

# Introduction

## Stollenwerck's Panorama, 1815

You may read in many languages, yet read nothing about it,  
You may read the President's Message, and read nothing about it  
there,  
Nothing in the reports from the State department or Treasury department,  
or in the daily papers or the weekly papers,  
Or in the census returns, assessors' returns, prices current, or any  
accounts of stock.

*Chants Democratic*, III, 17

In 1815, Peter Stollenwerck, a New York watchmaker, put on display in his shop a panorama of a manufacturing and commercial city by the sea, a fantasy of a city like his own Manhattan (Plate 1). It was something of a cultural event. Although panoramas (or dioramas) of historical scenes had been a familiar New York entertainment for years, Stollenwerck's was the first in America in which the figures actually moved and in which the artist tried to represent the ordinary clamor of a contemporary expanding city. In such urban busyness, another artisan, Walt Whitman, would later find the poetry of the self and the democratic mass. Stollenwerck, a craftsman working during the twilight of the American Enlightenment, was more literal; like the first photographers (whom the dioramists anticipated), he was interested in exactness, in reproducing city life as perfectly as possible, omitting only the most intimate of scenes. Here, lured to the back of Stollenwerck's shop, patrons could see themselves as they could not in the window reflections at street level, as part of a comprehensible order, of a rational (if not necessarily divine) design, coming and going in harmonious balance, all part of the pleasing spectacle.<sup>1</sup>

1. *Longworth's American Almanac for 1816* (New York, 1816). On panoramas in England and the United States, see Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge,

Obviously, Stollenwerck had commercial motives when he built his model; if the departing customers paused to inspect the master's watches and clocks, so much the better. But Stollenwerck was also a dedicated craftsman proud of his artistry and his trade, a pride that showed in his decision to make the city's artisans the featured performers in his panorama. Instead of the usual diorama fare—Washington crossing the Delaware, Vesuvius in flames—Stollenwerck gave his public skilled men, at work in the different mechanical arts. We are left only a glimpse of one of these vignettes, a small group erecting an elaborate building; elsewhere, shoemakers worked their awls, tailors flashed their needles, shipbuilders raised Lilliputian masts. Throughout, Stollenwerck depicted material progress achieved within an artisan system of masters, journeymen, and apprentice craftsmen—all dressed in work clothes, all at their labor, enlarging their city and its goods, carving civilization out of what was still semiwilderness, imposing their own rational design on nature's fruits. If Stollenwerck celebrated anything in his model, he celebrated these men—his fellows—and their work. He may have understood only dimly that even as he cranked up his ingenious contraption, the system of labor and the way of life he had so carefully copied and idealized were disintegrating.

The decline of Stollenwerck's universe, and of the frame of mind that inspired his panorama, was part of a series of epochal historical transformations, what Karl Polanyi collectively called the great transformation and others describe as the emergence of modern bourgeois society and the working class.<sup>2</sup> For more than a millennium, urban crafts had been organized along roughly similar lines, successively adapted to different modes of production—geared to limited markets, based on the skilled use of hand tools, passed through generations of masters and apprentices. The artisan system persisted in early commercial capitalist Britain and Europe, instituted and formalized in the great urban guilds, and containing what Marx cogently described as an all-important duality in the social relations of the workshop:

The master does indeed own the conditions of production—tools, materials, etc. (although the tools may be owned by the journeyman too)—and he owns the product. To that extent he is a *capitalist*. But it is not as capitalist that he is *master*. He is an artisan in the first instance and is supposed to be a master of his craft. Within the process of production he appears as an artisan, like his journeymen, and it is he who initiates his apprentices into the mysteries of the craft. He has precisely the same relationship to his apprentices as a professor to his

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Mass., 1978), 128–210. Altick, on the basis of extensive research, concluded that the first moving diorama mounted in the United States dated from 1828; that date may now be pushed forward by more than a decade.

2. Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, 1957).

students. Hence his approach to his apprentices is not that of a capitalist but of a *master* of his craft.<sup>3</sup>

In the most advanced parts of Britain and Europe, the interposition of merchant capital and continued expansion of capitalist markets rendered this duality a contradiction: gradually, from the sixteenth century through the early nineteenth, merchant capitalists and master craftsmen restructured the social relations of production, transformed wage labor into a market commodity, and established the basis for new sets of class relations and conflicts. In America, colonial rule, slavery (and other forms of unfree labor), the weakness of mercantilist guilds, and an abundance of land created a different economic matrix; nevertheless, a similar process occurred at an accelerated rate beginning in the late eighteenth century in the New England countryside and the established northern seaboard cities. Along with the destruction of plantation slavery, this disruption of the American artisan system of labor ranks as one of the outstanding triumphs of nineteenth-century American capitalism, part of the reordering of formal social relations to fit the bourgeois ideal of labor, market, and man.<sup>4</sup>

3. Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London, 1976), I, 1029.

4. This paragraph draws upon a wide-ranging body of research by historians and economists, much of which is summarized in Stephen Marglin, "What Do Bosses Do? The Origin and Function of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 6 (1974): 33-60. On craftsmen in antiquity, see Alison Burford, *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society* (Ithaca, 1972). On English and European craftsmen and early industrial capitalism, see Maurice Agulhon, *Une Ville ouvrière au temps du socialisme utopique: Toulon de 1815 à 1851* (Paris and The Hague, 1970); Theodore S. Hamerow, *Restoration, Revolution, Reaction: Economics and Politics in Germany, 1815-1871* (Princeton, 1958); Christopher H. Johnson, *Utopian Communism in France: Cabot and the Icarians, 1839-1851* (Ithaca, 1974); Bernard H. Moss, *The Origins of the French Labor Movement: The Socialism of Skilled Workers* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1976); Iorwerth Prothero, *Artisans and Politics in Early Nineteenth-Century London: John Gast and His Times* (Folkestone, 1979); Joan Wallach Scott, *The Glassworkers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974); William H. Sewell, Jr., *Work and Revolution in France: The Language of Labor from the Old Regime to 1848* (Cambridge, 1980); E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York, 1964). Recent work on the crafts in the United States has concentrated on local studies. On the eighteenth century, see Charles Olton, *Artisans for Independence: Philadelphia Mechanics and the American Revolution* (Syracuse, 1975); Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976); Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979). On the nineteenth century, the work of Alan Dawley, Paul G. Faler, Bruce G. Laurie, Howard B. Rock, and Anthony F. C. Wallace has been of exceptional importance; for a review of these and related works, see Sean Wilentz, "Artisan Origins of the American Working Class," *International Labor and Working Class History* 18 (1981): 1-22. Still of enormous influence are two essays by David Montgomery, "The Working Classes of the Pre-Industrial American City, 1780-1830," *LH* 9 (1968): 3-22; and "The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the

Stollenwerck's fate was tied both to the decline of the artisan system and to the rise of new kinds of urban life. Every era has, of course, had its great cities, which have displayed social and economic assumptions, conflicts, and accommodations of the age in a concentrated form. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, the new towns and cities of Lancashire, the Lyonnais, and New England quickly captured the imagination of both the champions and critics of early industrial capitalism, as sites where the ambitions and exploitation of capitalist enterprise seemed most evident, congealed in the very architecture of the mills, the mansions, and the rows of workers' housing. Of no less interest—and, arguably, of greater importance—were the established capitalist metropolitan centers. Some had long been important as political capitals or commercial cities, but as the fruits of merchant capital accumulated and as the structure of national and international economic life altered, these cities experienced rapid change along unfamiliar lines. The metropolises became the headquarters of new agencies of national and international finance, communications, and commerce; usually, they became important manufacturing cities as well. With the arrival of poor migrants and venturesome entrepreneurs, they contained the greatest extremes of new forms of conspicuous luxury and squalid poverty—and every gradation of splendor and misery in between. It was in these metropolises that the idealism and anxiety of what came to be called “modern life” were most keenly felt and expressed. The most influential early labor movements took root in such centers earlier and more tenaciously than elsewhere. By 1850, London and Paris had become the model metropolises of the Old World, the capitals, to borrow Walter Benjamin's phrase, of the nineteenth century. So, by 1850, Stollenwerck's New York, although no longer a political capital, had become the metropolis of America.<sup>5</sup>

To link these two developments—to write the history of class relations and the rise of the working class in the emerging American metropolis—is a vital task if we are to comprehend the social history of the United States. Historians have long understood the need for this. More than

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Kensington Riots of 1844,” *JSH* 5 (1972): 411–46; and Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* (New York, 1976), esp. 3–78.

5. On the culture of nineteenth-century metropolitan life, see Walter Benjamin, “Paris—The Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London, 1973), 155–76; and Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, 1978). Unfortunately, no early-nineteenth-century metropolis, including New York, has received the kind of polyvalent appraisal accorded Vienna in Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1980). Recent social and urban historians have been especially slow to examine the metropolis in comparative terms, as a distinct social formation. For one approach, though, see Lynn H. Lees, “Metropolitan Types,” in *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* ed. H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (London, 1973), I, 413–28.

sixty years ago, William V. Trimble singled out Jacksonian New York as a key site for historical investigation, America's foremost center for the initiation and spread of political opinion, a rapidly growing city "where massing of population, a new capitalistic domination of industry, and the emergence of a proletariat were raising imperative questions."<sup>6</sup> Ever since, some of the foremost American historians—including Dixon Ryan Fox, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Richard Hofstadter, and Lee Benson—have based their conclusions on early national and Jacksonian America largely or wholly on their studies of class and politics in New York. None, however, have offered entirely satisfactory accounts and interpretations of New York's "great transformation"; thus, the most influential interpretations of the era's significance have been either flawed or limited in important ways.

Progressives like Trimble, Fox, and (in a later, New Deal variation) Schlesinger, Jr., thought that the heart of the matter lay in party politics—that the early industrial revolution and the advent of the Jacksonian Democrats marked the political rise of "proletarian," liberal forces, centered in New York and Massachusetts, which aimed to curb the excesses of conservative "capitalists." The Progressives' contributions—in some of the first sustained efforts to write a social history of American politics—were immense. Unfortunately, although the Progressives understood that social coalitions and conflicts were fundamental to political battles, they utilized a concept of class that now seems rudimentary. In place of an examination of changing social relations and the process of class formation—the *emergence* of new social classes in the early nineteenth century—they substituted a series of flat, fixed social categories (proletarians, capitalists), lacking in historical specificity and explanatory power. The Progressives' insistence that political parties, in New York and elsewhere, directly embodied class interests—that the Whigs were the party of business, the Democrats the party of farmers and labor, or simply "the people"—led them in turn to ignore the plain truth that in New York and in the rest of the country, both major parties were led by established and emerging elites and their professional allies, usually lawyers. By then looking at employers and workers primarily through the distorting lens of party politics, the Progressives further narrowed their understanding of popular social consciousness, virtually equating it with the ideas espoused by either the Whigs or the Democrats; simultaneously, they took the politicians' most fiery "class" rhetoric at face value, as a full and accurate expression of the *politicians'* social views and allegiances. The work of the most important labor historians of the Progressive Era and afterward did not speak directly to that of the political historians

6. William V. Trimble, "Diverging Tendencies in the New York Democracy in the Period of the *Loco Focos*," *AHR* 24 (1919): 398.

(although there were unmistakable affinities); their elucidation of “practical,” wage-conscious American unionism did, however, help forestall more expansive treatments of class relations and of working-class beliefs and behavior.<sup>7</sup>

Counter-Progressives like Hofstadter and Benson demolished what had become Progressive orthodoxy by taking another look at the liberal ideology and social composition of the Democrats and Whigs—and by finding that the two parties’ similarities overwhelmed their differences. In refuting the Progressives, however, American historians from the late 1940s through the early 1970s retained some of their elders’ assumptions, above all their fixation on party politics and their willingness to understand class as an abstract institution. By equating class with wealth and occupation, and by taking either voting behavior or the actual social philosophy of party politicians (and of a few supposedly “radical” splinter parties) as leading indicators of popular consciousness, the counter-Progressives discovered a past in which political conflict turned on deep ethnic, religious, and “status” divisions but in which class and class consciousness were either nonexistent or submerged by an American entrepreneurial consensus.<sup>8</sup>

While they cleared the way for a more realistic appraisal of party politics and political culture, the counter-Progressives left a great deal to be explained about Jacksonian New York and Jacksonian America. The obvious and growing inequalities of wealth and power in the early-nineteenth-century metropolis seemed to demand closer attention than most counter-Progressives were willing to pay. It was still possible, of course, to argue that these inequalities did not shake the fundamental American consensus or that the politicians handled them in ways that did not upset their own political power. Nevertheless, the sheer mass of the evidence placed enormous strains on the notion that ethnicity or consensus negated class differences.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the counter-Progressives offered no way for understanding the abundant evidence of labor radicalism and of class formation and recurrent conflict in early-nineteenth-century New York. How could the counter-Progressives with their “ethnocultural models” ex-

7. See Dixon Ryan Fox, *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York, 1801–1840* (New York, 1919); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945); John R. Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States* (New York, 1916), I; Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (New York, 1928).

8. Richard Hofstadter, “William Leggett, Spokesman of Jacksonian Democracy,” *PSQ* 58 (1943): 581–94; idem, *The American Political Tradition* (New York, 1948), 56–85; Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton, 1961). For fuller remarks and a brief overview, see Sean Wilentz, “On Class and Politics in Jacksonian America,” in *The Promise of American History: Progress and Prospects*, ed. Stanley I. Kutler and Stanley N. Katz (Baltimore, 1982), 45–63.

9. See Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* (Lexington, Mass., 1973).

plain the rise and brief political success of the Working Men of 1829 and their leader Thomas Skidmore—a man who called for a civil revolution and the equalization of property relations? How could they make sense of the class-conscious, inter-ethnic New York labor movement of the mid-1830s, the strike waves and labor uprisings of 1836 and 1850, or the working-class unrest discussed by Robert Ernst in his important study of the city's immigrants?<sup>10</sup> The most sustained counter-Progressive attempt to do so, by Walter E. Hugins, preserved the consensus formula, but only by adapting the work of the early labor historians to describe artisan radicals as entrepreneurial reformers and the labor movement as an expression of narrow, "practical" trade unionism.<sup>11</sup> Yet ever since, apart from Edward Pessen's examination of the ideas of some of New York's "uncommon" Jacksonian labor leaders, no plausible alternative to the counter-Progressives' arguments has appeared.<sup>12</sup>

Recent work on the history of early industrial workers and nineteenth-century democratic movements helps us take the first steps toward just such a reinterpretation, in ways that allow us to incorporate the important insights of previous work.<sup>13</sup> Slicing across the unfortunate compartments

10. Ernst, *Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825–1863* (New York, 1949), 99–121.

11. Hugins, *Jacksonian Democracy and the Working Class: A Study of the New York Workingmen's Movement, 1829–1837* (Stanford, 1960).

12. Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany, 1967). Douglas M. Miller, *Jacksonian Aristocracy: Class and Democracy in New York, 1830–1860* (New York, 1967), contradicts the counter-Progressives but offers little in the way of an analysis of class formation and consciousness beyond what was presented earlier by the Progressives and the Commons school. Counter-Progressive formulations have been more successfully challenged in studies of other states and regions. See above all, Donald B. Cole, *Jacksonian Democracy in New Hampshire, 1800–1851* (Cambridge, Mass., 1970); James Roger Sharp, *The Jacksonians versus the Banks: Politics in the States after the Panic of 1837* (New York, 1970); Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second Party System in Cumberland County, North Carolina* (Baton Rouge, 1981).

13. Among the most important of these works on the history of the United States are Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); Paul G. Faler, *Mechanics and Manufacturers in the Early Industrial Revolution* (Albany, 1981); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana, 1983); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, 1976); Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society*; Bruce G. Laurie, *Working People of Philadelphia, 1800–1850* (Philadelphia, 1980); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (New York, 1967). On the eighteenth century, see Foner, *Tom Paine*; on the twentieth, see James R. Green, *Grass Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895–1943* (Baton Rouge, 1978). In other ways, the revitalization of historical materialism undertaken by Eugene D. Genovese (in recent years, in collaboration with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese) has had a continuing influence on my thinking about capitalism, ideology, and property relations. See, above all, their articles collected in *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York, 1983).

of academic fashion—the “new” social history, the “new” urban history, “anthropological” history—these studies have begun to change the ways in which American historians understand social development and consciousness. In place of a static, instrumentalist economic determinism, they have treated class as a dynamic social relation, a form of social domination, determined largely by changing relations of production but shaped by cultural and political factors (including ethnicity and religion) without any apparent logic of economic interest. They take for granted the inescapable fact that class relations order power and social relationships; they have examined the numerous conflicts and accommodations that give rise to and accompany these relations as a complex series of social encounters, fusing culture and politics as well as economics. In short, they insist that the history of class relations cannot be deduced by some “economic” or sociological calculus and imposed on the past; nor can it be ignored if it does not appear just as the historian thinks it should, either in or out of politics. It must be examined as part of a human achievement in which men and women struggle to comprehend the social relations into which they were born (or entered involuntarily) and in which, by the collective exercise of power, they sustain or challenge those relations, in every phase of social life. From this perspective, the history of class relations in the emerging metropolis quickly begins to look very different from those offered or implied in earlier writings. The wish to enlarge and, in part, to correct that perspective, and to rewrite the history of the formation of the metropolitan working class, with all its larger implications about the history of capitalism and democracy in the United States, was my major reason for undertaking this study.

The final product approaches the problem through a series of interconnected middle-range themes. The first will come as no surprise: the central role of the crafts. Craft workers—sometimes treated by labor historians as a working-class elite, the aristocracy of urban labor—were in fact at the heart of New York’s emerging working class from the 1790s until midcentury, embracing a wide range of people, from well-paid skilled journeymen to outworkers getting by on starvation wages. Clerks and unskilled laborers represented a numerous but decided minority of male metropolitan workers before the Civil War; except for domestic servants, a very special group, the vast majority of female wage earners as well were craft workers.<sup>14</sup> Al-

14. In all, clerks and unskilled laborers (including common laborers, porters, stevedores, cartmen) made up about 40 percent of the male wage-labor force in 1855. For figures on men and women, see Ernst, *Immigrant Life*, 214–17. The treatment of certain groups of craft workers as a privileged sector has been most marked—and disputed—in the recent British literature on the labor “aristocracy”; see R. Q. Gray, *The Labour Aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford, 1976); John Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns*



though male laborers and dockhands did organize on their own behalf, it was the craft workers (including the women) who, in concert with radical small producers, elaborated the first articulate forms of plebeian radicalism, and who dominated the most powerful labor organizations of the era. Other groups have to be considered, but it is to the craft workers and their employers that we must look in order to understand the most dramatic changes in class relations in early-nineteenth-century New York.

Interpreting the history of the crafts leads directly to what might be called the problem of the middle class. In large measure, the best recent work on class and class formation in the North has approached the history of a single class in isolation; we now know a great deal about how workers, petty proprietors, and merchant capitalists forged what Paul Johnson has called the "moral imperative" around which they formed class identities, but very little about how these classes-in-formation affected each other.<sup>15</sup> In particular, historians of the working class have been too willing either to portray middle-class employers as Dickensian parodies of the parvenu or to ignore them altogether; likewise, they have made little progress in analyzing the importance of petty proprietors, especially those shopkeepers and small master artisans who helped direct various radical and labor reform movements.<sup>16</sup> No study of New York's workers, particu-

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(London, 1974); Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840-1880* (London, 1978). The supposedly privileged position of all craft workers—based usually on an idealized conception of craft workers as opposed to factory workers and common laborers—is commonly taken for granted in the United States. One recent text book, by a respected group of economic historians, goes so far as to transform the journeymen wage earners of the general trades' unions of the 1830s into "small businessmen" who "used their membership largely to assist price fixing in their business transactions." See Lance E. Davis et al., *American Economic Growth: An Economist's History of the United States* (New York, 1972), 228.

15. Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York, 1978), 8. See also Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York, 1981), on middle-class imperatives and family life.

16. The failure to treat petty proprietors has been particularly troublesome, given, as Arno Mayer has observed, that the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century "may well have been the closest thing there has ever been to a country of small producers and property owners." I sympathize with Mayer's argument—that America has long been a lower-middle-class nation that lives by spurious middle-class myths and visions—but my emphasis here is rather different. Whatever their character (and they were, I think, considerably more complex and multifarious than Mayer had the opportunity to discuss), the culture and myths of the urban American lower-middle class took shape only as part of a process of class formation and conflict before the Civil War. In this respect, shopkeepers and, even more, small master artisans in New York had a central, if at times somewhat ambiguous, influence on the making of the working class, and vice versa. As we shall see, through 1850, at least some of these small producers saw their primary social and political allegiances resting with wage earners, and against financiers and capitalist employers. See Arno J. Mayer, "The Lower Middle Class as Historical Problem," *Journal of Modern History* 47 (1975): 422.

larly not one that tries to analyze working-class beliefs as well as behavior, can leave these people out; moreover, even if New York had its own, homegrown Bounderbys and Veneerings, the middle class merits respectful study. If, as Bryan Palmer has astutely observed, the history of class and class formation is the history of the "process of confrontation" between classes, then the terms of confrontation were set by the ideals, aspirations, rationalizations, and activities of New York's employers and independent small producers as well as by the city's workers.<sup>17</sup> To make sense of the emerging middle class in this context is to begin to comprehend the dialectics of power and social change.

The economic history of early industrialization in New York also demands more thorough evaluation. Recently, English and Continental historians have challenged the familiar "leading sector" synthesis on the industrial revolution, in order to stress the combined and uneven character of nineteenth-century capitalist growth. Gone is the nearly exclusive concern with mechanization, with the rise of the factory system, and with the prehistory of twentieth-century forms of mass production. Instead, attention has shifted to the larger process of capitalist transformation—a process that fostered a *variety* of possible forms of industrial organization, that hastened the intensification of human labor and the proliferation of sweating as well as the introduction of labor-saving machinery, and that affected some sectors of production more than others.<sup>18</sup> American urban and labor historians have been slower to reconsider the conventional wisdom; most pertinent here, the history of manufacturing in early-nineteenth-century New York continues to be presented as part of a seemingly inevitable national shift toward a factory system.<sup>19</sup> In fact, that history was far more

17. Bryan D. Palmer, *A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860–1914* (Montreal, 1979), xvi.

18. The conventional wisdom appears in Marxist, non-Marxist, and anti-Marxist writings alike. The locus classicus is Marx, *Capital*, I, chaps. 13–16, but see also W. W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge, 1960), and David S. Landes, *The Unbound Prometheus: Technological Change and Development in Western Europe from 1750 to the Present* (Cambridge, 1969). The most sustained and intelligent critique on the English case is Raphael Samuel, "The Workshop of the World: Steam Power and Hand Technology in Mid-Victorian Britain," *History Workshop*, no. 3 (1977): 6–72.

19. Most of the "new" labor history has concentrated on various "leading sectors" and single-industry towns, despite the early warnings of George Rogers Taylor, in *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York, 1951), that these were not the sole, or even the most significant, sites of early industrial change. Susan E. Hirsch, *The Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800–1860* (Philadelphia, 1978), offers a more complex account of antebellum manufacturing, but remains committed to showing that industrialization and the rise of the factory system are best handled as identical terms. More illuminating is Bruce Laurie's discussion of uneven development in Philadelphia, in *Working People of Philadelphia*, chap. 1. On New York, see virtually every book that has even touched on the city's

complex and interesting, an example of the early stages of what I have chosen to call metropolitan industrialization. Any attempt to reinterpret the ideology and social conflicts of the era would be hopeless without a detailed examination of metropolitan industrialization, from its first stirrings in the 1780s through the 1840s.

Ideology—the emerging systems of belief of employers and workers—and how to recover it present the most intractable problems of all. In 1909, John H. Morrison, the historian of New York's shipyards, reported that the history of labor relations in New York's early-nineteenth-century trades had never fully been written, on account of the scarcity of material.<sup>20</sup> Morrison exaggerated the dearth; nevertheless, the historian of New York labor is left few of the diaries, family papers, account books, and narratives that have enriched recent social histories of the South, of New England, and of the West. To interpret social consciousness as broadly as possible, I have turned to what I could find of other kinds of evidence, located in court records, ceremonial speeches, contemporary prints and drawings, and accounts of parades and festivals. These sources, especially the speeches, carry their own perils, as the counter-Progressives pointed out. Many take the form of rhetorical exhortations, directed at workers or employers (and sometimes both) to win their confidence and support, usually for a political cause. As such, they are, in William Empson's term, "myths," intended by their authors to flatten out a multitude of prejudices, hopes, and motives for the sake of easy assimilation and graphic power.<sup>21</sup> If interpreted too literally, they can disguise as much as they reveal about social perceptions and relations. But there is also meaning in these sources, as historians discover from time to time; such "myths," after all, draw on popular beliefs and assumptions; once formulated, they help order people's understanding of the world and tell us something about social relations. Nowhere was this truer than in early-nineteenth-century America, where political rhetoric and spectacle were subjects of passionate popular interest and debate.<sup>22</sup> That the "myths" were manipu-

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manufacturing economy before 1860, including Edward K. Spann's encyclopedic *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840–1857* (New York, 1981).

20. Morrison, *A History of New York Ship Yards* (New York, 1909), 64.

21. Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), 35.

22. Such, of course, was the leading article of faith for what used to be known as the "symbolist" American-studies movement, in its discussions of Jacksonian politics and industrialization. See, for example, Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950); John William Ward, *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York, 1955); Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford 1957); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York, 1964). More recent work in this vein includes John Kasson, *Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in the United States, 1776–1900* (New York, 1977). Each of these works, with

lated for a variety of ends and came to mean different things to different people only confirms that they held substantive and evocative meanings for the audiences to whom they were directed. Taken at this level, a historical reading of these materials—an examination of how the “myths” changed and were invested with different meanings by different groups—can help bring us closer to some understanding of how old forms of social solidarity and consciousness decayed and new ones arose.

Such a study of ideology and class demands coming to terms with political culture and with shifting definitions of republicanism. In almost every conceivable public context—and some private ones as well—the subjects of this book turned to the language of the Republic to explain their views, attack their enemies, and support their friends. As recovered by J. G. A. Pocock, this discourse rested largely on four interlocking concepts: first, that the ultimate goal of any political society should be the preservation of the public good, or *commonwealth*; second, that in order to maintain the commonwealth, the citizens of a republic had to be able and willing to exercise *virtue*, to subordinate private ends to the legislation of the public good when they conflicted; third, that in order to be virtuous, citizens had to be *independent* of the political will of other men, lest they lose sight of the common good; fourth, that in order to guard against the encroachments of would-be tyrants, citizens had to be active in politics, to exercise their *citizenship*. To these concepts, eighteenth-century Americans, above all “middling” merchants and artisans, added *equality*, the liberal idea that all citizens should be entitled to their natural civil and political rights under a representative, democratic system of laws.<sup>23</sup>

The history of class formation in New York is comprehensible only if it is understood in this broad ideological context: faced with profound changes in the social relations of production, ordinary New Yorkers began to reinterpret their shared ideals of commonwealth, virtue, independence, citizenship, and equality, and struggled over the very meaning of the terms. In so doing, they also revealed the social meanings of republicanism

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all of its merits, is hampered by its insufficient attention to social relations, power, and class. The significance of cultural myths and symbols has, however, been presented in a revised form, in a number of new studies of working-class culture. The most systematic of these is Sewell, *Work and Revolution in France*. Critical influences here—on the present study as on others—have been Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*; Maurice Agulhon, *La République au village* (Paris, 1970); idem, *Une Ville ouvrière*; idem, *Marianne au combat: L'Imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789 à 1880* (Paris, 1977).

23. J. G. A. Pocock, “Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *JH* 3 (1972): 119–34; idem, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975). On equality, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969), esp. 72–73; and Foner, *Tom Paine*, 123–24, 225–26.

for urban producers—and how they changed. Formal republican thought was a political ideology, a world view that distinguished sharply between society and government and held that social disorder stemmed from political corruption. Nevertheless, it bore close associations to social relations outside of politics, associations that were severely tested as Americans came to consider their own way of life as peculiarly conducive to a proper republican order. In the decades just after the Revolution, New York's artisans (like their counterparts in other cities) elaborated their own democratic variant of American republican ideology, bound to their expectations about workshop production.<sup>24</sup> By 1850, with the erosion of the artisan system, that shared vision had virtually collapsed and been replaced by new and opposing conceptions of republican politics and the social relations that would best sustain them. This process of social reformation and ideological transformation was neither simple nor linear; to trace its sometimes baffling course from the most direct of class confrontations through nativism and immigration, political intrigue, gang warfare, and numerous reform movements, is the greatest challenge for the historian of early-nineteenth-century urban labor. Nevertheless, the process happened, and can be shown to have happened, in the republican metropolis.

What to call the new forms of social consciousness that appeared has long been subject to debate. Early on, I abandoned the familiar, essentialist concept of class consciousness, still dominant in the Marxist and Weberian traditions, that would define the term as an all-embracing (usually revolutionary) critique of capitalist wage-labor relations, held by the mass of proletarians and expressed in all consequential matters of public and private concern, above all in politics. The problem, as I see it, is not with such abstractions per se; they have their uses for social historians, who must sift through a multitude of historical particulars and untidy events. It is, rather, that historians who have stuck to this particular concept have usually allowed it to tyrannize them, so that they try to see how closely the past approximated the ideal—thereby using a concept to account for why something that presumably *should* have happened did not, before coming to terms with what *did* happen. Very quickly, the historian discovers that the ideal “conscious class” has never existed in the United States as, supposedly, it has in England and on the Continent; characteristically, this leads to attempts to explain why the past let down the ideal, why there has been no class consciousness (or, as Werner Som-

24. I argued this point, in a preliminary fashion, in “Artisan Republican Festivals and the Rise of Class Conflict in New York City, 1788–1837,” in *Working-Class America: Essays in Labor, Community, and American Society*, ed. Michael Frisch and Daniel Walkowitz (Urbana, 1983), 37–77. I have corrected and refined the materials and interpretations presented in that essay.

bart put it, no socialism) in the United States.<sup>25</sup> It is the wrong question, one that is based on a woefully stylized impression of class consciousness abroad, one that short-circuits our attempts to understand the class perceptions that did exist in this country, one that pulls history through the looking glass into a make-believe world of “false consciousness” and “liberal consensus.” Instead of writing about this aspect of the history of American class relations, we have usually written it off from the start.

Rejection of the old ideal has not, however, led me to abandon the concept of class consciousness altogether or to collapse it into a broader category like “plebeian,” or “populist.” Recent historians and sociologists have argued that such categories help us to understand numerous nineteenth-century British popular movements, including some that scholars habitually classify as working-class protest. Some of the movements examined here may also be understood in such terms. But the label “populist” fails to account for those movements that did comprehend social conflict as being, at least in part, a result of capitalist labor relations. Nor does the term “class loyalty”—commonly used to describe a recognition of class differences that falls short of class consciousness—adequately cover the purposeful critiques of capitalist wage labor elaborated in Jacksonian New York.<sup>26</sup> Rather, between 1829—the annus mirabilis of New York artisan radicalism—and 1850, both a process and a strain of consciousness emerged in numerous ways from the swirl of popular politics, in which people came

25. Sombart, *Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus?* (Tübingen, 1906). The tenacity of the Sombartian fallacy is evident in several of the essays in John H. M. Laslett and S. M. Lipset, eds., *Failure of a Dream? Essays in the History of American Socialism* (Garden City, N.Y., 1974). Christopher Lasch has made a similar point, in a different but related context, observing, “The understanding of American radicalism and its history has suffered from a recurrent tendency either to force it into European categories or to make its very resistance to this procedure the basis of a general condemnation of the American Left.” See Lasch’s preface, along with Olaf Hansen’s introduction, to Randolph Bourne, *The Radical Will: Randolph Bourne, Selected Writings, 1911–1918*, ed. Olaf Hansen (New York, 1977).

26. On the “populism” of English workers’ movements, see Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism during the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago, 1982). Gareth Stedman Jones has argued more persuasively that several movements of the 1830s and 1840s—above all Chartism—are better understood as extensions of eighteenth-century radicalism than as the bearers of a new working-class critique of capitalist wage relations or as a pre-Marxian socialism. In part, the same holds true in the United States; nonetheless, I would argue that various strains of class consciousness, deeply attached to republican values but distinguishable from “classical” artisan republicanism, and linked to critiques of workshop dependency and exploitation, also emerged in the 1830s and 1840s. See Gareth Stedman Jones, “The Language of Chartism,” in *The Chartist Experience: Studies in Working-Class Radicalism and Culture, 1830–1860*, ed. James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson (London, 1982), 3–58. The concept of “class loyalty” (*Klassengefühl*) was first developed clearly by Samuel Gompers; for a brief discussion, see Dawley, *Class and Community*, 239–40.

at various points to interpret social disorder and the decline of the Republic at least partly in terms of class divisions between capitalist employers and employees. More specifically, workers and radicals elaborated a notion of labor as a form of personal property, in direct opposition to capitalist conceptions of wage labor as a market commodity. For much of the period, this consciousness of class appeared within a broader defense of the "producing classes," an amalgam of "honorable" anticapitalist small masters and wage earners; in moments of particularly acute crisis, however, as in the mid-1830s and in 1850, critiques of wage relations came to the fore, usually (but not exclusively) in trade-union movements.

It is in these terms, rejecting the more familiar definition of class consciousness as the only one, recognizing the possible coexistence of several tendencies and outlooks, sometimes in a single movement or in the minds of individual participants, that I think we can better understand the social and ideological tensions at work in early-nineteenth-century New York. We encounter a continuing working out of emerging class conflicts, in which different groups, including employers, drew upon and transformed an established "plebeian" artisan republicanism to make sense of their experience and to act upon it. This process did not turn into a fixed battle at any one point; class consciousness and labor radicalism (in various and changing forms) emerged and abated, depending on a myriad of circumstances. Overall, however, we can detect a pattern, indicating that New Yorkers—especially in brief periods of what André-Jean Tudesq has aptly called "social fear"<sup>27</sup>—returned to class issues and to class identities and allegiances to defend their interests, and those of the democratic Republic itself, as they saw them. It is in this pattern of human relationships over time—and not the creation of abstract social categories or "groups"—that I find it possible to locate and describe the process of class formation as a central development in early-nineteenth-century New York.

In principle, such a study could encompass every realm of social life for all New Yorkers before the Civil War: if new forms of class relations and social consciousness arose, as I believe they did, they should show up in redefinitions of gender, sexuality, and family, in the conduct of politics, in childhood, in housing patterns, in the meanest transactions of everyday life. No such total history is attempted here. In some cases, the decision to eliminate material or pass over entire questions was eased by the spate of excellent recent works on New York, which promise finally to put the history of the metropolis in a full and proper perspective.<sup>28</sup> More impor-

27. André-Jean Tudesq, *Les Grands Notables en France (1840-1849): Étude historique d'une psychologie sociale* (Paris, 1964), II, 1236.

28. See, e.g., Elizabeth Strother Blackmar, "Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780-1850" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1980); Amy Bridges, *A City*

tant, by sticking mainly to familiar subjects—especially the trade unionists, labor radicals, and their opponents—I hope to place what have long been recognized as central problems in a new light. For three generations, historians have told and retold the history of class relations and labor movements in early-nineteenth-century New York. This book will have served its purpose if it can help to tell that history again in a more convincing way.

Above all, while I treat one, highly unusual city, I hope to contribute to the continuing attempts to reconceptualize the history of the American working class. By this, I do not mean to suggest that a single entity came into being in the antebellum years never to change or to be changed, ever bound by a unity of sentiment across the shifting barriers of trade, region, race, sex, or ethnicity, autonomous and eternally resentful of all other classes. This Working Class never existed, least of all before the Civil War. But a new order of human relations did emerge, primarily (but not exclusively) in the North and West, defined chiefly (though again not exclusively) by the subordination of wage labor to capital.<sup>29</sup> What is more, men and women came in the same period to understand that this was happening, and they began to think and act, in E. P. Thompson's phrase, in new "class ways," unlike those of the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup> Worldwide capitalist development continued to alter the locus and texture of these relations; all of the fundamental tensions, issues, and dilemmas of class remained. In this sense, it is proper to treat the so-called

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*in the Republic: The Origins of Machine Politics in New York City* (forthcoming); Carol Groneman [Pernicone], "The 'Bloody Ould Sixth': A Social Analysis of a New York Working-Class Community in the Mid-Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., University of Rochester, 1974); Paul E. Gilje, "Mobocracy: Popular Disturbances in Post-Revolutionary New York City, 1780-1820" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1980); John B. Jentz, "Artisans, Evangelicals, and the City: A Social History of Abolition and Labor Reform in Jacksonian New York" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1977); Elaine Weber Pasco, "From the Philanthropic Tradition to the Common School Ideal: Schooling in New York City, 1815-1832" (Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 1980); Howard B. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 1979); Spann, *The New Metropolis*; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: The Female Laboring Poor in New York, 1785-1860* (New York, forthcoming); Paul O. Weinbaum, *Mobs and Demagogues: The New York Response to Collective Violence in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, 1979).

29. In somewhat broader terms (based on the best available data), the United States changed, between the late eighteenth century and 1870, from a nation of independent producers, slaves, and slaveholders to one in which most gainfully employed persons worked for wages. Emancipation in the South after 1865 was an important but secondary factor in this statistical shift. See Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, 1965), 271-76; and Montgomery, *Beyond Equality*, 25-31.

30. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Social History* 3 (1972): 147.



early national and Jacksonian eras as a period of class formation in the United States. People and events in New York City were a vital part of that process; by examining them, from the 1780s to the final establishment of the New York working-class presence in 1850, this book aims not to study a "typical" case, a microcosm, but to supply an important part of the historical puzzle and to suggest ways in which class formation might be approached in other areas of the country.

A final word on organization. In the main, the argument is structured as a chronological, analytical narrative—a useful form in which to describe the process of class formation *as* a process. Part I, on the artisan republic, is, however, more synoptic, a setting of the stage. It should be clear that the period 1788–1825 was not a static or harmonious one—far from it. Nonetheless, it is a period that is best seen as prelude to what was to come. For that reason, I have deliberately been as panoramic as possible in the opening section, in order to touch on the several themes that united New York's workers and employers as well as on those that divided them, on those themes of *harmony and of suspicion that would come into play* as the early crises of the artisan republic deepened into new forms of social understanding and conflict. We begin, then, with a city in celebration.

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