between 1843 and 1893 besides those rooted in artisan work habits and diverse ethnic working-class subcultures deserve brief attention as important considerations in understanding the behavior of artisans and other workers in these decades. I have suggested in other writings that significant patterns of opposition to the ways in which industrial capitalism developed will remain baffling until historians re-examine the relationship between the premodern American political system and the coming of the factory along with the strains in premodern popular American ideology shared by workers and large numbers of successful self-made Americans (policemen, clergymen, politicians, small businessmen, and even some "traditional" manufacturers) that rejected the legitimacy of the modern factory system and its owners.³⁴ One strain of thought common to the rhetoric of nineteenth-century immigrant and native-born artisans is considered here. It helps explain their recurrent enthusiasm for land and currency reform, cooperatives, and trade unions. It was the fear of dependence, "proletarianization," and centralization, and the worry that industrial capitalism threatened to transform "the Great Republic of the West" into a "European" country. In 1869, the same year that saw the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the chartering of the Standard Oil Company, the founding of the Knights of Labor, and the dedication of a New York City statue to Cornelius Vanderbilt, some London workers from Westbourne Park and Notting Hill petitioned the American Ambassador for help to emigrate. "Dependence," they said of Great Britain, "not independence, is inculcated. Hon. Sir, this state of things we wish to fly from . . . to become citizens of that great Republican country, which has no parallels in the world's history." Such men had a vision of Old America, but it was not a new vision. Industrial transformation between 1840 and 1890 tested and redefined that vision.

³³ Table on New Jersey and Illinois trade union membership in Isaac Hourwich, *Immigration and Labor: The Economic Aspects of European Immigration to the United States* (New York, 1912), 524; Leon Woolf, *Lockout: the Story of the Homestead Strike of 1892* (New York, 1965), 187-88.

³⁴ See, for examples, H. G. Gutman, "The Worker's Search for Power: Labor in the Gilded Age," in H. Wayne Morgan, ed., *The Gilded Age: A Reappraisal* (Syracuse, 1963), 38-68; Gutman, "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement: The Christian Spirit in the Gilded Age," *American Historical Review*, 72 (1966-67): 74-101; Gutman, "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth Century American Industrial Cities: Paterson, New Jersey, a Case Study," in Frederic C. Jaher, ed., *Age of Industrialism: Essays in Social Structure and Cultural Values* (New York, 1968), 263-87.

Seven years after their visit, the New York *Labor Standard*, then edited by an Irish socialist, bemoaned what had come over the country: "There was a time when the United States was the workingman's country, . . . the land of promise for the workingman. . . . We are now in an *old country*." This theme recurred frequently as disaffected workers, usually self-educated artisans, described the transformation of premodern America. "America," said the Detroit *Labor Leaf*, "used to be the land of promise to the poor. . . . The Golden Age is indeed over—the Age of Iron has taken its place. The iron law of necessity has taken the place of the golden rule." We need not join in mythicizing preindustrial American society in order to suggest that this tension between the old and the new helps give a coherence to the decades between 1843 and 1893 that even the trauma of the Civil War does not disturb.³⁵

As early as the 1830s, the theme that industrialism promised to make over the United States into a "European" country had its artisan and working-class advocates. Seth Luther then made this clear in his complaint about "gentlemen" who "exultingly call LOWELL the Manchester of America" and in his plea that the Bunker Hill monument "stand *unfinished*, until the time passes away when aristocrats talk about mercy to mechanics and laborers, . . . until our rights are acknowledged." The tensions revealed in labor rhetoric between the promises of the Republic and the practices of those who combined capital and technology to build factories continued into the 1890s. In 1844 New England shoemakers rewrote the Declaration of Independence to protest that the employers "have robbed us of certain rights," and two years later New England textile workers planned without success a general strike to start on July 4, 1846, calling it "a second Independence Day." The great 1860 shoemakers' strike in Lynn started on George Washington's birthday, a celebration strikers called "sacred to the memory of one of the greatest men the world has ever produced." Fear for the Republic did not end with the Civil War. The use of state militia to help put down a strike of Northeastern Pennsylvania workers in 1874 caused *Equity*, a Boston labor weekly, to condemn the Erie Railroad as "the George III of the workingman's movement" and "the Government of Pennsylvania" as "but its parliament." ("Regiments," it added, "to protect dead things.")³⁶

Such beliefs, not the status anxieties of Progressive muckrakers and New Deal historians, gave rise to the pejorative phrase "robber baron." Discontented Gilded Age workers found in that phrase a way to summarize their worries about dependence and centralization. "In America," exploded

³⁵ *Reynold's Newspaper* (London), Mar. 28, 1869; *Labor Standard* (N.Y.), May 6, 1876; *Detroit Labor Leaf*, Sept. 30, 1885.

³⁶ Luther, *Address to the Workmen of New England*, *passim*; Ware, *Industrial Worker, 1840-1860*, 38-48; Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York, 1947), 1: 202-09, 241-45, 292; *Equity* (Boston), 1 (1874), quoted in James Dombrowski, *Early Days of Christian Socialism* (New York, 1936), 81.

the *National Labor Tribune* in 1874, "we have realized the ideal of republican government at least in form." "America," it went on, "was the star of the political Bethlehem which shone radiantly out in the dark night of political misrule in Europe. The masses of the old world gazed upon her as their escape." Men in America could be "their own rulers"; "no one could or should become their masters." But industrialization had created instead a nightmare: "These dreams have not been realized. . . . The working people of this country . . . suddenly find capital as rigid as an absolute monarchy." Two years later, the same Pittsburgh labor weekly asked, "Shall we let the gold barons of the nineteenth century put iron collars of ownership around our necks as did the feudal barons with their serfs in the fourteenth century?" The rhetoric surrounding the little-understood 1877 railroad strikes and riots summed up these fears. Critics of the strikers urged repressive measures such as the building of armories in large cities and the restriction of the ballot, and a few, including Elihu Burritt, even favored importing "British" institutions to the New World. But the disorders also had their defenders, and a strain in their rhetoric deserves notice. A radical Massachusetts clergyman called the strikers "the lineal descendants of Samuel Adams, John Hancock, and the Massachusetts yeomen who began so great a disturbance a hundred years ago . . . only now the kings are money kings and then they were political kings." George McNeill, a major figure in the nineteenth-century labor movement and later a founder of the American Federation of Labor, denied that the Paris Commune had come to America: "The system which the pilgrims planted here has yet a residue of followers. No cry of 'commune' can frighten the descendants of the New England commune. This is the COMMONWEALTH, not the *Class* wealth, of Massachusetts." A discharged Pittsburgh brakeman put it differently in blaming the violence on a general manager who treated the railroad workers "no better than the serfs of Great Britain, sir, . . . introduced into this country a lot of English ideas and customs, [and] made our men wear uniforms and traveling bags." "A uniform," he worried, "constantly reminds them of their serfdom, and I for one would rather remain out of work than wear one." An amazed reporter wondered how this man could "assert his rights as a free born American, even if in so doing himself and family starved."³⁷

This Pittsburgh brakeman revealed values that persisted throughout the decades of industrialization, that expressed themselves most commonly in the rhetoric and behavior of artisans and skilled workers, and that worried other influential Americans besides railroad magnates and industrial manufacturers. In 1896 an army officer won a prize for writing

³⁷ *National Labor Tribune* (Pittsburgh), Dec. 12, 1874, and Oct. 14, 1876; Jesse Jones, "Railroad Strike of 1877," and George McNeill, "An Address," *Labor Standard* (N.Y.), Aug. 26, and Sept. 30, 1877; Robert, Pittsburgh dispatch, *Chicago Inter-Ocean*, Sept. 11, 1877.

the best essay submitted to the *Journal of the Military Service Institutions of the United States*. Theodore Roosevelt helped to judge the contest. The officer insisted that “discipline” needed to be more rigorous in an American as opposed to a European army. Even though he knew little about European societies, his insistence that “means of discipline are entirely artificial productions of law” in the United States counted as a profound insight into a social condition that plagued industrialists and sparked frequent discontent among skilled and other workers in industrializing America:

Discipline should be as a rod of iron. It may seem hopelessly illogical to claim that the army of a free people needs to be kept in stricter discipline than any other army, with wider space between the officers and the enlisted men, yet there are natural reasons why it should be so. The armies of Europe are drawn from people who for countless generations have lived under monarchical institutions and class government, where every man is born and bred to pay homage to some other man, and the habit of subordination to the will of another is a matter of heredity. It is natural that when such a man finds himself in the army he is not only amenable to discipline, but any relaxation on the part of the officer would be accepted as a matter of grace.

With us these conditions are reversed. Every man is born and bred in the idea of equality, and means of discipline are entirely artificial productions of law, not only without support from traditional habit, but they have that habit to overcome, and familiarity on the part of the officer would breed contempt of authority.

Two decades earlier, the London editor of the *Industrial Review* and increasingly conservative British trade-union leader, George Potter, posed the same problem somewhat differently. The disorders incident to the 1877 railroad strikes convinced him that Americans then lived through an earlier stage of English history, before “habit” had “begotten” men to “use their combinations peaceably and wisely.” “The state of things that existed then in England,” Potter insisted, “exists now in the United States. It was at one time believed that this was impossible within the borders of the great Republic, but it has proved itself wrong.” Potter believed that the widespread violence in 1877 had been caused by men “suddenly or newly brought together to defend an interest” and therefore lacking “that wisdom of method that time and experience develop.” But Potter was wrong. The men who quit work in 1877 (and before and after that) included many deeply rooted in traditional crafts and worried that the transformation of the American social and economic structure threatened settled ways of work and life and particular visions of a just society. Their behavior—in particular the little-understood violence that accompanied the strikes (including the burning and destruction of the Pennsylvania Railroad’s Pittsburgh yards and equipment)—makes this clear. It had specific purposes and was the product of long-standing

grievances that accompanied the transformation of Old America into New America.³⁸

QUITE DIVERSE PATTERNS of collective working-class behavior (some of them disorderly and even violent) accompanied the industrialization of the United States, and certain of them (especially those related to artisan culture and to peasant and village cultures still fresh to factory labor and to the machine) deserve brief attention. Characteristic European forms of "premodern" artisan and lower-class protest in the United States occurred before (prior to 1843), during (1843-93), and after (1893-1919) the years when the country "modernized." The continuing existence of such behavior followed from the changing composition of the working-class population. Asa Briggs's insistence that "to understand how people respond to industrial change it is important to examine what kind of people they were at the beginning of the process" and "to take account of continuities as well as new ways of thinking," poses in different words the subtle interplay between culture and society that is an essential factor in explaining working-class behavior. Although their frequency remains the subject for much further detailed study, examples of premodern working-class behavior abound for the entire period from 1815 to 1919, and their presence suggests how much damage has been done to the past American working-class experiences by historians busy, as R. H. Tawney complained more than half a century ago, "dragging into prominence forces which have triumphed and thrusting into the background those which have been swallowed up." Attention is briefly given to three types of American artisan and working-class behavior explored in depth and with much illumination by European social historians ("church-and-king" crowds, machine-breaking, and food riots) and to the presence in quite different working-class protests of powerful secular and religious rituals. These occurred over the entire period under examination, not just in the early phases of industrial development.³⁹

Not much is yet known about premodern American artisan and urban lower-class cultures, but scattered evidence suggests a possible American variant of the European church-and-king phenomenon. Although artisan and lower-class urban cultures before 1843 await their historians, popular street disorders (sometimes sanctioned by the established authorities) happened frequently and increasingly caused concern to the premodern

³⁸ Major George Wilson, "The Army: Its Employment During Times of Peace and the Necessity for Its Increase," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, 18 (1896): 8-9; George Potter, "The American Labour Riots," *Industrial Review* (London), Aug. 4, 1877, p. 9.

³⁹ Asa Briggs, review of Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, in *Labor History*, 6 (1965): 84-91; R. H. Tawney, *Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (London, 1912), 177.

elite classes. Street gangs, about which little is yet known except the suggestion that some had as members artisans (not just casual or day laborers) and were often organized along ethnic lines, grew more important in the coastal and river towns after 1830. New York City, among other towns, had its Fly Boys, Chichesters, Plug Uglies, Buckaroos, and Slaughterhouse Gangs, and their violence against recent immigrants provoked disorderly counterthrusts. Political disorders on election days, moreover, were apparently well-organized and may have involved such gangs. The recurrence of such disorders through the pre-Civil War decades (including the nativist outbursts in nearly all major Northern and Southern cities in the 1850s) may have meant that local political parties, in their infancy, served as the American substitute for the King and the Church, a third party "protecting" artisans and even day laborers from real and imagined adversaries and winning clanlike loyalty. Although the testimony of Mike Walsh, a Tammany leader and later the publisher of the *Police Gazette*, must be read with care, he suggested an interesting relationship between the decline of premodern lower-class entertainments and the rise of modern political "machines." Election politics, Walsh noted in the *Subterranean*, saw "the Goth-and-Vandal-like eruption of the shirtless and unwashed democracy" which Walsh connected to the disappearance of popular lower-class entertainments. A "gloomy, churlish, money-worshipping . . . spirit" had "swept nearly all the poetry out of the poor man's sphere," said the editor-politician. "Ballad-singing, street dancing, tumbling, public games, all are either prohibited or discountenanced, so that Fourth of July and election sports alone remain." Workers flocked to political clubs and labored hard for a party to "get a taste of the equality which they hear so much preached, but never, save there, see even partially practiced." If Walsh's insight has merit, political parties quite possibly competed with early craft unions in adapting older forms of popular entertainment and ritual to changing needs. That process, once started, had a life beyond the early years of the premodern political party and continued as the composition of the working-class changed. The ethnic political "boss" created a new dependence that exploited well-understood class feelings and resentments but blunted class consciousness. The relationship, however, was not simple, and in the 1880s the socialist Joseph P. McDonnell exploited that same relationship to convince local New Jersey politicians to respond to pressures from predominantly immigrant workers and thereby to pioneer in the passage of humane social legislation, a process that began well before the stirring of the middle- and upper-class conscience in Progressive America.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Mike Walsh, *Subterranean* (N.Y., n.d.), quoted in M. R. Werner, *Tammany Hall* (New York, 1932), 49-51 (courtesy of Paul Weinbaum). On gangs, nativism, politics, and antebellum street violence, see A. F. Harlow, *Old Bowery Days* (New York, 1931), *passim*; *Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860* (New York, 1938), *passim*; and McNeill, *Labor Movement*, 344. The ways in which McDonnell used machine politics and politicians to push social reform in the 1880s

Available evidence does not yet indicate that machine-breaking of the "Luddite" variety was widespread in the United States. There are suggestive hints in reports that Ohio farm laborers burnt and destroyed farm machinery in 1878 and that twenty years later in Buffalo a crowd of Polish common day laborers and their wives rioted to break a street-paving machine, but the only clear evidence found of classic machine-breaking occurred early in the Civil War among rural blacks in the South Carolina Sea Islands, who resisted Yankee missionary and military efforts to make them plant cotton instead of corn and therefore broke up cotton gins and hid the iron work. "They do not see the use of cotton," said a Northern female school teacher, and a Yankee entrepreneur among them added that "nothing was more remote from their shallow pates than the idea of planting cotton for 'white-folks' again." (Some time later, this same man ordered a steam-run cotton gin. "This engine," he confided, "serves as a moral stimulus to keep the people at work at their hand-gins, for they want to gin all the cotton by hand, and I tell them if they don't by the middle of January I shall get it by steam.") If white workers rarely broke machines to protest their introduction, they sometimes destroyed the product of new technology. In the early 1830s Brooklyn ropemakers paraded a "hated machine" through town and then "committed to the flames" its product. Theirs was not an irrational act. They paid for the destroyed hemp, spun "a like quantity" to allow the machine's owner to "fulfill his engagement for its delivery," and advertised their product in a newspaper, boasting that its quality far surpassed machine-made rope "as is well known to any practical ropemaker and seaman." Silk weavers in the Hudson River towns of New Jersey broke looms in 1877 but only to prevent production during a strike. A more common practice saw the destruction of the product of labor or damage to factory and mining properties to punish employers and owners. Paterson silk weavers regularly left unfinished warps to spoil in looms. Crowds often stoned factories, burned mine tipples, and did other damage to industrial properties (as in the bitter Western Pennsylvania coke strikes between 1884 and 1894) but mostly to protest the hiring of new hands or violence against them by "police." Construction gangs especially in railroad work also frequently destroyed property. In 1831, between two and three hundred construction workers, mostly Irish, punished an absconding contractor by "wantonly" tearing up track they built. Similar penalties were meted out by Italian construction gangs between 1880 and 1910 and by unorganized railroad workers, mostly native-born repairmen and trainmen, between 1850 and 1880, who

are described in Gutman, "Class, Status, and the Gilded Age Radical: The Case of a New Jersey Socialist," in a work currently in press, Gutman and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Many Past: Readings in American Social History* (Englewood Cliffs, 1973), vol. 2.

tore up track, spiked switches, stole coupling links and pins, and did other damage to protest changing work rules or to collect back wages.⁴¹

“Luddism” may have been rare, but classic “European” food riots occurred in the United States, and two in New York City—the first in 1837 and the second in 1902—that involved quite different groups of workers are briefly examined to illustrate the ways in which traditional cultural forms and expectations helped shape working-class behavior. (Other evidence of similar disorders, including the Confederate food riots led by white women in Mobile, Savannah, and Richmond, await careful study.) In February 1837, thousands gathered in City Hall Park to protest against “monopolies” and rising food prices. Some months before that park had witnessed yet another demonstration against the conspiracy trial of twenty-five striking journeymen tailors. In their rhetoric the protesters identified the trial with the betrayal of the premodern “Republic.” “Aristocrats” had robbed the people of “that liberty bequeathed to them, as a sacred inheritance by their revolutionary sires” and “so mystified” the laws that “men of common understanding cannot unravel them.” “What the people thought was liberty, bore not a semblance to its name.” Resolutions compared the tailors to that “holy combination of that immortal band of

⁴¹ *Labor Standard* (N.Y.), Sept. 28, 1878; Edward S. Abdy, *Journal of a Residence and Tour in the United States from April 1833 to October 1834* (London, 1838), 1: 77–79; Gutman, “Class, Status, and Community Power”; Pennsylvania Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Fifteenth Annual Report, 1887* (Harrisburg, 1888), F1–F18 and *Nineteenth Annual Report, 1891* (Harrisburg, 1892), D1–D18; *Niles’ Weekly Register*, 40 (1831): 338–39; *New York Tribune*, May 2, 1857; *John Swinton’s Paper* (N.Y.), Feb. 24, 1884; *New York Tribune*, Oct. 21, 1893; *New York State Board of Mediation and Arbitration, Eleventh Annual Report, 1898* (New York, 1899), 139–42; Gutman, “Trouble on the Railroads in 1873–1874,” *Labor History*, 2 (1961): 215–35. The materials on the Sea Island blacks are found in Laura Towne, *Letters and Diaries of Laura S. Towne 1862–1884, Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina*, ed. Rupert S. Holland (Cambridge, Mass., 1910), 16–17, 20–21; Elizabeth Ware Pearson, ed., *Letters from Port Royal, 1862–1868* (Boston, 1906), 221–22, 236–37, 250; Willie Lee Rose, *Port Royal Experiment: Rehearsal for Reconstruction* (Indianapolis, 1964), 141; Jane and William Pease, *Black Utopias* (Madison, 1963), 134, 143, 149–50. Although American blacks are not included in these pages, the behavior and thought of rural and urban blacks fits the larger patterns suggested here in a special way. Their experiences first as slaves and then as dependent laborers in the rural South as well as in the industrial North (where most manufacturing industries remained closed to them until the First World War) distinguished most lower-class blacks from all immigrant and native white workers. In still little-understood but profoundly important ways enslavement followed by racial exclusion sustained among blacks a culture that despite change remained preindustrial for more than merely two or three generations. Despite this significant difference, similarities in behavior between blacks and native and immigrant white workers can be noticed. Visitors to the Richmond tobacco factories in the 1850s found industrial slaves there who practiced “Blue Monday.” Joseph C. Roberts, *The Story of Tobacco in America* (New York, 1949), 86–91. Blacks themselves made comparisons to whites who shared difficult premodern rural experiences: “I have never heard any songs like those [slave songs] anywhere since I left slavery, except when in Ireland. . . . It was during the famine of 1845–1846.” Frederick Douglass said that. Quoted in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Men of Our Times* (Hartford, 1868), 395. Contemporary observers who noticed black work habits after emancipation rarely told of “laziness” but nearly always noticed irregularity, and in 1909 W. E. B. Du Bois quoted approvingly a writer who suggested that “what is termed Negro ‘laziness’ may be a means of making modern workingmen demand more rational rest and enjoyment rather than permitting themselves to be made machines.” W. E. B. Du Bois, *Negro-American Family* (Atlanta, 1909), 42. See also Du Bois’s discussion of the same matter in *World’s Week*, 103 (1926), quoted in Asa H. Gordon, *Sketches of Negro Life and History in South Carolina* (Industrial College, Ga., 1929), 10–11.

Mechanics who . . . did throw into Boston Harbor the Tea." In 1837 a crowd dumped flour, not tea, and in its behavior revealed a commonplace form of premodern protest, a complaint against what Thompson calls "the extortionate mechanisms of an unregulated market economy." The crowd in City Hall Park heard protests about the high price of rent, food, and especially flour and denunciations of "engrossers," and the New York *Herald* called the gathering "a flour meeting—a fuel meeting—a rent meeting—a food meeting—a bread meeting—every kind of a meeting except a political meeting." But a New York newspaper had printed advice from Portland, Maine, that "speculating" flour dealers be punished with "some mark of public infamy," and after the meeting adjourned a crowd (estimates range from two hundred to several thousand) paraded to Eli Hart's wholesale flour depot. A speaker advised it to "go to the flour stores and offer a fair price, and if refused take the flour." Crowd members dumped two hundred barrels of flour and one thousand bushels of wheat in the streets, broke windows, did other minor damage, and chased the city's mayor with stones and "balls of flour." At first, little looting occurred, and when wagons finally appeared to carry home sacks of flour "a tall athletic fellow in a carman's frock" shouted: "No plunder, no plunder; destroy as much as you please. Teach these monopolists that we know our rights and will have them, but d-n it don't rob them." The crowd moved on to other flour wholesalers and continued its work. It smashed the windows of B. S. Herrick and Son, dumped more flour, and finally stopped when "a person of respectable appearance" came from inside the building to promise that what remained untouched would be distributed gratis the next day to the "poor." The crowd cheered and melted away. More than twenty-eight persons were arrested (among them "mere boys," a few "black and ignorant laborers," a woman, and as yet unidentified white men), but the *Herald* found "mere humbug . . . the unholy cry of 'It's the foreigners who have done all this mischief.'" The daily press, including the *Herald*, denounced the crowd as "the very canaille of the city," but the *Herald* also pleaded for the reimposition of the assize of bread. "Let the Mayor have the regulation of it," said the *Herald*. "Let the public authorities regulate the price of such an essential of life." (In 1857, incidentally, New Yorkers again filled the City Hall Park to again demand the restoration of the assize of bread and to ask for public works.)⁴²

More than half a century later different New York City workers re-

⁴² John R. Commons and others, eds., *Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland, 1910), 5: 314–22; New York *Herald*, Feb. 13–16, 1837; New York *Evening Post*, Feb. 14, 16, 1837; New York *Sun*, n.d., quoted in Thomas Brothers, *United States of America as They Are* (London, 1840), 374–76; E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, 50 (1971): 76–136 but especially 134. On the Confederate bread riots, see Paul Angle and Earl S. Miers, eds., *Tragic Years, 1860–1865* (New York, 1960), 1: 526–28; William J. Kimball, "The Bread Riot in Richmond," *Civil War History*, 7 (1961): 149–54. Early American patterns of price regulation involving foodstuffs and the disputes over them are detailed splendidly in Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946), *passim*, and Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City* (Philadelphia, 1968), ch. 1.

enacted the 1837 food "riot." Unlike the rioters of 1837 in origins and rhetoric, the later rioters nevertheless displayed strikingly similar behavior. In 1902, and a few years before Upton Sinclair published *The Jungle*, orthodox New York City Jews, mostly women and led by a woman butcher, protested the rising price of kosher meat and the betrayal of a promised boycott of the Meat Trust by retail butchers. The complaint started on the Lower East Side and then spontaneously spread among Jews further uptown and even among Jews in Brooklyn, Newark, and Boston. The Lower East Side Jews demanded lower prices. Some called for a rabbi to fix for the entire New York Jewish community the price of meat, as in the East European *shtetl*. Others formed a cooperative retail outlet. But it is their behavior that reveals the most. The nation's financial metropolis saw angry immigrant women engage in seemingly archaic traditional protest. Outsiders could not understand its internal logic and order. These women did not loot. Like the 1837 demonstrators, they punished. Custom and tradition that reached far back in historical time gave a coherence to their rage. The disorders started on a Wednesday, stopped on Friday at sundown, and resumed the following evening. The women battered butcher shops but did not steal meat. Some carried pieces of meat "aloft on pointed sticks . . . like flags." Most poured kerosene on it in the streets or in other ways spoiled it. "Eat no meat while the Trust is taking meat from the bones of your women and children," said a Yiddish circular apparently decorated with a skull and crossbones. The New York police and the New York *Times* came down quite hard on these Jewish women. A "dangerous class . . . very ignorant," said the *Times*, explaining:

They mostly speak a foreign language. They do not understand the duties or the rights of Americans. They have no inbred or acquired respect for law and order as the basis of the life of the society into which they have come. . . . The instant they take the law into their own hands . . . they should be handled in a way that they can understand and cannot forget. . . . Let the blows fall instantly and effectively.

Two days later, the *Times* reflected on a British Royal Commission then examining the effects of Jewish immigration on British society. "Stepney," the *Times* of New York noted, also was "becoming a foreign town. . . . Perhaps when the Royal Commission reports on what England should do about its un-English Londoners we shall learn what to do about these not yet Americanized New Yorkers whose meat riots were stranger than any nightmare." The *Times* found comfort in what it felt to be a "fact." Immigrant Jews had sparked the 1902 troubles. "The attempted incendiarism," it believed, "could not happen in an American crowd at all." The New York *Times* had done more than idealize a world that had never been lost in suggesting that premodern Americans had been little more than ordered and expectant entrepreneurs. In comparing its response in 1902

to that of the New York *Herald* in 1837, we measure some of the distance that proper Americans had travelled from their own, premodern American roots.⁴³

Even though American society itself underwent radical structural changes between 1815 and the First World War, the shifting composition of its wage-earning population meant that traditional customs, rituals, and beliefs repeatedly helped shape the behavior of its diverse working-class groups. The street battle in 1843 that followed Irish efforts to prevent New York City authorities from stopping pigs from running loose in the streets is but one example of the force of old styles of behavior. Both the form and the content of much expressive working-class behavior, including labor disputes, often revealed the powerful role of secular and religious rituals. In 1857 the New York City unemployed kidnapped a musical band to give legitimacy to its parade for public works. After the Civil War, a Fall River cotton manufacturer boasted that the arrival of fresh Lancashire operatives meant the coming of “a lot of greenhorns here,” but an overseer advised him, “Yes, but you’ll find they have brought their horns with them.” A few years later, the Pittsburgh courts prevented three women married to coal miners from “tin-horning” nonstrikers. The women, however, purchased mouthorgans. (“Tin-horning,” of course, was not merely an imported institution. In Franklin, Virginia, in 1867, for example, a Northern white clergyman who started a school for former slave children had two nighttime “tin horn serenade[s]” from hostile whites.) Recurrent street demonstrations in Paterson accompanying frequent strikes and lockouts nearly always involved horns, whistles, and even Irish “banshee” calls. These had a deep symbolic meaning, and, rooted in a shared culture, they sustained disputes. A Paterson manufacturer said of nonstrikers: “They cannot go anywhere without being molested or insulted, and no matter what they do they are met and blackguarded and taunted in a way that no one can stand . . . which is a great deal worse than actual assaults.” Another manufacturer agreed:

All the police in the world could not reach the annoyances that the weavers have at home and on the street that are not offenses—taunts and flings, insults and remarks. A weaver would rather have his head punched in than be called a “knobstick,” and this is the class of injury they hate worst, and that keeps them out more than direct assault.

But the manufacturers could not convince the town’s mayor (himself a British immigrant and an artisan who had become a small manufacturer) to ban street demonstrations. The manufacturers even financed their own

⁴³ New York *Herald*, Apr. 21, 23, May 15–30, 1902; New York *Tribune*, Apr. 19, 21, May 11, 16–27, June 15, 1902; New York *World*, May 16–19, 1902; New York *Commercial Advertiser*, May 15, 17, 24, 26, 1902; New York *Times*, May 23–26, June 7, 1902; New York *Journal*, May 15, 1902; *People* (N.Y.), May 14, 15, 20, 23, 26, 1902. Food riots occurred again among immigrant New York City Jews in the spring of 1917.

private militia to manage further disorders, but the street demonstrations continued with varying effectiveness until 1901 when a court injunction essentially defined the streets as private space by banning talking and singing banshee (or death) wails in them during industrial disputes. In part, the frequent recourse to the courts and to the state militia after the Civil War during industrial disputes was the consequence of working-class rituals that helped sustain long and protracted conflicts.⁴⁴

Symbolic secular and, especially, religious rituals and beliefs differed among Catholic and Jewish workers fresh to industrial America between 1894 and the First World War, but their function remained the same. Striking Jewish vestmakers finished a formal complaint by quoting the Law of Moses to prove that “our bosses who rob us and don’t pay us regularly commit a sin and that the cause of our union is a just one.” (“What do we come to America for?” these same men asked. “To bathe in tears and to see our wives and children rot in poverty?”) An old Jewish ritual oath helped spark the shirtwaist strike of women workers in 1909 that laid the basis for the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union. A strike vote resulted in the plea, “Do you mean faith? Will you take the old Jewish oath?” The audience responded in Yiddish: “If I turn traitor to the cause, I now pledge, may this hand wither and drop off at the wrist from the arm I now raise.” (Incidentally, during this same strike a magistrate who advised troublesome Jewish women that “you are on strike against God” provoked Bernard Shaw’s classic quip, “Delightful, medieval America always in the most intimate personal confidence of the Almighty.”) Immigrant Catholic workers shared similar experiences with these immigrant Jews. A reporter noticed in 1910 at a meeting of striking Slavic steel workers in Hammond, Indiana: “The lights of the hall were extinguished. A candle stuck into a bottle was placed on a platform. One by one the men came and kissed the ivory image on the cross, kneeling before it. They swore not to scab.” Not all rituals were that pacific. That same year, Slavic miners in Avelia, Pennsylvania, a tiny patch on the West Virginia border, crucified George Rabish, a mine boss and an alleged labor spy. An amazed journalist felt their behavior “in the twentieth century . . . almost beyond belief”:

Rabish was dragged from his bed and driven out into the street amid the jeers of the merciless throng. . . . Several men set about fashioning a huge cross out of mine timbers. They even pressed a crown of thorns upon his temples. After they had nailed him to the cross, the final blasphemy was to dance and sing about the still living man.

⁴⁴ Billington, *Protestant Crusade*, 196; New York *Herald*, Nov. 12, 1857; Fall River *Weekly News*, Jan. 21, 1875; L. H., Pittsburgh, to the editor, *John Swinton’s Paper* (New York), Sept. 28, 1884; A. B. Corliss, Franklin, Va., to the editor, *American Missionary*, 11 (1867): 27–28; Paterson *Press*, Aug. 2, 1877; Paterson *Guardian*, Aug. 2, 1877; Gutman, “Class, Status, and Community Power”; 283–87; Gutman, “Social Structure and Working-Class Life and Behavior in an Industrial City, Paterson, New Jersey, 1830–1905,” unpublished manuscript.



Fig. 9. Striker argues with a strikebreaker in New York City. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine. Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.

That event was certainly unusual, but it was commonplace for time-honored religious symbols as well as American flags to be carried in the frequent parades of American workers. Western Pennsylvania Slavic and Italian coal miners in a bitter strike just east of Pittsburgh (eighteen of twenty thousand miners quit work for seventeen months when denied the right to join the United Mine Workers of America) in 1910 and 1911 carried such symbols. "These rural marches," said Paul Kellogg, "were in a way reminiscent of the old time agrarian uprisings which have marked English history." But theirs was the behavior of peasant and village Slavs and Italians fresh to modern industrial America, and it was just such tenacious peasant-worker protests that caused the head of the Pennsylvania State Police to say that he modeled his force on the Royal Irish Constabulary, not, he insisted, "as an anti-labor measure" but because "conditions in Pennsylvania resembled those in strife-torn Ireland." Peasant parades and rituals, religious oaths and food riots, and much else in the culture and behavior of early twentieth-century immigrant American factory workers were cultural anachronisms to this man and to others, including Theodore Roosevelt, William Jennings Bryan, Elbert Gary, and even Samuel Gompers, but participants found them natural and effective forms of self-assertion and self-protection.⁴⁵

THE PERSPECTIVE emphasized in these pages tells about more than the behavior of diverse groups of American working men and women. It also suggests how larger, well-studied aspects of American society have been affected by a historical process that has "industrialized" different peoples over protracted periods of time. Fernand Braudel reminds us that "victorious events come about as the result of many possibilities," and that "for one possibility which actually is realized, innumerable others have drowned." Usually these others leave "little trace for the historian." "And yet," Braudel adds, "it is necessary to give them their place because the losing movements are forces which have at every moment affected the final outcome." Contact and conflict between diverse preindustrial cultures and a changing and increasingly bureaucratized industrial society also affected the larger society in ways that await systematic examination. Contemporaries realized this fact. Concerned in 1886 about the South's "dead"—that is, unproductive—population, the Richmond *Whig* felt the "true remedy" to be "educating the industrial morale of the people." The

⁴⁵ Rischin, *Promised City*, 144–94; Levine, *Women's Garment Workers*, 154; Graham Adams, *Age of Industrial Violence, 1910–1915* (New York, 1966), 105–16, 188–94; Chicago *Socialist*, Jan. 31, 1910, quoted in Brody, *Steelworkers in America*, 125–46; Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, Apr. 24, 1910 (courtesy of Robert D. Greenberg); Paul Kellogg and Shelby M. Harrison, "The Westmoreland Strike," *Survey*, 25 (1910), 345–66; *Report on the Miners' Strike in the Bituminous Coal Fields in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, in 1910–1911* (Washington, 1912), *passim*. A recent work which convincingly disputes earlier views that Slavic coal miners were difficult to organize into trade unions is Victor H. Greene, *Slavic Community on Strike* (Notre Dame, 1968).

Whig emphasized socializing institutions primarily outside of the working class itself. "In the work of inculcating industrial ideas and impulses," said the *Whig*, "all proper agencies should be enlisted—family discipline, public school education, pulpit instruction, business standards and requirements, and the power and influence of the workingmen's associations." What the *Whig* worried over in 1886 concerned other Americans before and after that time. And the resultant tension shaped society in important ways. Some are briefly suggested here. In a *New York Times* symposium ("Is America by Nature a Violent Society?") soon after the murder of Martin Luther King, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz warned: "Vague references to the frontier tradition, to the unsettledness of American life, to our exploitative attitude toward nature or to our 'youthfulness' as a nation, provide us with prefabricated 'explanations' for events we, in fact, not only do not understand, but do not want to understand." More needs to be said than that Americans are "the spiritual descendants of Billy the Kid, John Brown, and Bonnie and Clyde." It has been suggested here that certain recurrent disorders and conflicts relate directly to the process that has continually "adjusted" men and women to regular work habits and to the discipline of factory labor. The British economic historian Sidney Pollard reminds us that this "task, different in kind" is "at once more subtle and more violent from that of maintaining discipline among a proletarian population of long standing."⁴⁶

The same process has even greater implications for the larger national American culture. Hannah Arendt has brilliantly suggested that the continual absorption of distinctive native and foreign "alien" peoples has meant that "each time the law had to be confirmed anew against the lawlessness inherent in all uprooted people," and that the severity of that process helps explain to her why the United States has "never been a nation-state."⁴⁷ The same process also affected the shaping and reshaping of American police and domestic military institutions. We need only realize that the burning of a Boston convent in 1834 by a crowd of Charlestown truckmen and New Hampshire Scotch-Irish brickmakers caused the first revision of the Massachusetts Riot Act since Shays' Rebellion, and that three years later interference by native firemen in a Sunday Irish funeral procession led to a two-hour riot involving upwards of fifteen thousand persons (more than a sixth of Boston's population), brought militia to that city for the first time, and caused the first of many reorganizations of the Boston police force.⁴⁸ The regular contact between alien work

⁴⁶ Richmond *Whig*, June 15, 1886 (courtesy of Leon Fink); Clifford Geertz, "We Can Claim No Special Gift for Violence," *New York Times Magazine*, Apr. 28, 1968, pp. 24-25; Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution," 254-71.

⁴⁷ Hannah Arendt, "Lawlessness Is Inherent in the Uprooted," *New York Times Magazine*, Apr. 28, 1968, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁸ Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants* (New York, 1968), 186-91; Roger Lane, *Policing the City: Boston* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), chs. 1-2.

cultures and a larger industrializing or industrial society had other consequences. It often worried industrialists, causing C. E. Perkins, the president of the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad to confide in a friend in the late nineteenth century, "If I were able, I would found a school for the study of political economy in order to harden men's hearts." It affected the popular culture. A guidebook for immigrant Jews in the 1890s advised how to make it in the New World: "Hold fast, this is most necessary in America. Forget your past, your customs, and your ideals. . . . A bit of advice to you: do not take a moment's rest. Run, do, work, and keep your own good in mind."⁴⁹ Cultures and customs, however, are not that easily discarded. So it may be that America's extraordinary techno-

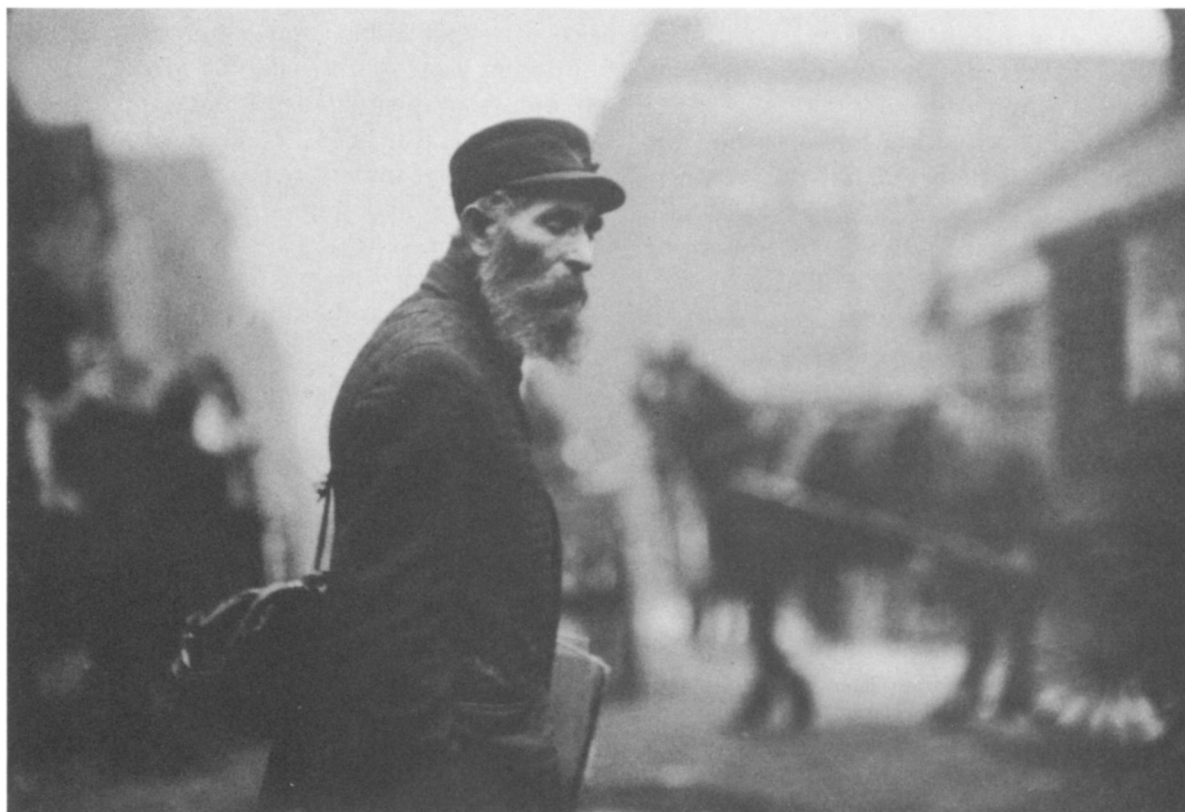


Fig. 10. Jewish peddler in Chicago, ca. 1910. Photograph by Lewis W. Hine.
Courtesy George Eastman House Collection.

logical supremacy—its talent before the Second World War for developing labor-saving machinery and simplifying complex mechanical processes—depended less on "Yankee know-how" than on the continued infusion of prefactory peoples into an increasingly industrialized society.⁵⁰ The same

⁴⁹ Sidney Fine, *Laissez Faire and the General Welfare State* (Ann Arbor, 1956), 54, 56, 103; Rischin, *Promised City*, 75.

⁵⁰ John Higham, in C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Comparative Approaches to American History* (New York, 1968), 101; H. J. Habakkuk, *American and British Technology in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1967), *passim*.

process, moreover, may also explain why movements to legislate morality and to alter habits have lasted much longer in the United States than in most other industrial countries, extending from the temperance crusades of the 1820s and the 1830s to the violent opposition among Germans to such rules in the 1850s and the 1860s and finally to formal prohibition earlier in this century.⁵¹ Important relationships also exist between this process and the elite and popular nativist and racist social movements that have ebbed and flowed regularly from the 1840s until our own time, as well as between this process and elite political "reform" movements between 1850 and the First World War.⁵²

The sweeping social process had yet another important consequence: it

⁵¹ Although the literature on American temperance and prohibition movements is vast, nothing yet written about them approaches in clarity of analysis and use of evidence Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England, 1815-1872* (Pittsburgh, 1971). Much information on the relationship between temperance and late nineteenth-century American factory labor is found in the little-used *U.S. Commissioner of Labor, Twelfth Annual Report, 1897* (Washington, 1897), a detailed analysis of the replies about working-class drinking habits from the owners of more than seven thousand establishments which together employed about 1,750,000 workers. For the later period see (but with great care), Herman Feldman, *Prohibition: Its Economic and Industrial Aspects* (New York, 1927), especially pages 200-12. Feldman, who surveyed representative manufacturing firms about the impact of Prohibition on work patterns, learned that "many plants in pre-Prohibition days had the five-day week long before Henry Ford ever thought of it, because so many workers were absent after pay-day." Employers used "considerable ingenuity" to cut down Monday absenteeism. Some had shifted pay-day from Saturday to a mid-week work day, and others paid wages less frequently. Feldman received replies from 287 firms. Two-thirds said improved attendance at work followed Prohibition. A New Hampshire shoe manufacturer no longer had to "reckon with the after-effects of celebrations, holidays, and weekends" as he did "years ago." And a St. Louis metal manufacturer told that the Saturday paycheck no longer meant "the usual 'Blue Monday.'" "Now," he explained, "we have changed to Friday, and as we are paying by the check system this enables the men to deposit their checks in one of the local banks that stay open on Friday evenings. We have no Saturday absences." Not all sounded so optimistic. "The stuff available to labor," said an employer of Delaware River tugboat and barge workers, "and there is plenty of it, is so rotten that it takes the drinking man two to three days to get over his spree." And a Connecticut manufacturer feared that new technology threatened regular attendance at work more than traditional or spurious spirits. "Cheap automobiles," he said, "make more employees tardy than does liquor."

⁵² Detailed local studies are badly needed here, and these should focus on the clear continuities between antebellum municipal "reform" movements and the issues that dominated much of local politics in the Gilded Age. Such studies will reveal neglected elements of continuity in political issues, patterns of elite reform, and patterns of political centralization that started before the Civil War and continued into the Progressive Era. Few saw this more clearly than President Andrew D. White of Cornell University who reminded delegates to the First Lake Mohonk Conference on the Negro Question in 1890 that "in 1847" New York had "sank back toward mobocracy." "We elected judges on small salaries for short terms," said White; "we did the same thing with the governors. We have swung backward or forward . . . out of that. We now elect men for longer terms. In many ways, we have returned to more conservative principles." Isabel Barrows, ed., *First Lake Mohonk Conference on the Negro Question* (Boston, 1890), 120. See also Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 55 (1964): 157-69. The pattern Hays uncovered for Progressive Pittsburgh was not new because its roots rested in elite fears of immigrant and working-class domination of municipal governments (and especially the influence of those groups on local fiscal and educational policies), fears that revealed themselves powerfully before the Civil War and retained much importance during the Gilded Age. The focus on municipal corruption has hidden such important social and political processes from historians. See the original and convincing study by Douglas V. Shaw, "The Making of an Immigrant City: Ethnic and Cultural Conflict in Jersey City, New Jersey, 1850-1877" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester, 1972), that demonstrates conclusively (for that city at least) that antebellum elite nativism did not end with the Civil War but continued into the postwar decades.

reinforced the biases that otherwise distort the ways in which elite observers perceive the world below them. When in 1902 the *New York Times* cast scorn upon and urged that force be used against the Jewish women food rioters, it conformed to a fairly settled elite tradition. Immigrant groups and the working population had changed in composition over time, but the rhetoric of influential nineteenth- and early twentieth-century elite observers remained constant. Disorders among the Jersey City Irish seeking wages due them from the Erie Railroad in 1859 led the *Jersey City American Standard* to call them “imported beggars” and “animals”, “a mongrel mass of ignorance and crime and superstition, as utterly unfit for its duties, as they are for the common courtesies and decencies of civilized life.” (According to their historian Earl Niehaus, the antebellum New Orleans Irish fared so badly in the “public” view that many non-Irish criminals, Germans and even blacks among them, assumed Irish names.) Although the Civil War ended slavery, it did not abolish these distorted perceptions and fears of new American workers. In 1869 *Scientific American* welcomed the “ruder” laborers of Europe but urged them to “assimilate” quickly or face “a quiet but sure extermination.” Those who retained their alien ways, it insisted, “will share the fate of the native Indian.” Elite nativism neither died out during the Civil War nor awaited a rebirth under the auspices of the American Protective Association and the Immigration Restriction League. In the mid-1870s, for example, the *Chicago Tribune* called striking immigrant brickmakers men but “not reasoning creatures,” and the *Chicago Post-Mail* described that city’s Bohemian residents as “depraved beasts, harpies, decayed physically and spiritually, mentally and morally, thievish and licentious.” The *Democratic Chicago Times* cast an even wider net in complaining that the country had become “the cess-pool of Europe under the pretense that it is the asylum of the poor.” Most Chicago inhabitants in the Gilded Age were foreign-born or the children of the foreign-born, and most English-language Chicago newspapers scorned them. The *Chicago Times* told readers that Slavic Chicagoans were descended from “the Scythians,” “eaters of raw animal food, fond of drinking the blood of their enemies whom they slew in battle, and [men] who preserved as trophies the scalps and skins of enemies whom they overthrew.” “The old taste for the blood of an enemy has never been obliterated,” said this proper Chicago newspaper. And the Slavs had now “invaded the peaceful republic.” In words echoed differently in the *New York Times* fifteen years later, the *Chicago Times* advised: “Let us whip these slavic wolves back to the European dens from which they issue, or in some way exterminate them.” Here, as in the *Jersey City American Standard* (1859) and the *New York Times* (1902), much more was involved than mere ethnic distaste or “nativism.” In quite a different connection and in a relatively homogeneous country, the Italian Antonio Gramsci concluded of such evidence that “for a social

elite the features of subordinate groups always display something barbaric and pathological." The changing composition of the American working class may make so severe a dictum more pertinent to the United States than to Italy. Class and ethnic fears and biases combined together to worry elite observers about the diverse worlds below them and to distort gravely their perceptions of these worlds. Few revealed these perceptual difficulties and genuine fears more clearly than John L. Hart in 1879:

About one half of our poor can neither read nor write, have never been in any school, and know little, positively nothing, of the doctrines of the Christian religion, or of moral duties, or of any higher pleasures than beer-drinking and spirit-drinking, and the grossest sensual indulgence. . . . They have unclear, indefinable ideas of all around them; they eat, drink, breed, work, and die; and while they pass through their brute-like existence here, the rich and more intelligent classes are obliged to guard them with police and standing armies, and to cover the land with prisons, cages, and all kinds of receptacles for the perpetrators of crime.

Hart was not an uneducated "nativist." He had been professor of rhetoric, the English language, and literature at the College of New Jersey and also the principal of the New Jersey State Normal School. These words appeared in his book entitled *In the School-Room* (1879) where he argued that "schoolhouses are cheaper than jails" and that "teachers and books are better security than handcuffs and policemen." We have returned to Lesson One.⁵³

THESE PAGES have fractured historical time, ranging forward and backward, to make comparisons for several reasons. One has been to suggest how much remains to be learned about the transition of native and foreign-born American men and women to industrial society, and how that transition affected such persons and the society into which they entered. "Much of what gets into American literature," Ralph Ellison has shrewdly observed, "gets there because so much is left out." That has also been the case in the writing of American working-class history, and the framework and methods suggested here merely hint at what will be known about American workers and American society when the many transitions are

⁵³ Jersey City *American Standard*, Sept. 20, 1859 (courtesy of Douglas V. Shaw); Earl Niehaus, *Irish in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, 1965), 186; *Scientific American*, June 19, 1869, pp. 393-94; *Chicago Tribune*, May 11, 1876; *Chicago Post and Mail*, n.d., reprinted in *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 1876; *Chicago Times*, Apr. 25, 1874; *Chicago Times*, May 6, 1886 (courtesy of Steven Hahn); Antonio Gramsci, quoted in Charles Tilly, "Collective Violence in European Perspective," in Hugh D. Graham and Ted R. Gurr, eds., *Violence in America* (New York, 1969), 12; John L. Hart, *In The School-Room* (Philadelphia, 1879), 252-57 (courtesy of Barbara Berman). See also John Kober, *Capone, The Life and World of Al Capone* (New York, 1972), 344, for an extraordinary description of Alcatraz prison routine in the 1930s: "Midmorning. Bell. Recess. Bell. Work. 11:30. Bell. Prisoners Counted. Bell. Noon. Bell. Lunch. 1 P.M. Bell. Work. Midafternoon. Bell. Recess. Work. 4:30. Bell. Prisoners Counted. Bell. 6:30. Bell. Lockup. 9:30. Bell. Lights Out."

studied in detail. Such studies, however, need to focus on the particularities of both the group involved and the society into which they enter. Transitions differ and depend upon the interaction between the two at specific historical moments. But at all times there is a resultant tension. Thompson writes:

There has never been any single type of "the transition." The stress of the transition falls upon the whole culture: resistance to change and assent to change arise from the whole culture. And this culture includes the systems of power, property-relations, religious institutions, etc., inattention to which merely flattens phenomena and trivializes analysis.

Enough has been savored in these pages to suggest the particular importance of these transitions in American social history. And their recurrence in different periods of time indicates why there has been so much discontinuity in American labor and social history. The changing composition of the working population, the continued entry into the United States of nonindustrial people with distinctive cultures, and the changing structure of American society have combined together to produce common modes of thought and patterns of behavior. But these have been experiences disconnected in time and shared by quite distinctive first-generation native and immigrant industrial Americans. It was not possible for the grandchildren of the Lowell mill girls to understand that their Massachusetts literary ancestors shared a great deal with their contemporaries, the peasant Slavs in the Pennsylvania steel mills and coal fields. And the grandchildren of New York City Jewish garment workers see little connection between black ghetto unrest in the 1960s and the Kosher meat riots seventy years ago. A half century has passed since Robert Park and Herbert Miller published W. I. Thomas's *Old World Traits Transplanted*, a study which worried that the function of Americanization was the "destruction of memories."⁵⁴

Not all fled such a past. Born of Croatian parents in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, in 1912 (his father and brother later killed in industrial accidents), Gabro Karabin published a prize-winning short story in *Scribner's Magazine* (1947) that reflected on the experiences replayed in different ways by diverse Americans and near-Americans:

Around Pittsburgh, a Croat is commonplace and at no time distinctive. As people think of us, we are cultureless, creedless, and colorless in life, though in reality we possess a positive and almost excessive amount of those qualities. Among ourselves, it is known that we keep our culture to ourselves because of the heterogeneous and unwholesome grain of that about us. . . . We are, in the light of general impression, just another type of laboring foreigner . . . fit only as industrial fuel.

⁵⁴ Ralph Ellison and James Alan McPherson, "Indivisible Man," *Atlantic*, 226 (1970): 57; Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 80; Park and Miller, *Old World Traits Revisited*, 281. I am indebted to Leon Stein, the editor of *Justice*, for calling to my attention the fact that W. I. Thomas, whose great study of the Polish immigrant leaves us all in his debt, was the author of *Old World Traits Revisited*.

The native-born American poet William Carlos Williams made a similar point. He lived near the city of Paterson and grasped its tragic but rich and deeply human interior textures far more incisively than temporary visitors such as Alexander Hamilton and William D. Haywood and illustrious native sons such as William Graham Sumner and Nicholas Murray Butler. The poet celebrated what gave life to a city in which men, women, and children made iron bars and locomotives and cotton and silk cloth:

It's the anarchy of poverty
 delights me, the old
 yellow wooden house indented
 among the new brick tenements

Or a cast iron balcony
 with panels showing oak branches
 in full leaf. It fits
 the dress of the children

reflecting every stage and
 custom of necessity—
 chimneys, roofs, fences of
 wood and metal in an unfenced
 age and enclosing next to
 nothing at all: the old man
 in a sweater and soft black
 hat who sweeps the sidewalk—

his own ten feet of it—
 in a wind that fitfully
 turning his corner had
 overwhelmed the entire city.

Karabin and Carlos Williams interpreted life and labor differently from the Chicago *Times* editor who in the Centennial Year (1876) boasted that Americans did not enquire “when looking at a piece of lace whether the woman who wove it is a saint or a courtesan.”⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Gabro Karabin, quoted in George J. Prpic, *Croatian Immigrants in America* (New York, 1971), 331–32; William Carlos Williams, “The Poor,” in Louis Untermeyer, ed., *Modern American and Modern British Poetry* (rev. ed.; New York, 1955), 132; Chicago *Times*, May 22, 1876.

APPENDIX

TABLE 3. MALE OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AND HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, SELECTED JEWS AND ITALIANS, NEW YORK CITY, 1905

	<i>Jews</i>	<i>Italians</i>
Total Males 20 and Older	6250	4518
Total Females 20 and Older	4875	3433
<i>Male Occupational Structure</i>		
Unskilled Laborer	7.7%	39.1%
Clothing Worker	44.7%	18.0%
Skilled Worker (Nonclothing)	21.5%	29.2%
Nonlaborer	26.1%	13.7%
<i>Household Composition</i>		
Percentage of All Households with a Nuclear Kin-related Core	96.6%	94.5%
Number of Kin-related Households	3584	2945
Number of Subfamilies	159	262
Nuclear Households	48.6%	59.9%
Extended Households	11.8%	23.2%
Augmented Households	43.1%	21.1%
Percentage of Households and Subfamilies with a Husband and/or Father Present	93.2%	92.9%

Note: As in 1880 the percentages again total more than 100 per cent because a small number of households that included both lodgers and relatives are counted twice.

The data are drawn from the New York State 1905 manuscript census schedules, and I am indebted to Mark Sosower, Leslie Neustadt, and Richard Mendales for gathering this material. As with the 1880 Paterson data, they cast grave doubts on the widely held belief that working-class family disruption commonly occurred as the by-product of immigration, urbanization, and factory work. The 1905 Jews studied lived on the Lower East Side (Rutgers, Cherry, Pelham, Monroe, Water, Pike, Jefferson, Clinton, Madison, Livingston, Henry, Division, Montgomery, Delancey, Rivington, Norfolk, Suffolk, and East Third Streets, East Broadway, and Avenue B). The Italians resided on Hancock, Thompson, Mulberry, Bayard, Mott, Canal, Baxter, Elizabeth, Spring, Prince, Grand, Hester, McDougal, Sullivan, West Houston, Bleecker, Bedford, Downing, and Carmine Streets, and the Bowery. The table above deserves another brief comment. Clothing workers are listed as a separate occupational category because census job descriptions make it impossible to determine their skill levels. A large percentage of those listed as nonlaborers engaged in petty enterprise (including peddling): 10.9 per cent of all the Jewish males and 8.3 per cent of all the Italian males. On early twentieth-century immigrant households and family behavior, see Virginia Yans McLaughlin, "Patterns of Work and Family Organization Among Buffalo's Italians," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1971): 299-314, and McLaughlin, "Like the Fingers of the Hand: The Family and Community Life of First-Generation Italian-Americans in Buffalo, New York" (Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York, Buffalo, 1970).