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Love's Labour's Lost: A History of the Question "Why is there No Socialism in the United States?"

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LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST:
A HISTORY OF THE QUESTION
"WHY IS THERE NO SOCIALISM IN THE UNITED STATES?"

by

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An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

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INTRODUCTION

There are certain questions in the intellectual discourse of a nation that never seem to go away. Among the top of this list is certainly the perennial question of “why is there no socialism in the United States?” This Question has been asked and answered so many times, that one would be hard pressed to find an answer that has not yet been suggested. While countless thinkers have pondered the various answers, not enough attention has been paid to the actual act of asking. Because, though the Question has been repeated endlessly, it has not remained static. The Question has meant different things to different people at different times. Not only have the questioners changed, but also so have their reason for asking it, as well as even the Question itself.

The Question’s origins can be traced back to Karl Marx. Marx’s theories differed from the prevailing socialist thought of the day. Early socialists, such as Henri de Saint-Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier, held more abstract, distant views of a perfect society, which, while egalitarian, were often elitist and based on the premise that revolution would arise without struggle through reform measures. Marxian socialism on the other hand was grounded in the experiences of the industrial revolution. Society was transformed as the largely agrarian and rural populace of Europe made the transition into lowly paid urban factory workers in the new industrial cities. This new industrial class became concentrated in large factories and workplaces, when it increasingly engaged in collective action through trade unions and strikes.

While working as a co-editor of a radical leftist newspaper in Paris (1843-1845), Marx experienced the waves of worker strikes and uprisings spreading through Europe, which convinced him that the transformation of society could only succeed through the participation of

the working class. Society was being split into two opposing classes, the property-owning bourgeoisie, and the working class, or proletariat, whose only material possession was their labor. Marx foresaw the continuing polarization of society leading to a unification of the working class through common struggle and their realization of their common class interests (class consciousness), which would lead to ever increasing conflict between the classes and the inevitable revolution.

Marx's theories were also grounded in his study of the British mining and textile industries. Setting himself apart from the "utopian socialists" that preceded him (a term he applied pejoratively), Marx tried to base his revolutionary theories on what he believed were scientific observations of historical development. This application of Marxist science to historical development became his theory of "historical materialism." First elucidated in 1859, it stated that all forms of social structures are based on a society's economic system of production, and people's place in relation to it:

In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.¹

Marx held that the modes of production changed throughout human history and this is what spurs revolutionary changes to society:

¹ Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 3.

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or... From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure.²

These shifts, he suggested, occur as part of a natural progression of society. The most recent one was the shift from feudalism to capitalism. He prophesized that the socialist mode of production would emerge in a post-capitalist economic system when the accumulation of capital was no longer sustainable due to falling rates of profit and social conflict arising from the contradictions between the level of productive technology and the capitalist form of social organization. A socialist society would be one where the mode of production was designed to directly satisfy human needs, with the working-class cooperatively or publicly owning the means of production, which would then lead eventually to the final shift to the classless, stateless ideal of communism.

So for socialists, the transition from capitalism to socialism was natural and inevitable. Capitalism simply had matured to the point where it was no longer sustainable. In this theory, the further advanced a country was industrially, the more radical and closer to the workers' revolution it should be. As Marx put it "the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future."³ And this is where the United States comes in. Though a late bloomer, by the late nineteenth century the United States was advancing industrially at a rapid rate.

Marx celebrated the history of the United States' Working Men's parties of the 1820s and 1830s as some of the first labor-oriented political organizations in the world. Emanating from of

² Ibid.

³ Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1958), 8-9.

the concerns of craftsmen and skilled journeymen over their low social and economic status, the members of the Working Men's parties, or "Workies," pressed for universal male suffrage, equal educational opportunities, protection from debtor imprisonment, greater financial security, and shorter working hours.⁴ Marx and his partner, the German social scientist, political theorist, and philosopher Friedrich Engels also admired the Knights of Labor (KOL), the first national labor organization in the United States. Organizing along industrial lines, rather than the more conservative craft model, the KOL engaged in struggles for the eight-hour workday without regard to ethnicity, sex, or skill set in the years following the U.S. Civil War. Engels even went as far as to advise the "backwards workers" of Britain to follow their example. The existence of these unions was a sure sign of the advanced level of the working class of the United States.⁵

Discussions of the theoretical importance of the United States spread through Marxist circles. After the death of Marx and Engels, Karl Kautsky arguably became the world's leading Marxist thinker. Kautsky was an Austrian Marxist and served as the intellectual authority on Marxism for the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), an organized socialist party that had mass-membership and held representation in its nation's government.⁶ "America shows us our future," Kautsky stated in 1902:

In America capitalism is making its greatest progress; it rules there more absolutely and with more ruthlessness than anywhere else. The class struggles are sharpening there to the highest possible degree.⁷

⁴Maximilien Rubel, "Notes on Marx's Conception of Democracy," *New Politics* 1, no 2 (Winter 1962): 83-85; Lewis Feuer "The North American Origin of Marx's Socialism," *The Western Political Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (Mar., 1963): pp. 53-67

⁵ Frederick Engels, "Preface to the American Edition," *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1887), (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1969), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1887/01/26.htm>

⁶ Dave Renton, *Dissident Marxism: Past Voices for Present Times* (New York: Zed Books Ltd., 2004), 60.

⁷ Karl Kautsky, "Socialist Agitation Among Farmers in America," *International Socialist Review*, 3 (September 1902), 148.

Eduard Bernstein, SPD leader and later a leading proponent of “Revisionist” Marxism, a reform-based Socialism that deviated from traditional Marxist thought, had declared in 1890, “we see modern socialism enter and take root in the United States in direct relation to the spreading of capitalism and the appearance of the modern proletariat.”⁸ Going even further, August Bebel, one of the founders of the Social Democratic Workers Party of Germany (which would merge with German Socialist Workers’ Party to form the SPD), declared confidently in 1907 that the “Americans will be the first to usher in a Socialist Republic.”⁹ Bebel’s faith continued at least until 1912 when he restated that the United States would “be the first nation to declare a co-operative commonwealth.”¹⁰

Beyond the confines of Marx’s homeland several socialist theoreticians repeated the sentiment that the most developed country would lead the world into socialism. Henry Mayer Hyndman, a British Marxist and founder of the English Social Democratic Federation and the National Socialist Party (a leftist-Marxist party with no relation to Nazism), asserted in 1904, “just as North America is to-day the most advanced country economically and socially, so it will be the first in which Socialism will find open and legal expression.”¹¹ In 1906, Jean Longuet, the French socialist lawyer and grandson of Karl Marx, averred that Marxism was strongest “in the new and already vast American socialist movement” than in any other country except Russia.¹²

Daniel De Leon, the combative leader the Socialist Labor Party of America, was ready to accept the role assigned to socialists in the United States by historical materialism. De Leon

⁸ Eduard Bernstein, “Herr Sartorius von Waltershausen über den modernen Sozialismus in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika,” *Die Neue Zeit*, 9, no.1 (1890-91), 73, quoted in R. Laurence Moore, *European Socialists and the American Promised Land* (New York: Oxford University Press 1970), 70.

⁹ August Bebel, “Bebel Sends Greetings,” *Appeal to Reason*, July 13, 1907

¹⁰ Nicholas Klein, “The Lion of Germany: An Interview with August Bebel,” *The Labour Leader*, November 14, 1912.

¹¹ Henry Hyndman, “A Socialist Survey of the Time,” *Justice*, April 30, 1904

¹² Jean Longuet, “A Great Socialist Novel ‘The Jungle,’” *La Revue socialiste*, 264 (December 1906): 704-

acknowledged this in 1904 before the Amsterdam Congress of the Socialist International, the second incarnation of the global alliance of socialist and labor parties. "Taking into consideration only certain cardinal principles [of Marxism]," stated De Leon, "the conclusion cannot be escaped that America is the theatre where the crest of capitalism would first be shorn by the falchion of socialism." A short while later, De Leon proclaimed to the 1906 convention of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the radical industrial trade union based in part on his philosophy of Marxism mixed with syndicalism that, "If my reading of history is correct, the prophecy of Marx will be fulfilled and America will ring the downfall of capitalism the world over."¹³

However, Marx had been mistaken about the degree of radicalism in the United States. The Working Men's parties were not socialists, but rather advocated for a meritocracy in capitalism. Their scope and view remained restricted to local issues, and their organization would be short lived. The Knights of Labor were not socialists either, but promoted a producer ethic of republicanism. The KOL peaked in 1886, and they too declined due to the problems of an autocratic structure, mismanagement, and unsuccessful strikes. They also suffered when a labor protest rally near Chicago's Haymarket Square turned into a riot after someone threw a bomb at police and eight anarchists were prosecuted for their alleged complicity in the attack. The KOL's reputation was forever tarnished by anarchy and violence as the more conservative craft union federation, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) quickly supplanted it at the center of labor in the United States.

For those whose understanding of historical materialism led them to conclude that the United States should be the first to usher in worldwide revolution, the socialist movement faced a

¹³ Daniel De Leon, *Proceedings of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago, 1906), 608; Daniel De Leon, *Flashlights of the Amsterdam Congress* (New York: New York Labor News Co., 1904), 133.

crisis. That the United States failed to meet its responsibilities called into question the validity of their interpretation of socialism. And so began fascination with the question “why is there no socialism in the United States?” The Question was originally an attempt by radicals to reconcile their philosophy with reality, the query long outlasted its original impetus. It has passed from generation to generation and as each new group takes up its mantle, they have come up with a diversity of answers. Some involved groundbreaking concepts to explain the absence U.S. socialism while others recycled responses that came long before. But all are novel in the sense that they reflect the contemporary society of those who pose it. The inquiry into “Why is there no socialism in the United States?” has been tailored to meet the specific the interests and needs of each generation. The variety of answers to the Question reflects the experience of each generation and its relation to broader forces in society, and the history of the United States.

PART ONE: Roast Beef and Apple Pie

Radicals and Reformers in an Irreconcilable Reality, 1900s-1940s

In the first half of the twentieth century the query “Why is there no socialism in the United States?” was initially asked by radicals and early Socialist parties trying to resolve practice and theory. Yet scholars sympathetic to Progressive reforms to regulate big business, protect labor and initiate campaigns against corruption in the early years of the century in the United States also sought to understand the absence of socialism, even if only to prevent it. By the 1920s and 1930s, in contrast, the Communist Party sought to better understand it so they could remedy the situation. The answers, in both cases, were generally confined to economic, political and social factors. However, the Question was not an abstract exercise. Rather it held real-world importance to thousands who sought either to preserve or change the society in which they lived.

I.

That U.S. capitalism continued to grow, but not U.S. socialism posed a problem to Marxist theorists who assumed the cultural and political superstructure of a society should reflect its economic and technological structure. And so it was the Marxists themselves that were first to address the Question of the absence of socialism in the United States. Marx and Engels proposed a number of potential factors that explained why the United States was lagging. For example, Marx and Engels accused U.S. socialists of being extreme and uncompromising in their adherence to Marxist doctrines. Marx referred to socialists in the United States as “crotchety and

sectarian,” while Engels in 1886 criticized the Socialist Labor Party (SLP), the first major U.S. socialist party, for treating Marxism in a “doctrinaire and dogmatic way as something which has got to be learnt by heart and which will then supply all needs without more ado. To them it is a credo and not a guide to action.”¹⁴ Simultaneously, however, Marx and Engels also claimed that U.S. citizens and other English-speaking people were unable to grasp complex concepts. Engels asserted in 1887 that Marx and his’ works were “far too difficult for America at the present time. The workers over there... are still crude, tremendously backward theoretically, in particular, as a result of their general Anglo-Saxon and special American nature.”¹⁵

Marx and Engels also pointed to the diversity of the United States as an impediment to radicalism. Ethnic and racial cleavages, according to them, were intentionally created to create an obstacle to the workers’ movement. In a letter to the German-American Socialist Hermann Schlüter in 1892, Engels wrote:

Your great obstacle in America, it seems to me, lies in the exceptional position of the native workers... Now a working class has developed and has also to a great extent organized itself on trade union lines. But it still takes up an aristocratic attitude and wherever possible leaves the ordinary badly paid occupations to the immigrants, of whom only a small section enter the aristocratic trade unions. But these immigrants are divided into different nationalities and understand neither one another nor, for the most part the language of the country. And your bourgeoisie knows much better even than the Austrian Government how to play off one nationality against each other: Jew, Italians, Bohemians,

¹⁴ Engels to Sorge, February 8, 1890, *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Correspondence, 1846-1895*, trans. Dona Torr (New York: International Publishers, 1942),449-450.

¹⁵ Engels to Sorge, March 10, 1887, *Letters to Americans*, Marx and Engels (New York: International Publishers Co., 1953),177.

etc., against Germans and Irish and each other, so that differences in the standard of life of different workers exist, I believe in New York to an extent unheard of elsewhere.¹⁶

There were also political factors that impeded the emergence of a socialist party in the United States. The “The Constitution,” Engels wrote in 1893, “causes every vote for any candidate not put up by one of the two governing parties to appear *lost*. And the American... wants to influence his state; he does not throw his vote away.”¹⁷

A final consideration proposed by Marx and Engels was the fact that the United States was a “new nation.” Because it was founded as a result of settler colonialism in the seventeenth through eighteenth centuries, it lacked many of the entrenched institutions and traditions of Europe. Marx and Engels concluded this boded ill for the nascent republic. People of the United States were “born conservative,” Engels explained in 1890, “just *because* America is so purely bourgeois, so entirely without a feudal past and therefore proud of its purely bourgeois organization.”¹⁸ And again in 1892:

It is... quite natural quite natural, that in such a young country, which has never known feudalism and has grown up on a bourgeois basis from the first, bourgeois prejudices should also be so strongly rooted in the working class.¹⁹

This sociological explanation, as well as variations of its political, cultural, ethnic, and internal answers, would repeat in some variety throughout all incarnations of this debate. Yet Engels and Marx clung to the importance of economic factors, with Engels claiming in 1886 “even in America the condition of the working class must gradually sink lower and lower.” Because of the

¹⁶ Engels to Schlüter, March 30, 1892 *Selected Correspondence*, 496-497.

¹⁷ Engels to Sorge December 2, 1893, “Unpublished Letters of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels to Americans,” trans/ed. Leonard E. Mins *Science and Society* 2 (Spring 1938): 374.

¹⁸ Engels to Sorge, February 8, 1890, *Selected Correspondence*, 467.

¹⁹ Engels to Sorge, December 31, 1892, *Selected Correspondence*, 501.

peculiarities of the U.S. situation, he added, “theory counts for nothing until it is imposed by dire necessity.”²⁰

II.

Early twentieth-century discussions of the prospect of socialism in the United States centered around one of the most important scholarly analyses of this time “Warum gibt es in den Vereinigten Staaten keinen Sozialismus? (1906),” (Why is there No Socialism in the United States?), a question posed by German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart. Sombart later aligned himself with Nazism, but at the time of this essay, he was one of the first pro-socialist professors in Imperial Germany acknowledging the absence of socialism in the United States. His prognosis for the country’s future was cautiously optimistic. He assumed that class conflict would eventually increase in the United States and with it would come the arrival of socialist movement.²¹

Before it did, however, Sombart believed U.S. socialists faced an uphill battle. This was because the working class of the United States was much more conservative than his European counterparts, especially German workers. The cause of the workers’ conservatism was affluence.²² As Sombart famously, declared “all socialist Utopias came to nothing on reefs of roast beef and apple pie.”²³ Simply put, workers in the United States had significantly higher

²⁰ Engels to Florence Kelley Wischnewetsky, February 3, 1886, *Letters to Americans*, 149-150; Engels to Florence Kelley Wischnewetsky, August 13, 1886, *Letters to Americans*, 160.

²¹ Iring Fetscher, “Comment 2 on *American Capitalism’s Economic Rewards* (1974),” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 2nd ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 477.

²² Jerome Karabel, “The Failure of American Socialism Reconsidered,” *Socialist Register*, 16 (1979), 208.

²³ Werner Sombart, *Why is There No Socialism in the United States?*, trans. Patricia M. Hocking and C.T. Husbands (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd., 1976), 105-106.

incomes and standards of living than German workers. “The diet of the American worker is much closer to that of [the] better-off [German] middle-class circles than to that of [the German] class of wage laborers,” Sombart concluded.²⁴ He reiterated that radicalism arises from economic depredation. It is only when a group is sufficiently convinced that the present system holds no likelihood of improvement that they will risk all that they have in attempting to overthrow it, he argued. Conversely, if workers were content with their economic level they would not have the desire to rebel and attempts to form a class-based political movement would fall on deaf ears.

Beyond simply attributing the rejection of radicalism to the high level of affluence, Sombart portrayed a high level of social equality in the United States. The relationship between labor and management, he contended, was not as adversarial as in Europe, and even the temper of conversation between employee and employer had a much more respectful tone.²⁵ Along with social equality, came social mobility. The workers in the United States, Sombart concluded, had a much better chance of climbing into a higher class than in Europe. If the working class assumed that they stood a good chance of escaping the bottom rung of the economic ladder, then they would be less inclined to change the system, and would put their efforts towards economic endeavors rather than political.

Social mobility was part and parcel of geographic mobility. The abundance of land acted as a safety valve for social tensions, Sombart explained. Geographic mobility offered workers an “avenue of escape.” No matter how bad life was the working class always had the option (or at least the belief in the option) to pack up and move to the unsettled west. Instead of working

²⁴ Ibid., 105.

²⁵ Ibid., 18-20.

toward the reorganization of the capitalist system, Sombart thought that workers would simply start life anew.²⁶

III.

Despite all the obstacles that the working class in the United States faced, Sombart still predicted socialism's inevitable success when he declared it "...will in all likelihood come to fullest bloom in the new world."²⁷ Sombart's optimistic thesis went against standard Marxist theory in that it proposed that as capitalism advanced, the conditions of workers would inevitably deteriorate. Though the United States had the most developed capitalism, it appeared able to continue to provide workers with an ever-increasing standard of living. This analysis came out of an emerging debate in the European radical intellectual scene.

In one camp there were socialists who were less concerned with the exact predictions of Marx and willing to alter or abandon central tenets of Marxist philosophy, and so were more willing to accept Sombart's unappealing prognosis that capitalism was serving workers in the United States well. Emile Vandervelde, the Belgian socialist, conceded in 1904 that in terms of economic welfare, "no one seriously disputes that, all in all, American workers have a position very superior to that of the European worker."²⁸ J. Keir Hardie, the Scottish socialist and British Labour leader, repeated the belief in 1908 that "[U.S.] capitalism has a power of adaptability for which some of its Socialist opponents do not make sufficient allowance."²⁹ The German Social Democrat Ludwig Quessel cited statistical evidence in 1909 that showed the wage increases that

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ Ibid., 141-142.

²⁸ Emile Vandervelde, "Impressions of America," *La Revue socialiste*, 41 (March 1905): 287.

²⁹ J. Keir Hardie, "James Keir Hardie, M.P. Character Sketch," *The Labour Leader*, September 5, 1903.

provided U.S. workers with an almost “bourgeois standard of living” showed no signs of slowing down.³⁰ H.G. Wells, the famous English author of the novels *The Time Machine* (1895), *The War of the Worlds* (1897), and *The Invisible Man* (1897), and member of the Fabian Society, a British organization that advocated the advance of socialism principles through gradual reforms, observed that in the United States, though “a growing proportion of wealth of the community is passing into the hands of a small minority,” the growing income gap was disguised by “the enormous increase of the total wealth.”³¹

In the other camp were socialist thinkers who held a deeper commitment to the precise nature of Marxist concepts, and rejected Sombart’s analysis. Though U.S. socialist journalist and editor of the *International Socialist Review*, Algie Martin Simons, had translated and printed the first half of Sombart’s essay in his publication, he ceased publishing the second half in 1907 after he grew offended with the conclusion that U.S. capitalism defied Marxist philosophy and denounced the “nonsense on the conditions of American workers.”³²

Socialists seeking answers that explained the situation in the United States without calling into question the soundness of Marxist theory, like Morris Hillquit, founder and leader of the Socialist Party of America and future Socialist candidate for mayor of New York City, formulated explanations for the stunted growth of U.S. socialism that were in disagreement with Sombart’s. Rejecting the reformism of much of the Sombart camp, Hillquit, was convinced that revolution could not come through the existing political system and asserted that the unique state of politics in the United States was to blame for the lack of an organized working-class party. He contended that the U.S. electoral system was designed to limit the chances of a third party by

³⁰ Ludwig Quessel, “K. Kautsky als Vulgärökonom,” *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 15, no. 2 (1909): 1105.

³¹ H.G. Wells, *The Future in America: A Search after Realities*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1906), 105-106.

³² Karabel, “The Failure of American Socialism Reconsidered,” 206.

absorbing radicals into one of the two major coalition parties. Hillquit blamed the failure of the Socialist party in the 1908 elections on the Democratic party which

revived all the slogans of its old time middle-class radicalism and re-instated the prophet of that brand of radicalism, William J. Bryan, in the leadership of the party... The direct and public endorsement of the Democratic Party by the officials of the American Federation of Labor and their appeal to organized labor for active support of the candidates of that party, could not but be detrimental to the socialist campaign.³³

Hillquit's view is borne out by the fact that as early as the 1820s, Jeffersonian Democrats had coopted Working Men's Parties.³⁴ In 1872 the Democratic Party undercut radicals by supporting Horace Greeley, a social reformer and member of the early utopian socialist Fourierist movement, for president instead of David Davis, sitting Supreme Court Justice and candidate of the Labor Reform Party, a short lived, political vehicle for the National Labor Union, the first nationwide labor union in the United States.

Another example of the weakness of third political parties involved the neutralization of the People's Party, the largest and most sustained effort at a third party in the United States. Also known as the "Populists," the short-lived U.S. political movement was a loose coalition of Farmers alliances and laborers united against eastern bankers, industrialists, railroad companies, and elites in general. In the last decade of the 19th century, these agrarian radicals advocated for an expanded currency, free coinage of gold and silver, public ownership of railroads, and a graduated federal income tax. The movement grew fast and even gained the support of labor, small business, and socialists, although it was co-opted when the Democratic Party adopted many of its reform planks. When the Democrats ran agrarian reformer William Jennings Bryan

³³ Morris Hillquit, *History of Socialism in the United States*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1910), 349.

³⁴ Yohoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 238-239.

as their presidential candidate in 1896, the Populists endorsed him, in effect fusing the parties together.³⁵ This trend was so ominous that the German intellectual Philipp Rappaport, writing in the socialist journal of the SPD *Die Neue Zeit* in 1907, argued that socialists in the United States should focus on converting the Democratic party, because attempting to work around it in a third party was hopeless.³⁶

Other socialists looking to explain away the incongruity of socialism in the United States turned to the unique characteristics of the U.S. working class itself. Franz Mehring, a German socialist and historian, claimed that because the United States was “still an overwhelmingly agricultural country,” class consciousness had not fully developed.³⁷ Another difference attributed to the U.S. Socialists was their ideology. Rather than lacking revolutionary fervor, however, some like H.G. Wells accused it of having too much. Wells contended that Socialism of the United States was “a fierce form of socialist teaching... far more closely akin to the revolutionary socialism of the continent than to the constructive and evolutionary socialism of Great Britain... It is a Socialism reeking with class feeling and class hatred and altogether anarchistic in spirit...”³⁸ It was this radical form of socialism that prevented Socialists in the United States from making the proper concessions these analysts believed were necessary to enact real gains. Echoing Marx and Engels’ criticisms of the U.S. Party, Vladimir Lenin, the Russian socialist thinker and future leader of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the Soviet Union, made his point in 1907:

What Marx and Engels criticize in British and American socialism is its isolation from the labour movements. The burden of all their numerous comments on... the American

³⁵ Seymour Martin Lipset, “Why No Socialism in the United States?,” in *Radicalism in the Contemporary Age*, vol.1, *Sources of Contemporary Radicalism*, eds. Seweryn Bialer and Sophia Sluzer, (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1977), 61.

³⁶ Philipp Rappaport, “Political Parties of the United States,” *Die Neue Zeit*, 25, no. 1 (1906-7), 291-298.

³⁷ Franz Mehring, “A Journey to America,” *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, July 26, 1906.

³⁸ H.G. Wells, *Social Forces in England and America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1914), 345-346.

Socialists is the accusation that they have reduced Marxism to a dogma, to a 'rigid orthodoxy'... that they are incapable of adapting themselves to the theoretically helpless but living and powerful mass labour movement that is marching alongside them."³⁹

Without being able to make concessions, this argument suggested, the Socialists could not mobilize workers in the United States, and Socialism stood no chance.

Karl Kautsky also furthered the idea that the make-up of the U.S. working class was to blame. Kautsky contended that the absence of a native working class, caused by ever-increasing waves of immigration, prevented a working class movement from forming.⁴⁰ Kautsky also highlighted The United States' specific historical development. The United States, unlike Europe, had no direct feudal past. Much of the class consciousness and political organization of the European socialist organizations stemmed from the fight for basic political rights. However, in the United States basic political rights were already guaranteed to much of the public. As Kautsky put it, "the struggle for freedom is very much superior to the effortless possession of a freedom that others have won before."⁴¹

The lack of a large-scale struggle for political rights in the United States was a popular explanation for the United States' unique situation. Writing in 1907, Vladimir Lenin pointed to "the absence of any at all big, nation-wide democratic tasks facing the proletariat" as the reason for failure of socialism in the United States. Lenin added that the basic political liberties in the United States actually produced "the complete subjection of the proletariat to bourgeois politics;

³⁹ V.I. Lenin "Preface to the Russian Translation of 'Letters by Ph. Becker, J. Dietzgen, F. Engels, K. Marx and Others to F.A. Sorge and Others,'" in *V.I. Lenin: On Britain*, comp. C. Leiteizen, ed. and trans. T. Dexter, (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, n.d., 1960), 49.

⁴⁰ Karl Kautsky, "The American Worker," *Die Neue Zeit*, 24, no. 1, (1905-6), 773-87. in *Historical Materialism* 11, no. 4, (Brill Academic, 2003), 37.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

the sectarian isolation of the [socialist] groups... not the slightest success of the Socialists among the working masses in the elections, etc.”⁴²

Morris Hillquit agreed with Lenin that the success of the United States in political freedoms actually undermined the Socialists ability to garner support:

Another check to the progress of the socialist movement in the United States was to be found in the political institutions of the country: the working classes of the European countries were as a rule, deprived of some political rights enjoyed by other classes of citizens, and the common struggle for the acquisition of those rights was frequently the first cause to draw them together in a political union.

In the United States, however, the working men enjoyed full political equality at all times, and thus had one less motive to organize politically on a class basis.⁴³

Following Hillquit’s line of reasoning, Max Beer, the Austrian-born Marxist journalist, focused on the lack of middle-class political movements as the saboteur of U.S. socialism. In Marxist theory, according to Beer, the bourgeoisie would struggle for political rights by mobilizing the proletariat:

The rise and effervescence of Socialist Labour movements at various periods were, as a rule, the concomitant phenomena of middle-class upheavals, which, directly or indirectly mobilized some strata of the working class...[and which] were accompanied by an inrush of Socialists ideas... [However] in the United States middle class movements against a privileged upper class or personal monarchy could not arise, for these phenomena did not exist, and there was no need to mobilize the classes for the fight.⁴⁴

Without being mobilized by the middle class in their struggle for political rights, wrote Beer, the working class in the United States never gained the political acumen and consciousness

⁴² V.I. Lenin “Preface to the Russian Translation of ‘Letters,’” 51.

⁴³ Hillquit, *History of Socialism*, 154.

⁴⁴ Max Beer, *Fifty Years of International Socialism*, (London: Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935),113.

necessary to take it one step further and advocate on behalf of their own class. Variations on these explanations would soon become increasingly useful, as the potential for a socialist movement in the United States became even more in doubt.

IV.

It was not only radicals who addressed the absence of U.S. socialism. Political reformers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century became increasingly interested in the problems brought up by industrialization and modernization, however, “Progressives” sought to address the most egregious abuses of capitalism in order to save the system from more radical changes. This period of social activism saw urban, middle-class reformers support a greater role of the government regarding, political corruption, regulation of big business, labor rights, and social welfare, including involvement in enacting the direct primary, initiative, referendum, recall, women’s suffrage. Progressive Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Woodrow Wilson pursued anti-trust action, established the Federal Reserve System (1913), which set up the central banking system in the United States, and witnessed passage of the Seventeenth Amendment (1913), which provided the direct election of U.S. senators.⁴⁵

Progressive concepts also spilled over into academia. In what would become known as the “Progressive School,” historians shifted away from the Germanic style of “scientific” history, and the rigorous analysis of primary documents to extract larger historical truths.⁴⁶ Drawing from their contemporary experiences, progressive scholars such as Frederick Jackson Turner, Charles

⁴⁵ Ernst Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval, & Modern*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 293-302

⁴⁶ Sean Wilentz, “American Political Histories,” in *A Century of American Historiography*, ed. James M. Banner Jr. (Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 2.

A. Beard, and Vernon L. Parrington used economic criteria to evaluate the past and saw conflict as a major driving force throughout U.S. history.

Turner's 1893 essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," presented to the American Historical Association, argued that in its political and socioeconomic effects, three centuries of westward movement of population across the continent provided a democratizing experience that was uniquely "American." This concept, known as the frontier thesis, was identical to Sombart's emphasis on geographic mobility, except instead of lamenting the class impediment, Turner fear the closing of the frontier: "A new national development is before us without the former safety valve of abundant resources open to him who would take. Classes are becoming alarmingly distinct."⁴⁷

Beard embraced the concept of class struggle, but mainly in terms of farmers and middle-class producers versus financial elites, not the industrial working class, in works such as *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (1913) and *The Rise of American Civilization* (1927) that argued that such conflict was defining the featuring of U.S. history. Parrington's *Main Currents in American Thought* (1927–1930), in turn, focused on U.S. literary and intellectual history by proposing a sharp divide between elitist Hamiltonian currents and the populist Jeffersonian forces.

Progressive approaches characterized U.S. history as a struggle between the people versus the elites. This, however, was not a Marxist concept of class struggle. Turner, Beard, and Parrington saw private property and free enterprise as the best way to ensure there were opportunities for ordinary citizens of the United States, and thus private property should be

⁴⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, "Pioneer Ideals and the State University (1910)," in *Turner, The Frontier in American History*, (New York: Holt, 1920), 280.

protected. Instead of celebrating the past, however, progressive scholars looked for lessons to move forward and justify reforms to save capitalism.

The most important academic analysis of the Question in the Progressive era came from Selig Perlman, a scholar in the academic school of industrial labor economics and history that took root at the University of Wisconsin.⁴⁸ Perlman was born in Congress Poland (a part of Tsarist Russia), to parents active in the Zionist and labor movement. After immigrating to the United States in 1918, he attended the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he studied under Frederick Jackson Turner and the progressive labor historian and economist John R. Commons, with whom he would work for years to come. Under their influences, Perlman abandoned an earlier dedication to Marxism in favor of a Progressive approach to the study of labor.

In works such as *The History of Labor in the United States* (written with Commons, 10 vols., 1918) and *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (1928), Perlman questioned the argument proposed by Lenin and others that criticized unions for too often pursuing higher wages and better working conditions (the so-called “bread-and-butter” issues), rather than putting their efforts towards revolution. Lenin had suggested in his extremely influential political pamphlet of 1902, “What Is to Be Done?” that it is the role of intellectuals and professional revolutionaries to enter the labor movement and guide it along.⁴⁹ Perlman agreed with Lenin yet he claimed that the working class was inherently conservative and that radicalism only arose from the agitation of intellectuals imposing their own anti-capitalist beliefs upon them.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Lipset, “Why No Socialism in the United States?,” 63-2

⁴⁹ V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 4 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1929), 114.

⁵⁰ Adolph Sturmthal, “Comments on Selig Perlman’s *A Theory of the Labor Movement*,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 4, no. 4 (July 1951): 485-6.

Unlike Lenin, Perlman proposed that the conservative nature of the working class was a positive thing.⁵¹ Unions formed, Perlman argued, as a means for workers to maintain high wages. It was correct, not an aberration, for unions to focus solely on wages and working conditions, he wrote. In this "business unionism" model of labor, members defined the goals of the union.⁵² These conservative features of the proletariat particularly held true for U.S. workers Perlman concluded. It was for this reason there was no socialism in the United States.

The causes of conservatism among U.S. workers ran the gamut, according to Perlman. Partially, it was due to the particular nature of the U.S. national character. Being rooted in puritanism with its emphasis on individualism, he wrote, the ethos of workers in the United States was not compatible with the social collectivism needed for socialism. Perlman also suggested that worker conservatism had to do with the racial and ethnic makeup of the United States. Not only did ethnic heterogeneity prevent deep class affiliations from forming, but the waves of immigrants had made it so there was not a "settled" wage earning class to organize.⁵³ Perlman suggested that these immigrants and their offspring were conservative by nature, primarily focused on improving their inferior lot, therefore working to support, rather than challenge the capitalist system.⁵⁴

Revealing his affinity with Progressives, Perlman put economic reasons at the forefront of the reasons why the United State was unsuitable for socialism. Agreeing with Sombart and many socialist commentators, he saw the U.S. class structure as much more fluid than in Europe. This fluidity offered "the opportunity for the exceptional workman to desert his class and set up

⁵¹ Ibid., 489.

⁵² Braham Dabscheck, "Reviews: 'Trade Unionism: Purposes and Forms,' by Ross M. Martin," *Australian Journal of Management*, 16, no. 1 (June 1991): 97.

⁵³ Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1960), 276-7.

⁵⁴ Bell, *The End of Ideology*, 276-7.

in business for himself.”⁵⁵ If workers in the United States could reasonably hope to escape the confines of their class, the argument went, they would not go to great lengths to try to change it.

According to Perlman, this egalitarian class system produced a unique political system in the United States, which was the most important feature in inhibiting the growth of radicalism. Agreeing with the likes of Kautsky, Lenin and Hillquit, Perlman pointed out that universal manhood suffrage was attained in the United States without much struggle. This “free gift of the ballot” as he would come to call it,

...came to labor at an early date as a by product of the Jeffersonian democratic movement. In other countries, where the labor movement started while the workingmen were still denied the franchise, there was in the last analysis no need of a theory of “surplus value” to convince them that they were a class apart and should therefore be ‘class conscious.’ There ran a line like a red thread between the laboring class and the other classes. Not so where that line is only an economic one.⁵⁶

Perlman contended that, unlike other working class political movements like the Chartists in England, the U.S. working class had primarily economic demands.⁵⁷ Without a political component to the movement, workers in the United States never became politically active and were content to settle their grievances through unions and strikes rather than developing a labor based political organization. For Perlman, it was this focus on economic issues that led to the development of “business unionism” and the anti-political, job-consciousness approach of U.S. labor. Perlman’s view not only coincided with the Progressive scholarly focus on economics, but also served the Progressive agenda by highlighting the overall conservatism of the working class

⁵⁵ Selig Perlman, *A History of Trade Unionism in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan CO., 1922), p 65.

⁵⁶ Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 167-68.

⁵⁷ Bell, *The End of Ideology*, 276-7.

in the United States as well as focusing on the potential of the United States political system to both implement and prevent social change.

V.

The outlook for the United States' conversion to socialism diminished even further as events surrounding World War I stunted the hope of radical political action. At home the United States resorted to repression to silence dissent through measures such as the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918, which made it a crime to write, publish or even talk about the armed forces in a negative way and allowed the government to prosecute scores of radicals. And following the War, the persecution continued as radicals were denied political rights, subject to exclusionary laws, arrested, and even killed. The First Red Scare (1919-1921) was spurred in large part by one of the most lasting outcomes of the WWI, the Russian Revolution of 1917.

The Russian Revolution enabled a Marxist party to assume the reigns of power of a nation for the first time in history. This would have profound effects on radicalism the world over, including the United States. The revolutionary Bolsheviks taking the title of the Communist Party, assumed the mantle of the leaders of the worldwide workers' movement following the creation of the Soviet Union. Through the creation of the Third, or Communist International (Comintern), they tried to refashion the world's Marxist parties in their image. In the United States the left wing of the Socialist party split off in 1919 to form the Communist Party of America, joining with the Communist Labor Party to form the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) in 1920. Only months after its founding, the CPUSA had 60,000 members, while the

Socialist party had only 40,000.⁵⁸ This would not only help cripple the American Socialist party by producing deep fractures within it but would incite further repression from government authorities, thereby changing the entire nature of the debate surrounding socialism in the United States.

It was now clear that the United States would not be the first country to usher in socialism and the Communists were faced with the task of explaining why. This was theoretically important as a means to reconcile Marxist theory that socialism would first appear in the country that was most advanced industrially with the fact that it actually began in the primarily agrarian and industrially weak state of Russia. In addition, this was a practical problem. Since the goal of the Comintern, initially, was to spread revolution worldwide, it needed to be determined what approaches, if any, should be taken in the United States. Communists needed to understand why there was no socialism in the United States. To resolve this contradiction Communist thinkers like Grigory Zinoviev, the Bolshevik revolutionary and leader of the Comintern, claimed there was something about the United States that made it different from the rest of the countries. Instead of the more advanced capitalist countries collapsing first, the United States was affluent enough to stave off the inevitable deterioration of capitalism longer than most, at least temporarily.⁵⁹

This theory was expounded in 1926 when Zinoviev first declared that instead of the anticipated decline, U.S. Capitalism was “on the upgrade.”⁶⁰ Hungarian Communist and Comintern functionary for the CPUSA, John Pepper, incorporated this line of reasoning into his

⁵⁸ "Communist Party USA." *West's Encyclopedia of American Law*. 2005. *Encyclopedia.com*. (June 7, 2014). <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3437700990.html>

⁵⁹ Lipset, “Why No Socialism in the United States?,” 66-67.

⁶⁰ Joseph Stalin, “The Seventh Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, November 22-December 16, 1926,” *Works*, vol. 9, December 1926-July 1927 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1954).

address to the Ninth Enlarged Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern in 1928.

Pepper identified it as number one out of his five “fundamental differences” between the United States and the Europe:

1. American capitalism is still on the *upgrade* as compared with European capitalism.
2. American imperialism is still increasing in power on almost every front of world politics...
3. The American working class as a whole is in a privileged position compared with the European working class...
4. ...The working class of America has not yet reached that stage of class-consciousness and homogeneity which is the prerequisite of constituting itself as an independent political factor.
5. There is no marked tendency of a left trend on a national scale in the American working class.⁶¹

This explanation provided the Communists a way to explain away the peculiarity that was the United States. They accepted that U.S. capitalism would decay and with it would come the inevitable proletariat revolution. They only sought to update Marxist theory in light of the unimaginable success of United States industry, and adjust their expectations, and tactics, for the U.S. branch of the Communist Party accordingly. As Jay Lovestone, then general secretary of the CPUSA, put it blankly, “objective conditions prevailing in the United States are not favorable for the development of a mass Communist Party.”⁶²

However, Joseph Stalin, the Bolshevik revolutionary who by the late 1920s had assumed undisputed control of the Soviet Union and Comintern, rejected this defeatism. Stalin chastised the U.S. Party for believing in what he coined as “American exceptionalism” by inflating the distinctiveness of U.S. capitalism. Instead, Stalin declared that the collapse of worldwide capitalism was nigh, and returned the United States as the theoretical harbinger of socialist

⁶¹ John Pepper, “America and the Tactics of the Communist International,” *The Communist*, 7 (April 1928): 223-4. (emphasis added).

⁶² Jay Lovestone, quoted in Harvey Klehr, “Leninism and Lovestonism,” *Studies in Comparative Communism* 7 (Spring/Summer 1974): 7-12

success. At a speech to the American Commission of the Comintern in 1929 he expounded the new position:

The Communist Party of America is one of the few communist parties in the world upon which history has placed tasks of decisive importance from the point of the international revolutionary movement... Many seem to think that the general crisis of capitalism will not affect America. This, of course, is wrong... I think that the moment is not far off when a revolutionary crisis comes in the United States, it will mark the beginning of the end of world capitalism.⁶³

While admitting that the United States, like any other country, had “special peculiarities,” Stalin warned that it was “incorrect to base the activities of the Communist Party on these specific features, since... the general features of capitalism... are the same in all countries.”⁶⁴ Stalin had restored the significance of the United States in Marxist theory while simultaneously ending its remarkableness.

At the same time, not all socialists followed the Communist party line. Bolshevik revolutionary and soon-to-be-exiled Soviet leader Leon Trotsky saw U.S. capitalism as not yet “having exhausted itself,” and “incomparably stronger and more solid than European capitalism.”⁶⁵ According to Trotsky, the retarded development of class consciousness in the United States was due to immense economic power, which allowed it “to apply the traditional method of the British bourgeoisie to fatten the labor aristocracy in order to keep the workers in

⁶³ Joseph Stalin, “Speech Delivered in the American Commission of the Presidium of the ECCI, May 6, 1929,” (San Francisco: Proletarian Publishers, 1970), accessed June 7, 2014. <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1929/cpusa.htm>.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Leon Trotsky, “Extrait d’un Rapport à la Fraction Communiste du 10^e Congrès des Soviets,” in Trotsky, *Europe et Amérique* (Paris: Librairie de l’Humanité, 1926). 89-91.

shackles.”⁶⁶ As long as U.S. capitalism was growing, it could provide enough workers with enough benefits to prevent the growth of socialism.

Leon Samson, a radical U.S. socialist, instead connected the absence of socialism to values in the United States. Samson claimed that instead of Marxism, “Americanism” was the dominant ideology among U.S. workers, and with its creed of egalitarianism, Americanism prevented socialism by making many in the United States believe that they already possessed what socialism offered:

When we examine the meaning of Americanism, we discover that Americanism is to the American not a tradition or a territory, not what France is to a Frenchman or England to an Englishman, but a doctrine—what socialism is to a socialist. Like socialism, Americanism is looked upon ... as a highly attenuated, conceptualized, platonic, impersonal attraction toward a system of ideas, a solemn assent to a handful of final notions—democracy, liberty, opportunity, to all of which the American adheres rationalistically much as a socialist adheres to his socialism—because it does him good, because it gives him work, because, so he thinks, it guarantees him happiness. Americanism has thus served as a substitute for socialism.⁶⁷

In the 1930s by the CPUSA under the leadership of Earl Browder tried to exploit this connection between Americanism and socialism. Under the slogan “Communism is 20th Century Americanism” Browder tried to gain the party mainstream acceptance by portraying Communism as an indigenous reform movement during the period of cooperation known as the Popular Front (1935-1939).⁶⁸ The CPUSA joined with Communist parties around the world in making alliances with liberal and leftist groups in order to defend the world from the growing

⁶⁶ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁷ Leon Samson, *Toward a United Front: A Philosophy For American Workers* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1935), 16-17.

⁶⁸ Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On?: The American Communist Party During the Second World War*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982),9.

fascist threat as well as to take advantage of the weakened state of capitalism during the Great Depression to make social advances.

The Communist party in the 1930s experienced unprecedented approval in the United States. CPUSA membership swelled to over 65,000 as it organized the unemployed, created "red" unions, and fought evictions of farmers and the working poor.⁶⁹ The Party also championed the rights of African Americans by offering aid and organization to poor black sharecroppers and tenant farmers, as well as legal representation to the high-profile Alabama "Scottsboro Boys" case, where it succeeded in freeing eight, young black men, wrongly sentenced to death.⁷⁰

Politically, the Communist Party gained legitimacy when it aligned itself with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his administration's "New Deal" reform (1933-1938), which sought to save the capitalist system and prevent more radical forces from taking action with measures that restructured the nation's financial system, created employment through public work programs, slowed farm and home foreclosure rates, and provided basic relief for the suffering public. This was accompanied by the inclusion of Communists and radicals into the nation's cultural sphere. Michael Denning, American Studies Scholar, has termed it the "Cultural Front," "the brief moment when 'politics' captured the arts, when writers went left, Hollywood turned Red, and painters, musicians, and photographers were 'social-minded.'"⁷¹ Radicalism in the United States was on an upswing

⁶⁹ Paul Buhle and Dan Georgakas, "Communist Party, USA," *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), accessed June 7, 2014, <http://www.marxists.org/history/usa/parties/cpusa/encyclopedia-american-left.htm>.

⁷⁰ Richard Wormser, "Jim Crow Stories: Communist Party, USA." *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, (PBS, 2002), Web. Accessed June 5, 2014, www.pbs.org/jimcrow.

⁷¹ Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century*, (London: Verso, 1998),xvi.

PART TWO: No Feudalism, No Socialism

Consensus Scholars and the American Ethos, 1950s-1960s

The period following World War II saw a shift in the attempts to answer the Question “Why is there no socialism in the United State?” While it was primarily within the realm of radical thinkers in the first half of the century, by the second, it had been relegated to academia and scholarly debate. By the time World War II ended and a Cold War between the United States emerged radicalism had seemingly been destroyed. In the state of post-war stability and prosperity, academics in the social sciences and history took up the question, not in an attempt to learn how to usher in socialism, but instead to declare its demise. The answers primarily assumed an overarching character or “ethos” of the United States that predestined them toward moderation, and which caused the basic agreement or “consensus” that characterized the U.S. past. These consensus scholars sought to prove to themselves, and their critics, that the failure of socialism in the United States was inevitable. And so they asked: “Why, thank God, is there no socialism in the United States?”

I.

The Popular Front strategy ended temporarily with the signing of the non-aggression Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi-Germany in 1939. With Hitler and the Soviets in truce, Communist parties were ordered to switch from a position of cooperation with capitalist regimes to one advocating non-intervention in the growing “imperialist” war. With this abrupt about-face, the CPUSA lost much of the goodwill it had

earned the decade prior, especially as the Roosevelt administration ramped up its interventionist propaganda campaign. Though the Soviet Union and the United States became allies once more as they joined the war against the Axis Powers after Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 and the U.S. Communist movement saw a resurgence of membership during World War II to its all-time high of 85,000, the marriage would be short-lived.⁷²

Revelations of overt anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, the Soviet-backed coup in Czechoslovakia in 1948, the emergence of the Cold War, the growing awareness of the atrocities committed under Stalin's reign, and the brutal crushing of the Hungarian uprising in 1956 severely challenged the prospects for a global proletariat revolution. Instead of a decaying advanced capitalist economy on the verge of collapse, moreover, the United States emerged from the war as the most powerful economic and military nation in the world. Instead of the socialists' hope of a return to the prewar state of depression, the United States experienced the greatest era of economic prosperity in its history.

The Cold War brought heightened political repression against radicals at home that included a fear campaign spreading paranoia over the infiltration of and influence over U.S. institutions by communists. The Second Red Scare (1950-1956) as it was called, decimated the remaining CPUSA members and drove the rest into hiding. The Socialist party, whose membership had been dwindling for years, dropped out of electoral politics altogether after garnering less than 100,000 votes in the 1952 presidential election. Radicalism in the United States had declined significantly, and it appeared to many that socialism had officially failed.

The profound ideological shift in the United States helped bring about a transformation of U.S. academic thought as well. By the 1930s the Progressive interpretation of history had begun

⁷² Buhle and Georgakas, "Communist Party, USA."

to falter. Turner's frontier thesis was increasingly seen as irrelevant to the modern industrial society and scholars grew weary of the Beardian model solely based on economic conflict.⁷³

World War II was the deathblow to progressivism. The view that mankind was always progressing was shattered by the unprecedented level of violence and bloodshed surrounding the war. How could one reconcile these horrors with liberal confidence in the constant betterment of man? The stage was set for the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr to be the unlikely impetus for a monumental shift in the historical profession. Starting out as a social gospel evangelical minister in inner city Detroit, in the 1920s, Niebuhr soon became restless of Marxist doctrines, seeing humans as more complex than economically driven, and identifying the irrational elements by which people act against their own interests.

In a world torn apart by totalitarian regimes on both the right and the left, Niebuhr recognized that civilization was not becoming more moral, that love and justice were not prevailing. Using theological, psychological and classical Greek motifs, the theologian portrayed a picture of man that was inherently flawed, one framed by a metaphorical "original sin." In what would be called Christian Realism, Niebuhr attacked utopianism as naïve and asserted that the perfectibility of man was impossible. Despite this reduced belief in mankind, Niebuhr advocated for action, often military, and claimed the only way to confront evil in the world was with countervailing power, yet he insisted that democracy needed to separate from a state of innocence. To to preserve its values, one needed to use institutions, power, and occasionally coercion.

The works of Niebuhr would have remained obscure if Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. had not adopted them. Distressed by rise of fascist regimes on the right and the pacifist line taken by the

⁷³ Kenneth Kusmer, "Historiography," *Oxford Encyclopedia of American Cultural and Intellectual History*, eds. Joan Rubin and Scott Casper, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013),3-4.

Communists before 1941, Schlesinger came to see threats from both the left and the right. In an article for Life Magazine and later book titled *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (1945), he claimed individual freedom was more important than equality and that the moderates of the world had more in common with each other than they had with the extremes and thus need to form a coalition to fight for liberty.⁷⁴ The "‘vital center’ refers to the contest *between* democracy and totalitarianism, not to contests *within* democracy between liberalism and conservatism." He stated.⁷⁵ This concept that conservatism and liberalism are actually mostly in agreement and represent a moderate middle ground between the extreme left and right would become very influential to a new generation of historians who had turned to Niebuhr and Schlesinger’s concepts to replace the seemingly outdated progressive interpretation.

The U.S. historian Richard Hofstadter in his iconoclastic book, *The American Political Tradition* (1948), first elucidated this theory of the moderation of the United States. Influenced by the common experiences of a unified nation at war, followed soon after by the onset of the Cold War against a common enemy and a period of prolonged prosperity, Hofstadter maintained that conflict was not as important a force in U.S. society as the Progressives had once stressed. Instead, a new generation of historians emerged to emphasize the shared values of people in the United States and what brought them together as opposed to what divided them. The history that stressed continuity or consensus throughout the U.S. past became known as the “Counter-Progressive” or “Consensus” model and by the mid-1950s was firmly established as the dominant school in U.S. scholarship.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin CO., 1949).

⁷⁵ Arthur Schlesinger, "Introduction to the Transaction Edition," *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998),xiii.

⁷⁶ Kusmer, "Historiography," 5.

II.

The consensus model was predicated upon the belief that the history of the United States was marked by cooperation and moderation as opposed to conflict and extremism. At the center of this was the assumption that something inherent in the ethos or character of the United States was antithetical to radicalism. Since the lack of U.S. socialism was central to the entire intellectual school, theories as to why socialism failed in the United States became central to many of its interpretations of U.S. History.

The most influential of the consensus interpretations addressing the lack of socialism in the United States came from the U.S. political scientist Louis Hartz. In his seminal work *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (1955), Hartz argues that the United States is founded on the concepts of the 17th century English philosopher John Locke that espouse equality, liberty, representative democracy, restraints on the government, civil rights, laissez faire-capitalism, and private property rights. This form of Lockean liberalism, insists Hartz, became so deeply engrained within the United States that radicalism could not find fertile ground:

For swallowing up both peasantry and proletariat into the “petit-bourgeois” scheme, America created two unusual effects. It prevented socialism from challenging its Liberal Reform in any effective way, and at the same time it enslaved its Liberal Reform to the Alger dream of democratic capitalism.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1955), 228.

The reason Hartz gave for this particularly strong tendency towards U.S. liberalism can be summed up by his famous adage: “No feudalism, No socialism,” the fact that unlike Europe, the United States lacked a feudal past:

It is not accidental that America which has uniquely lacked a feudal tradition has uniquely lacked also a socialist tradition. The hidden origin of socialist thought everywhere in the West is to be found in feudalism ethos... Everywhere in Europe, in MacDonald’s England hardly less than in Kautsky’s Germany, socialism was inspired considerably by the class spirit that hung over not from capitalism but from the feudal system itself.⁷⁸

For Hartz, The United States was a thoroughly bourgeois nation. It never experienced feudalism, the pre-capitalist system based on the servitude of the peasants to the propertied aristocratic class, and was founded entirely on liberal Enlightenment ideals. This was the cause for the consensus in the United States. Instead of a history of conflict between classes over the proper way to structure society, Hartz contended that throughout U.S. history both the right and the left in the United States had agreed upon the basic social structure. The United States not only lacked a socialist or radical left party, but also a Tory or extreme right segment of society. It was, by nature, moderate. Because the United States was free from this feudal baggage, class-lines were less permanent and this was the reason, according to Hartz, why there was less class consciousness among U.S. workers, and therefore, less class conflict.

Along the same vein of Perlman’s “free gift of the ballot,” Hartz stressed how the United States skipped the struggle for emancipation under feudalism since “socialism arises not to fight capitalism but the remnants of feudalism itself...”⁷⁹ The lack of feudalism in the United States

⁷⁸ Ibid., 6, 234.

⁷⁹ Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, 9.

also meant an absence of what Hartz called a “medieval corporate spirit.”⁸⁰ Europeans peasant under feudalism acted and thought in a much more collective manner. With this lacking in the United States, the socialist had the impossible task of trying to recreate a form of collectivism that had no place in the traditions of U.S. workers. Socialists failed in part because their lack of understanding the peculiarities of the U.S. public led to their “persistent use of European concepts of Marxism” where it was not applicable.⁸¹ So not only a pervasive liberalism, and an obstructed class consciousness, but also a lack of collectivism can all be attributed to a lack of feudalism, according to Hartz.

It should be noted that this focus on feudalism did not originate solely with Hartz. Going back decades, thinkers including Marx, Engels, Sombart, Trotsky, Lenin, and Gramsci have all made the connection between the United States’ unique position and its lack of a feudal past.⁸²

Writing in 1906, H.G. Wells declared:

[My] chief argument is that the Americans started almost clear of medieval heritage, and developed in... the modern type of productive social organization. They took the economic conventions that were modern and progressive at the end of the eighteenth century and stamped them into the Constitution as if they meant to stamp them there for all time... America is pure eighteenth century⁸³

Under Hartz, however, this theory took on new dimensions. It perfectly encapsulated the spirit of consensus scholarship in the post-war United States. Consensus historians shared a common theoretical framework that citizen of the United States across the centuries had agreed upon how to structure society, and that this agreement on democracy and liberal capitalism

⁸⁰ Louis Hartz, “Reply to ‘Comment on *The Liberal Tradition* (1974),” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 2nd ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 357.

⁸¹ Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*, 235.

⁸² Lipset, “Why No Socialism in the United States?,” 81.

⁸³ Wells, *The Future in America*, 72-76.

prevented conflict, diminished differences and explained the absence of extreme ideologies like socialism.⁸⁴

III.

While ranking as one of the most important explanations of American exceptionalism, Hartz's *Liberal Tradition* was not a celebration of American capitalism. Actually it lamented The United States' incapacity to deal with the complex realities of the modern world because of its confinement within the liberal ethos.⁸⁵ Viewed in this light, *the Liberal Tradition* could almost be considered Marxist, in how it assumes the inevitability of socialism if the prescribed precursors are in place.

Other consensus interpretations of U.S socialism were not as generous. It was this generation that, instead of wondering *when*, or *if*, socialism would come to the United States, declared emphatically that it would not. And in the geo-political landscape of the Cold War, much of the scholarship surrounding radicalism was as much an obituary for socialism as it was a victory cry for U.S. capitalism and national traditions of moderation.

For example, the jingoistic U.S. historian Daniel Boorstin in *The Genius of American Politics* (1953) proclaimed it was the praiseworthy pragmatism of the U.S. public, which allowed them to escape the destructive ideologies of Europe.⁸⁶ Clinton Rossiter, the historian and political scientist, refers to an all-encompassing "American tradition" in *Marxism: the View from*

⁸⁴ Kusmer, "Historiography," 6.

⁸⁵ Eric Foner, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?," *History Workshop Journal* 17, (Spring 1984): 62.

⁸⁶ Daniel Boorstin, *The Genius of American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953).

America (1960).⁸⁷ According to Rossiter, the American tradition is “consciously pluralistic. Its unity is the result and process through which unnumbered diversities of faith and intellect seek to live together in accommodation...[It] is doggedly individualistic... It understands that freedom is an eternal paradox...”⁸⁸ It is,

a casual blend of conservatism and liberalism. It is conservative... because it is cautious and moderate, because it is disposed to preserve what it has inherited, because it puts a high value on tradition as a social force and prudence as an individual virtue... Yet it is liberal, too... because it is open-handed and open-minded, because it really expects the future to be better than the past, because it is interested first of all in the development of free men.⁸⁹

It is this tradition, he believes, that prevents Marxism from taking hold. People of the United States are too rational for socialism. And while Marxists are well intentioned, they fall prey to economic determinism and come to see life only as the product of economics. Only the U.S. system based on collaboration and individualism can see men for the “robust individuals” they are and “not just a good member of an economic class.”⁹⁰ For Rossiter the overarching ethos of the United States made socialism impossible.

Other scholars of this time looked to more tangible aspects of the U.S. experience for possible answers, though with the same all-encompassing approach of their colleagues. Reflecting the postwar economic boom, academics such as economists Charles A. Gulick and Melvin Bers writing in the journal *Industrial Labor Relations Review*, reiterated Sombart’s emphasis on the affluence of the United States as an inhibiting factor:

There is in the American experience one colossal datum which has stood above all the rest. It has been the fact of a tremendously growing level of material well being yielded

⁸⁷ Clinton Rossiter, *Marxism: the View from America*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1960),239.

⁸⁸ Rossiter, *Marxism*, 239-241.

⁸⁹ Rossiter, *Marxism*, 243.

⁹⁰ Rossiter, *Marxism*, 76.

by the system as a whole... the American wage earner has experienced over a seventy-five year period a rate of economic betterment which has made him labor aristocrat of the world.⁹¹

According to Gulick and Bers pervasive prosperity not only provided support of the capitalist system, or at least an apathy to a program of change, but led to the consensus model of labor relations, where workers acted in what Selig Perlman referred to as a “job-conscious” manner, agreeing to forgo political action in exchange for a seat at the table with government and business management as economic partners.⁹²

Historian of the U.S. South David M. Potter added to the discussion by claiming in *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (1954), that the United States had been defined by its sheer immensity of wealth and resources. It is this abundance, he suggested, that has prevented radical movement:

Essentially, the difference is that Europe has always conceived of redistribution of wealth as necessitating the expropriation of some and the corresponding aggrandizement of others; but America has conceived of it primarily in the terms of giving to some without taking from others.⁹³

Influenced by the U.S. postwar prosperity, the theory held that in the United States, unlike Europe, there was enough wealth to go around. This affluence not only prevented class conflict, according to Potter, but contributed to cooperation in society, as every class in the United States came to realize that they all could achieve more by working together.

⁹¹ Charles A. Gulick and Melvin Bers, “Insight and Illusion in Perlman’s Theory of the Labor Movement,” *Industrial Labor Relations Review* 6, no 4 (July, 1953): 559.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 528.

⁹³ David M. Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), 118-121.

IV.

While explanations concerning the United States' lack of socialism continued to focus on affluence and tangible effects, most scholars did so under a framework of an overarching U.S. ethos. Some intrepid scholars sought to combine the two. In *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (1959), political scientist Seymour M. Lipset and sociologist Reinhard Bendix discussed both influences, not only, the level of affluence and social mobility that kept radicalism at bay, they argued, but a pervasive spirit in the United States that this affluence was attainable. "For as a matter of fact it is not really clear whether the different political orientation of the American and European worker reflects different opportunities for social mobility or only a difference in their ethos!" they stated.⁹⁴ Lipset and Bendix tried to show that a main part of the ethos of the United States was the belief in the "American Dream" of social mobility, which encouraged workers to work within the system to achieve their desire, instead of working to change it.

The common framework of trying to apply an overarching ethos was also used to examine the peculiarities of the U.S. working class as a possible explanation for the lack of socialism in the United States. Adolph Sturmtal, the Austrian-American political scientist and sociologist of labor studies and international relations, started with Hartz's now commonplace explanation of the "absence of feudalism" and concluded that U.S. workers were more independent of the state. In another contribution to the *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* (1951), Sturmtal contrasted this with the conditions in Europe, where a tradition of enlightened absolutism under the monarchies of feudalism, left in place a hierarchical and stratified society.

⁹⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset and Reinhard Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 12.

According to Sturmthal, the lower classes under enlightened absolutism became accustomed to a certain amount of dependence on the state. This “belief in the all-powerful state,” in turn, led to the “peculiar tendency of European labor to settle by law the problem of labor relations that American unions traditionally solve by way of collective agreement.”⁹⁵ U.S. workers lacked this statist attitude, and engaged in Selig Perlman’s “business unionism” where they sought out only economic demands and dealt directly with their employers through contracts and negotiations. European unions, in contrast, worked within the framework of the state and went through political channels, which led to political organization based on class factors, and eventually a sizeable socialist movement.⁹⁶

U.S. labor historian Marc Karson’s *American Labor Unions and Politics 1900-1918* (1958) described pervasive middle class individualism and an anti-statist fear of a strong central government as the “central creed” of U.S. workers:

The American worker feels middle-class and behaves middle-class. To understand his politics, one must recognize his psychology, a large part of which is middle-class derived... When Socialists criticize the self-interest and acquisitive spirit of capitalism, the worker feels under attack for within himself, he knows, burns the capitalistic spirit.⁹⁷

Karson attributed the conservatism of U.S. labor unions to Samuel Gompers, the influential president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) from 1886 until his death in 1924. Under Gompers’ tutelage the AFL became the United States’ largest and most powerful labor organization. Though Gompers initially had been sympathetic to socialist politics, noted Karson, he turned away from class issues towards harmonious cooperation with capitalism and business unionism.

⁹⁵Sturmthal, “Comments on Selig Perlman’s *A Theory of the Labor Movement*,” 487.

⁹⁶ Marc Karson, *American Labor Unions and Politics, 1900–1918* (Carbondale IL.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1958), 290-292.

⁹⁷ Karson, *American Labor Unions and Politics*, 290.

The Labor movement under Gompers focused on “pure-and-simple” unionism devoted mainly to “bread-and-butter” economic issues such as issues of wages, benefits, hours, seniority, anti-injunction legislation, and working conditions, all of which could be negotiated through collective bargaining.⁹⁸ In politics, the Federation sought "political nonpartisanship," or as Gompers put it, a promise to "elect their friends and defeat their enemies." This meant they avoided grand reform proposals or direct political action such as the formation of a labor party in favor of maintaining an independent political agenda and leveraging labor’s mobilization in exchange for support.⁹⁹

V.

As Karson explained, Gompers rejected the industrial unionism of the more radical Knights of Labor, and later the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), which advocated organizing all workers within an industry regardless of skill or position. Instead, the AFL remained substantially the domain of skilled, white, native-born, male workers, or the labor aristocracy. This nativist, labor-segmentation approach prevented repression and by World War I, Gompers was able to leverage his position for political favors as he was appointed to the Council of National Defense by President Woodrow Wilson. There he helped craft national labor policy, including explicit government support for independent trade unions and collective bargaining in exchange for the wartime mobilization of the labor movement. Gompers and the AFL, as a result, gained clout in national politics and undue influence over the entire labor movement in the United States up to the 1930s.

⁹⁸ “Samuel Gompers (American Labour Leader),” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica, n.d. Web. Date accessed June 7, 2014.

⁹⁹ Samuel Gompers, “Labor’s Political Campaign,” *American Federationist* 15, no. 5 (May, 1908): 342.

According to Karson, it was, in large part Gompers's ideological leadership that changed the face of the AFL, as well as the organized U.S. working class.¹⁰⁰ Beyond the influence of Gompers, however, Karson also attributed the conservative psychology of the workers to the Roman Catholic faith of the large number of immigrants within its ranks. In a 1951 journal article for *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Karson argued that the "weakness of socialism" in the AFL "was, in part, a testimonial to the success of the Catholic Church's opposition to the doctrine."¹⁰¹

The prolific U.S. social historian Oscar Handlin also attributed socialism's failure, at least in part, to Catholicism. In his groundbreaking study, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation* (1941), Handlin singled out the Irish as especially anti-radical, with efforts to change the world being viewed from futile to sacrilegious. For Handlin, however, the argument went backwards.¹⁰² It was not religion that made the Irish conservative, but their former conservative nature that made them religious. And the most important feature contributing to the overarching conservative ethos of the Irish was their peasant status. In "The Immigrant and American Politics," in *Foreign Influence in American Life* (1944), Handlin argued that the trauma of transplanting communities to a foreign land isolated and alienated peasant immigrants:

Perhaps the most prevalent myth about immigrants links them with radicalism, but nothing could be farther from the truth. The overwhelming majority were exceedingly conservative in politics, as in other forms of social expression. The peasant origins of many, and the comparative backwardness of the societies from which they emigrated,

¹⁰⁰ Karson, *American Labor Unions and Politics*, x,69.

¹⁰¹ Marc Karson, "The Catholic Church and the Political Development of American Trade Unionism (1900-1918)," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 4 (July 1951): 542.

¹⁰² Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1865: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1941).

bred a submissiveness which was not shed in the crossing. In fact the very process of emigration fosters it.¹⁰³

It was this shock of emigration that caused the immigrant of peasant backgrounds to turn inward to the security of ethnic ties or religion, and reject the call of radicalism.¹⁰⁴

Consensus thought is readily apparent in the seminal work, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (1960), by the U.S. sociologist Daniel Bell. Going beyond a consensus examination of the working class, Bell took the concept of an all-encompassing U.S. ethos and applied it to the radical parties themselves. He argued that the grand ideologies of the nineteenth century were becoming outdated as the United States moved beyond the need for any ideologies. In this view, ideologically driven individuals or groups such as socialists were inherently irrational and unreasonable and thus doomed to failure.

Bell suggested that the interplay of competing interests in politics required compromise. Socialists were incapable of such pragmatism, he declared:

It is my argument that failure of socialist movement in the United States was rooted in its inability to resolve a basic dilemma of ethics and politics: the socialist movement by the way in which it stated its goal, and by way in which it rejected the capitalist order as a whole, could not relate itself to the specific problems of social action in the here and now, give and take political world. In Sum: it was trapped by the unhappy problem of living in but not of the world; it could only act, and then inadequately, as the moral, but not political, man in immoral society.¹⁰⁵

Bell asserted that socialists had two choices. They could remain outside of society or they could join it. From within they could try to influence the system but this would entail sacrificing

¹⁰³ Oscar Handlin, "The Immigrant and American Politics," in *Foreign Influence in American Life*, ed. David Bowers (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1944), 90-91.

¹⁰⁴ Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: From the Old World to the New*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1951), 217-8.

¹⁰⁵ Bell, *The End of Ideology*, 278-9.

some of their beliefs and lending de facto support to the system while possibly contributing to its survival by alleviating some of its systemic problems. If they remained on the outside, however, they could maintain their ideological purity and credibility, but they would all give up any ability to influence politics and simply act as a philosophical or ethical voice until the system collapsed on itself. U.S. Socialists, Bell contended, when faced with the problem of “living in but not of the world,” chose to straddle the line between the two. Yet their ideological rigidity prevented them from making the necessary sacrifices to succeed.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Bell, *The End of Ideology*, 287-98.

PART THREE: History from the Bottom Up

The New Left's Search for a Usable Past of U.S. Socialism, 1960s-1970s

The Consensus scholarship was shattered with the social upheaval of the 1960s and 1970s and was challenged by New Left historiography, which was no less influenced by the interests and needs of its generation. Inspired by the social justice movements of the era, a number of historians and social scientists increased focus on the lives of the dispossessed. This desire for a “history from the bottom up” shaped the way scholars answered the Question. Attention to the lives of rank-and-file workers and to the roots of the racial conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s led to explanations centering on the racial and ethnic divides within the U.S. workforce and the emergence of radical parties as a reason for “no socialism” in the United States.

An equally important development of this era was the search for a “usable past.” Scholars involved with the social justice movements of the day often sought a history that would encourage these struggles. This led some New Left academics to assign blame to the internal problems of the socialist movement. Such an approach not only refuted the “ethos” explanations of the Consensus era, but suggested that if these problems were fixable, then major social transformation in the United States was still possible. Other usable explanations focused on governmental repression, and the absorption of radicalism into mainstream movements, both contemporary concerns of the New Left. In effect, New Left scholars were simultaneously asking “Why, Goddammit was there no socialism?” as well as “How can there be Socialism in the United States?”

I.

As an example of Consensus scholarship, Bell's work reacted to the rise of extremist ideologies in Europe during the 1930s by placing a high price on moderation. Scholars such as Hartz, Boorstin, or Rossiter viewed U.S. capitalism as, if not desirable, then at least inevitable. And after experiencing the public unity that emerged during World War II and found a new common enemy in the Cold War, these academics often portrayed U.S. history as one of harmony and agreement in regard to matters of political economy.

Despite the dominance of the Consensus paradigm, however, several social conflicts threatened to unravel not only the academy, but society as a whole. By the 1960s the nascent African-American civil rights movement soon garnered national attention by confronting the system of racial segregation in the U.S. South. U.S. foreign policy saw the escalation of the war in Vietnam, which, to its critics, represented not the fair and just United States of the Consensus School, but rather an imperial venture designed to preserve capitalism. And as the casualties grew, so too did an anti-war movement swollen by the hordes of young people born in the boom following World War II now coming of age. Out of this new generation emerged a renewed zeal for social justice issues and a counterculture that revolutionized social and cultural norms about clothing, music, drugs, dress, formalities, and schooling.

The Consensus School could not explain the anomalies of poverty, racism, militarism, social disruption and violence that dominated public discourse by the Sixties. A framework emphasizing cooperation and unity increasingly seemed out of touch in the face of such blatant contradictions, and several scholars began to turn on its established wisdom. John Higham, the U.S. historian of home-grown nativism, was the first to name and criticize Consensus School in

the article for *Commentary*, “The Cult of the ‘American Consensus’: Homogenizing Our History (1959),” for seeking to “show us a single homogenized culture,” by carrying out “a massive grading operation to smooth over America’s social convulsions.”¹⁰⁷ In his influential article in *American Historical Review*, “Beyond Consensus: The Historian as a Moral Critic’ (1959), Higham called for a return to moral engagement.¹⁰⁸

One of the earliest and most influential scholars to shift away from the Consensus framework was William Appleman Williams. Williams’ rereading of U.S. diplomatic history helped set the tone for a general reinterpretation for the next generation of scholars. In *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (1959), Williams challenged conventional interpretations on The United States’ rise to world power status by claiming that U.S foreign policy was motivated by underlying expansionist tendencies rooted in an imperialist or “Open Door” policy. Williams turned the standard consensus interpretation of the Cold War around, blaming the United States, in part, for provoking a conflict with the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁹

As a sharp departure from the consensus model these radical interpretations shook conventional wisdom. Williams used the analytical tools of Niebuhr and turned them against the elites. Taking the consensus idea of pluralist powers balancing each other out, Williams put a spin on it and suggested it was actually a strategy of corporate interests seeking to stabilize capitalism through a collaboration between business, government, and labor. In this view, elites would make concessions that would ensure a long-term benefit of lowered class conflict through cooperation from the government. By inspiring a paradigm shift throughout the U.S. academy,

¹⁰⁷ John Higham, “The Cult of the ‘American Consensus’: Homogenizing Our History,” *Commentary* 27 (February, 1959): 93-101.

¹⁰⁸ John Higham, “Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic,” *The American Historical Review* 67, no. 3 (April 1962): 609-25.

¹⁰⁹ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962).

Williams became known as the “grand old man” of what would be called New Left” scholarship.¹¹⁰

Under the New Left paradigm, the perennial question of why there is no socialism in the United States took on new significance. Accordingly, New Left scholars immediately went to work to dismantle the Hartzian/consensus interpretation. The British sociologist Tom Bottomore, for example, asserted in his essay, “Comment on *The Relevance of Marxism*,” that the problem with the consensus explanation lied in its “notion of a single American ‘tradition,’ particularly in its conceptions of American democracy as the final attainment of the ‘good society,’ and the fundamental unchangeability of American institutions.”¹¹¹

Beyond this, New Left scholars attacked the Hartzian/consensus explanation for its lack of conflict. As U.S. social historian Eric Foner wrote,

The notion of an overarching liberal consensus went far toward understanding the context within which Hartz wrote – America of the 1950’s – but has proved of little value in explaining the strength of challenges to the capitalist order ranging from the class violence of 1877 to the Knights of Labor, Populism, and the old Socialist Party.¹¹²

As turmoil racked society, conflict came to the forefront of social sciences once again, and the consensus explanation that was based on the denying of any major upheavals throughout U.S. history had to be disregarded.

¹¹⁰ William Appleman Williams, *The Contours of American History*, (Cleveland World Publishing Co., 1961).

¹¹¹ Tom Bottomore, “Comment on *The Relevance of Marxism* (1974),” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 2nd ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 369.

¹¹² Foner, “Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?,” 63.

II.

Another critique of Consensus targeted an overarching U.S. ethos incompatible with the view that the United States was made of a multitude of diverse elements. Mirroring changing social beliefs about equity, a dominant feature of New Left scholarship was the belief that ordinary people possessed both the ability and the right to make decision for themselves.¹¹³ Suddenly the oppressed, the poor, and the exploited became central to many new studies as a “new social” history replaced the focus on the activities or ideas of elites. An interest in the diverse identities and historical experience of subordinate groups and a critical view of power structures led to a tendency toward what U.S. radical historian Jessie Lemisch, called “history from the bottom up.”¹¹⁴

A new generation of scholars now promoted the study of ordinary people throughout the past who often left no written record requiring new techniques. Some social historians began to use census data and evidence to try to extrapolate details from the populations of the past. The first major work to utilize these methods had been *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (1956), by the U.S. Progressive historian Merle Curti.¹¹⁵ His use of statistics and social science methodologies to systematically examine the social mobility of entire population of a frontier county set it apart from the older social history and helped establish the methodology for the new “Quantitative History” that would become central to many new social schools of historical analysis.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Gary J. Kornblith and Carol Lasser, “More than Great White Men: A Century of Scholarship on American Social History,” in *A Century of American Historiography*, ed. James M. Banner Jr., (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 16.

¹¹⁴ Staughton Lynd, “Reflections on Radical History,” *Radical History Review* 79 (Winter 2001): 104.

¹¹⁵ Merle Curti, *The Making of an American Community: A Case Study of Democracy in a Frontier County* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1956).

¹¹⁶ Kornblith and Lasser “More than Great White Men,” 14.

Quantitative history was soon used as a new tool in the arsenal of academics to address the topic of radicalism in the United States. U.S. historian Stephan Thernstrum adopted quantitative methods to test the assumption of many Consensus academics regarding the high levels of mobility of the United States. Going back to Marx and Sombart, commentators had asserted that high comparative levels of social mobility were major contributors to the lack of U.S. socialism. However, this theory rested entirely on conjecture and assumptions regarding the level of affluence of U.S. society, until Thernstrum put it to the test.

Examining the working-class city of Newburyport, Massachusetts for the years 1850 to 1880 and Boston from 1880 to 1963, Thernstrum, in his book *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (1964), concluded that the United States did have high levels of mobility when compared to the city of Marseilles in France. He also found that U.S. workers were likely to leave their place of birth, earn more money progressively over the course of their lives, earn more than their fathers, and enter into the property owning class. Yet homeownership required a severe limit on family spending and employment of the entire family. Those who did manage to attain the marker of “middle-class” success, did so often at the cost of their family’s comfort, putting women and children to work and requiring a level of austerity bordering on “ruthless under consumption.”¹¹⁷ Other scholars using the new methods of quantitative history, such as Tom Rishøj, published in the interdisciplinary journal on methodology *Quality and Quantity*, found that European cities such as Copenhagen had comparable rates of mobility to many U.S. Cities, if not higher rates.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Stephan Thernstrum, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 80-137.

¹¹⁸ Tom Rishøj, “Metropolitan Social Mobility 1850-1950: The Case of Copenhagen,” *Quality and Quantity*, (June 1971): 131-40.

Another new field that emerged in the 1970s was “ethnic studies”. Inspired by the racial tensions of 1960s, ethnic studies used the concept of history from the bottom up to bring attention to the diverse makeup of U.S. society. Scholars such as Iring Fetscher, the German political scientist, used this new field to help explain the United States’ unique ethnic mix. Fetscher argued that previous scholarship had failed to appreciate the rich diversity of U.S. society. Their model, he argued,

treats the American working class as a single unity. But in fact this has never been the case, and in the U.S.A. less so than in any other capitalist country. Not only does [it] not mention the Negro, but [it] overlooks the importance of the constant inflow of immigrants and the marked distinction between immigrants from the different part of Europe and Asia.¹¹⁹

Immigration and diversity, according to Fetscher, disproved the idea of a homogenous U.S. ethos, and therefore the Hartzian/consensus interpretation. Yet it also has been the same factor that that impeded the growth of socialism in the United States, he suggested, because it discouraged “the creation of a genuine sense of class consciousness and class solidarity” among a proletariat too heterogeneous to unite around class issues.¹²⁰

Investigating racial and ethnic conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s, Mike Davis, the writer, activist and historian, constructed a theory in his article “Why the U.S. Working Class is Different (1980),” in the *New Left Review*, in which diversity affected class consciousness in a different way. According to Davis, immigrant groups often formed complex ethnic and social networks that intended to forge cross class alliances based on shared ethnicity. These networks

¹¹⁹ Fetscher, “Comment 2 on *American Capitalism’s Economic Rewards*,” 478.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

diminished the strength of unions and class-based political parties, which sought to diminish ethnic loyalties and accentuate class.¹²¹

Sociologist Gerald Rosenblum, in *Immigrant Workers: Their Impact of American Labor Radicalism* (1973), used ethnic studies to help explain U.S. radicalism by focusing on the “new immigrants” that came to the United States during the intense period of immigration and industrialization in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. But rather than immigrants, Rosenblum argued, these workers should be viewed as more akin to migrant laborers, or “sojourners,” “insofar as their goals were short-term, narrowly economic, and oriented toward ultimate return to their home society.” Rosenblum pointed out that in 1910 three-quarters as many Italians migrants left the United States as arrived, making the Irish and the Jews the mainstay of organized labor in this period because these newcomers could not return home. The focus of the rest of the immigrants on economic gains, he explained, helped buttress the “business unionism” of the U.S. labor movement and diminished its radical potential.¹²²

The ethnic focus inspired by the New Left also looked into the divisions between the new immigrant communities and “old immigrants” who consisted primarily of the Irish and Northern and Western Europeans. Iring Fetscher pointed out how in an attempt to differentiate themselves from the new undesirables, the old immigrants often excluded the “newcomers” from spheres where they were already established:

¹²¹ Mike Davis, “Why the U.S. Working Class is Different,” *New Left Review*, 123 (September-October, 1980): 3-46.

¹²² Gerald Rosenblum, *Immigrant Workers: Their Impact on American Labor Radicalism*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 132.

The newcomers were not allowed to play a leading part in politics and as soon as they had become ‘citizens,’ they tended to distinguish themselves as much as they could from the next generation of newcomers ‘below them,’ as well as from the Establishment above.¹²³

In addition to the inter-generational divisions of immigrants, Sociologist Charles Leinenweber’s “The American Socialist Party and ‘New’ Immigrants (1968),” in *Science and Society*, made the point that an even greater rift stemming from immigration accounts for the failure of socialism in the United States. Nativism, or the opposition to immigration from the U.S. working class and the Socialist Party, he suggested, was to blame for socialism’s failure “motivated by nativism and racism,” Leinenweber asserted that the Socialist Party “kept these immigrant socialists adrift, failing to integrate them,” as the party’s “municipal” wing, sought electoral victories in cities and broad acceptance as a progressive reform party.¹²⁴

To gain acceptance, the Socialist Party aligned itself with the conservative AFL, whose opposition to immigration stemmed from the desire to curb cheap labor, a threat to the economic prospects of skilled workers. This anti-immigration stance was approved over the protests of the “industrial,” or more radical left wing of the party primarily concerned with ideological purity and revolutionary potential. Leinenweber avowed that “so long as the party was controlled by the right wing, it was incapable of molding a socialist army out of the new immigrants.” Because the U.S. socialist movement failed to properly court the immigrant population, it could never establish a sizeable party he concluded.¹²⁵

Economists Michael Reich, David M. Gordon and Richard C. Edwards also viewed the ethnic segmentation of workforce in the United States as an impediment to class consciousness

¹²³ Fetscher, “Comment 2 on *American Capitalism’s Economic Rewards*,” 478.

¹²⁴ Charles Leinenweber, “The American Socialist Party and ‘New’ Immigrants,” *Science and Society*, 32, no. 1 (Winter 1968): 24.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

and action. Their report published in the *American Economic Review*, showed how the division between native-born skilled workers and unskilled immigrant laborers discouraged radical unity:

Labor market segmentation arose and is perpetuated because... it helps reproduce capitalist hegemony. First... segmentation divides workers and forestalls potential movements uniting all workers against employers. Second, segmentation establishes "fire trails" across vertical job ladders and, to the extent that workers perceive separate segments with different criteria for access, workers limit their own aspirations for mobility. Less pressure is then placed on other social institutions- the schools and the family, for example- that reproduce the class structure. Third, division of workers into segments legitimizes inequalities in authority and control between superiors and subordinates.¹²⁶

According to the report, this segmentation is the deliberate outcome of the concerted effort of the capitalist class to forestall radicalism among workers in the United States.

III.

Despite such conclusions, not all ethnic studies scholars agreed that immigration and diversity curbed radicalism. Victor Greene argued in *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite* (1968) that the presence of immigrant workers in United Mine Workers (UNW) strikes in the Pennsylvania anthracite coal region in the 1880s increased the militancy of the strikers. Immigrants were "...more tenacious in their hold upon their right to organize even more than the Americans," concluded Greene. The practice of

¹²⁶ Michael Reich, David M. Gordon, and Richard C. Edwards "Dual Labor Markets: A Theory of Labor Market Segmentation," *American Economic Review* 63, no. 2 (May, 1973): 364.

organizing worker councils around ethnic lines, he suggested, tapped into ethnic community structures already in place and helped to strengthened union cohesion.¹²⁷

More positive assessments of the ties between ethnicity and radicalism stemmed from practitioners of “New Labor” studies, a genre inspired by the seminal work of British social historian E.P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Class* (1964)¹²⁸. Thompson, an avowedly partisan Marxist, focused on the experiences of actual workers instead of the traditional method of studying the hierarchies of trade unions, the development of markets, or political philosophies. It is no surprise, then, that many New Labor scholars assumed a critical stance when it came to traditional labor elites. Jeremy Brecher, a U.S. historian of social movements, went as far as to blame their mismanagement for the failure of socialism in the United States. In his book *Strike!* (1972), Brecher examined the country’s largest walkouts ranging from the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, in which federal troops had to be called in against waves of spontaneous violence, to the Strike Wave of 1946, the postwar labor actions that were the largest in U.S. History. Brecher concluded that rank-and-file workers were much more militant than often given credit, and that it was the organization and the leadership that dampened their revolutionary zeal.¹²⁹

Here Brecher turned both Lenin and Perlman on their heads. Instead of a conservative working class radicalized by intellectuals and leaders, it was the leaders that lagged behind the rank and file. And though Brecher’s argument might seem similar to Marc Karson’s in that they both emphasized the leadership of the labor movement, Karson’s focus on Gompers arose from the consensus school’s fixation on powerful individuals while Brecher’s approach derived from a contemporary distrust of institutions and hierarchies.

¹²⁷ Victor R. Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite*, (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 42-43.

¹²⁸ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

¹²⁹ Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*, (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1972),273-305.

Several New Left scholars sought to create a history that provided models of success and inspiration by constructing a “usable past.” Charles Leinenweber, reflecting on his own work in 1984,

The American Socialist Party and “New” Immigrants written early in 1967 in Berkley, California, during the building of the antiwar and black power movements. On the one hand, it was intended as a contribution to the ongoing debate “why no socialism in America?” On the other, it was intended to address implicitly the practical matter of creating a new socialist movement.¹³⁰

Activist historian Staughton Lynd also pointed out the importance of creating a usable past in addressing the question of “why is there no socialism in the United States?” “We must ask it not as detached spectators,” Lynd demanded,

but as men and women who will attempt to act out an answer. We must ask, not: Why is there still no socialist movement in the United States?, but: Can a socialist movement in the United States be built?...We will not know whether socialism in America is possible until, once more, we try.¹³¹

An increasingly appealing topic for New Left scholars, in this context, became the actions of the radical parties themselves. If the previous failures of radical movements were due to the mistakes of individuals, tactics, beliefs, or policies, then the modern movements could learn how to avoid those mistakes. On the other hand, if there was something inherent in U.S.

¹³⁰ Charles Leinenweber, “Reply to ‘Comment on *Socialism and Ethnicity*,” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 2nd ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 285.

¹³¹ Staughton Lynd, “The Prospects of the New Left,” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 1st ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), 736-738.

culture and society that prevented radicalism, then modern day movements stood very little chance of success, no matter what they did.¹³²

The most popular manifestation of the “internal” approach to the failure of socialism in the United States was directed at the leadership of the radical parties. Radical historian Paul Buhle maintained in an essay on Debsian Socialism and the ‘New Immigrant’ worker, in 1973 that it was not the working class, nor the labor elite, but the socialist leadership that was too conservative. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, he pointed out, the Socialist Party had made great inroads in the nation’s political scene, especially in local elections. In 1912 Socialists were elected to over 1200 local offices, thirty-three state legislative positions, and a number of leadership posts in municipal governments. However, according to Buhle, the Party’s obsession with electoral victories meant it failed to respond to the massive labor upheavals of the day. Inspired in part by nativism, it focused instead on native-born small farmers, skilled workers, and professionals and intellectuals instead of the factory workers and unskilled laborers essential to a successful movement.¹³³

Historian of U.S. labor and social movements, John Laslett, while denouncing Daniel Bell in a commentary in 1974, also argued that U.S. Socialists lacked a proper level of radicalism to succeed. This was especially so in the 1930s, Laslett suggested, when the “rightward drift” of the Socialist Party “made it so reformist as to abandon all serious attempts at socialism,” making it “virtually indistinguishable from the Democrats.”¹³⁴ These explanations not only served to free

¹³² Foner, “Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?,” 70.

¹³³ Paul Buhle, “Debsian Socialism and the ‘New Immigrant’ Worker,” in *Insights and Parallels: Problems and Issues of American Social History*, ed. William O’Neill, (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1973), 253-67.

¹³⁴ John H.M. Laslett, “Comment on *The Problem of Ideological Rigidity* (1974),” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 2nd ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 39-40.

U.S. history from a consensual ethos, but also served as a rallying cry for more radicalism in the contemporary movement.

James Weinstein, the socialist historian and journalist, came to a different conclusion. As Weinstein argued in *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925* (1967), the Socialist Party from 1900 to 1919 had not mistakenly aimed its focus on electoral victories but in fact succeeded at becoming a successful reform party. Unlike many scholars, Weinstein maintained that the Party's decline did not happen before or even during World War II, but after the impact of the Russian Revolution. Similar to Daniel Bell, Weinstein contended that the faction of the party allied to the Comintern succumbed to ideological rigidity and tried to impose a strict Soviet-style ideology upon the rest of the Old Left. What had been a broad popular movement, according to Weinstein, fell victim to factionalism and infighting, a lesson the author hoped to apply to the contemporary movement.¹³⁵

Sociologist and labor-historian, Melvyn Dubofsky's book *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (1969), looked at the IWW to examine the level of radicalism in the U.S. labor movement. The IWW was a mass-based union founded in 1905 as a radical alternative to the conservative AFL. IWW members, or Wobblies as they were known, advocated revolutionary socialism, workplace democracy and industrial unionism, where all workers in the same industry are organized into the same union, unlike the craft unionism of the AFL which only included skilled, white laborers. The IWW extended membership to all wageworkers regardless of race, creed, color or sex, and engaged in direct action resistance, even occasional sabotage, quickly earning it a widespread reputation, either romanticized or

¹³⁵ James Weinstein, *The Decline of Socialism in America, 1912-1925*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1967), 327-328

demonized. For these reasons the IWW served as the perfect topic of a usable past, as Dubofsky explained:

Although the IWW ultimately failed to achieve its major objectives, it nevertheless bequeathed Americans an invaluable legacy. Those young Americans who practice direct action, passive resistance, and civil disobedience, and who seek an authentic “radical tradition,” should find much to ponder in the Wobblies past. Those who distrust establishment politics, deride bureaucracies, favor community action, and preach “participatory democracy” would also do well to remember the history of the IWW. Indeed, all who prefer a society based upon community to one founded on coercion cannot afford to neglect the tragic history of the IWW.¹³⁶

As an all-inclusive, decentralized, and radical movement, the IWW appeared as a much better role model for current struggles than the conservative and bureaucratic Socialist Party or mainstream labor unions. However, according to Dubofsky, it was this radicalism that spelled defeat for the Wobblies. Pointing to the inherent difficulties in revolutionary movements, and the impossible balance between reform and rebellion, Dubofsky noted that the IWW needed to show its workers tangible results to justify their allegiance. Yet if the IWW allowed workers to fight for immediate improvements, the possibility was that they could win, “a result which, if achieved, inevitably diminished their discontent and hence their revolutionary potential.”¹³⁷ Recognition of this dilemma led to the union’s refusal to sign contracts with employers, believing that such agreements limited workers' ability to strike, and that it would then place the union in the position of enforcing capitalist demands upon its workers. As Dubofsky acknowledged,

¹³⁶ Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 480-481.

¹³⁷ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 480-481

Employers constantly used the IWW's no-contract principle to rationalize their own resistance to any form of collective bargaining. If the IWW could not negotiate with employers, how could it raise wages or improve working conditions? On the other hand, if the IWW did sanction contracts, win recognition, and improve its members' lives, what would keep them from forsaking revolutionary goals and adhering to the well-established AFL pattern? If the IWW began to declare truces in the class war, how could it bring about the ultimate revolution? In the end, IWW leaders usually subordinated reform opportunities to revolutionary necessities, while the rank and file, when it could, took reform and neglected the revolution.¹³⁸

Strangely reminiscent of Daniel Bell's theory, Dubofsky pictured the Wobblies as straddling the line between being of the world and in the world, a balance they ultimately failed to sustain.

IV

Another New Left explanation for the failure of radicalism in the United States was outright repression. "Violence and bloodshed did follow Wobblies wherever they fought for free speech or higher wages," claimed Dubofsky.¹³⁹ Historian and civil libertarian William Preston Jr.'s *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals 1903-1933* (1963), also highlights repression as a central factor curbing U.S. radicalism, specifically in reference to the IWW and the events surrounding the First World War. As the United States entered the European war in 1917, moderate unions were rewarded for cooperation. For example, Gompers of the AFL saw the war as an opportunity to gain respectability and achieve employer concessions such as the

¹³⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 165-6.

¹³⁹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 146.

eight-hour workday, 20 percent wage increases, welfare pensions, the formation of personnel departments, and union recognition.¹⁴⁰

The IWW, in contrast, maintained its dedication to radical social change at a cost. As one of the only labor organizations to publically oppose the war, the union bore the brunt of wartime measures to suppress dissent. Preston writes:

In the wartime hysteria of 1917, Americans were in no mood to accept reasonable interpretations of the inflammatory and incendiary prose by which the IWW had lived... By emphasizing the continuing war with the master class and by refusing to abandon the right to strike, the IWW retained the very concepts that were to ensure its suppression.¹⁴¹

Accordingly, President Woodrow Wilson sent federal troops to break up IWW strikes in Washington State and Montana and the Wobbly leadership was decimated when over 165 of its leaders faced federal prosecution under the Espionage Act of 1917. The Sedition Act of 1918, moreover, made it a crime to write, publish or even talk about the armed forces, flag, constitution or government in a negative way. Legal repression also encouraged vigilantes to attack or kill scores of Wobblies with impunity.¹⁴²

The end of the war brought no reprise as what would become known as the First Red Scare ushered in a period of widespread fear of and repression towards communists, anarchists, immigrants, and radicalism in general. Spurred by increased labor unrest and fears of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution spreading to shores of the United States, some communities banned books and required loyalty oaths from teachers, while twenty-eight states enacted anti-sedition laws.

¹⁴⁰ William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1963).

¹⁴¹ Preston, *Aliens and Dissenters*, 91

¹⁴² David A. Horowitz and Peter N. Carroll, *On the Edge: The United States in the Twentieth Century*, 3rd ed. (Belmont CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2005), 100-3.

Thousands of radicals and immigrants were arrested or deported, or even killed between 1919 and 1920 and the IWW was, for all intents and purposes, destroyed.¹⁴³

Historian Gabriel Kolko also points to government repression as a cause of the failure the American Socialist Party in the article “The Decline of American Radicalism in the Twentieth Century (1966),” for *Studies on the Left*. Following WWI, “at the very moment American socialism appeared on the verge of significant organization and success,” wrote Kolko, “it was attacked by the combined resources of the Federal and various state governments.”¹⁴⁴ During the war over one-third of the Party’s ranks had faced arrest. Eugene V. Debs, the outspoken labor leader and perennial Socialist candidate for president, had to run his fifth national campaign from inside a federal prison, after publicly denouncing the war and facing prosecution under the Espionage Act. After the war the government suppression of Socialists continued, even resulting in the expulsion of five democratically elected Socialist members of the New York Assembly in 1920.

James R. Green, Professor of History and Labor Studies, argued in *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest 1895-1943* (1978) that despite initial success, the repression of the socialist parties of the U.S. West and Midwest was a chief cause of their decline:

The unsuccessful efforts made by... other groups to oppose the draft led to widespread repression of the Socialist party and the IWW... And these abortive direct actions hastened the repression of the entire left in the Southwest...government officials possessed the legal authority to suppress radicalism. They used this authority quite effectively in 1917 and 1918 to destroy the Socialist movement throughout the West and

¹⁴³ Horowitz and Carroll, *On the Edge*, 100-3.

¹⁴⁴ Gabriel Kolko, “The Decline of American Radicalism in the Twentieth Century,” *Studies on the Left*, (September/October, 1966): 9-26.

Midwest... The passage of criminal syndicalism laws and the raids connected with the 1919 Red Scare wiped out the last pockets of radical resistance...¹⁴⁵

Green's point that the government repression of World War I radicals used "patriotism as a pretext" had particular relevance for New Left scholars who identified with anti-war protest during the height of the Vietnam War.

British author and historian, David Caute, expanded this argument to include the repression of radicals during the 1950s. During the Second Red Scare the FBI processed more than five million loyalty oaths and Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin and the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) initiated congressional hearings on possible communist infiltration of society. Dissidents, moreover, could face federal prosecution under The Alien Registration Act of 1940 (aka the Smith Act) or The Internal Security Act of 1950 (aka the McCarran Act), which outlawed any organization advocating the violent overthrow of the State, and put limitations on the rights Communists, effectively outlawing the CPSUA. By the end of the decade, thousands of suspected radicals had been wiretapped, surveilled, interrogated, blackmailed, indicted, or imprisoned.¹⁴⁶

Claiming that government suppression prevented socialism not only freed New Left scholars from the burden of an all-encompassing, inhospitable U.S. ethos, but took the blame off activists themselves. In this scenario radicals in the United States simply faced an adversary more powerful than they were. This explanation also had the added bonus of highlighting the

¹⁴⁵ James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 346.

¹⁴⁶ David Caute, *The Great Fear: The Anti-Communist Purge under Truman and Eisenhower* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), political repression 487-520, deportation arrests 233-44.; U.S. Congress. 76th Congress, 3rd Session. ch. 439, 54 Stat. 670, 18 U.S.C. § 2385, *Alien Registration Act*. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1940.; U.S. Congress. 81st Congress, 2nd Session. ch. 1024, 54 Stat. 987, 50 U.S.C. § 781, *Internal Security Act*. Washington, Government Printing Office, 1950.

historical injustices of the U.S. federal government, a tactic that helped activist scholars demonstrate parallels to modern struggles in the effort to garner support.

Historian John Laslett has acknowledged the importance of the “long history of repressive acts undertaken against radicals and Marxists” in curbing U.S. socialism but points to the contradiction that other countries with sizeable labor movements have experienced as much repression, if not more. In the United States, notes Laslett, “repression of radical movements has not taken the form of deliberate murder or destruction as often as it has in a number of European countries.” Yet Laslett reconciles this observation with the proposal that the U.S. socialist movement was more susceptible to repression than European counterparts because of larger societal forces:

I would suggest that part of the explanation is to be found in the fact that where you have a highly stratified society in which crucial elements of either the peasantry or the proletariat are already predisposed against constituted authority and at a time of crisis are willing to follow class leaders or otherwise to act in a class way, then repression simply drives the movement underground, from where it will reemerge, strengthened, at a suitable moment. On the other hand, if you have a society in which either the agrarian element or the urban working class lacks any coherent sense of class loyalty and is predisposed toward acculturation or assimilation, as in the United States, then repression will have the opposite effect. Instead of nourishing rebellion, in other words, it will induce its followers to draw back from any fundamental challenge to the society, and to accept their pace instead in what may continue to be an unjust social system.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ John H.M. Laslett, “Social Scientists View the Problem,” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 1st ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), 48-49, 52-54.

V.

While repression made for an appealing excuse for the failure of socialism in the United States, scholars like Laslett did not lay the entirety of the blame on that issue alone. An even greater factor pointed out by Melvyn Dubofsky was the ability of U.S. corporate managers and the political system to absorb radicalism. Referring to the IWW, Dubofsky suggested the following:

Unlike radicals in other societies who contended with established orders unresponsive to lower-class discontent and impervious to change from within, the Wobblies struggled against flexible and sophisticated adversaries... Whatever success the Wobblies achieved only stimulated the reform process, for employers who were threatened by the IWW paid greater attention to labor relations, and government agencies, initially called upon to repress labor strife, encouraged employers to improve working conditions. While IWW leaders felt repression during World War I, their followers enjoyed eight-hour days, grievance boards, and company unions. Put more simply, reform finally proved a better method than repression for weakening the IWW's appeal to workers.¹⁴⁸

Much like socialist politician Morris Hillquit who suggested the same theory a half-century earlier, many New Left scholars saw great efficacy in this proposition. As activists struggled to reform society in the 1960s and 1970s, they too faced what they saw as "flexible and sophisticated adversaries," in a democratic establishment that practiced the art of co-optation. First, the goal of racial justice had been addressed by President Lyndon Johnson in the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965. Next, class issues became a concern of the administration through the set of domestic programs designed to alleviate poverty and

¹⁴⁸ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 480-481

promote a social welfare safety net known as the Great Society, through Medicare Medicaid and aid to cities, college students and public schooling. Even the Vietnam War, which had been central to the foreign policy of the Democrats, was coopted by the time Senator George McGovern ran as a “peace” candidate for President in 1972, before Richard Nixon arranged a withdrawal of all combat troops from the war months later.

In similar fashion, John Laslett attributed the Socialist Party’s decline in large part to the loss of union support triggered by Wilsonian progressive reforms between 1913 and 1916:

Once President Wilson had been elected, and had begun to enact the series of social reforms for which his first administration became famous (the Clayton Act, the La Follette Seamen’s Act, the establishment of a Department of Labor, and so on), virtually all of the unions considered in this sample began immediately to turn away from their earlier political support of the Socialist party, and to align themselves with the Democrats.¹⁴⁹

Mike Davis pursued a similar line of reasoning, but put the foci in a later period by asserting that President Franklin Roosevelt neutralized labor and radicalism. Davis argued that the ‘leftward’ turn of the New Deal in 1935 through measures such as the Social Security Act, the Works Progress Administration, and the Wagner National Labor Relations Act “stole the thunder and coopted the popular *raison d’être* of the insurgent political movements.” This was particularly true of Roosevelt’s treatment of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). The CIO, a spin-off from the AFL, was much more progressive in that it organized regardless of craft or race but much less radical than previous industrial unions like the IWW. Although the CIO did not advocate revolution it practiced social unionism, which advocated that workers were

¹⁴⁹ John H.M. Laslett, “Socialism and American Trade Unionism, (1974)” in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 2nd ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 134-135.

patriotic consumers and what was good for them was good for everyone. The union's agenda included higher wages, seniority rights, grievance procedures, civil rights, health insurance, and full employment but accepted the basic capitalist structure of the economy.¹⁵⁰

By supporting the CIO, Roosevelt gained the support of labor. Davis explains that contrary to the strikebreaking of President Grover Cleveland and Wilson, Roosevelt's tacit support for the CIO's sit-down strike in 1936–37 "allowed him to appear as the saviour of industrial unionism." However, Davis also claims that the "shrewdness of Roosevelt's strategy" not only attained labor's support, but that "the broad reforms" of FDR's "Second New Deal" constituted a "powerful gravitational force which attracted contemporary radicalism much closer to the orbit of the Democratic Party." By 1940, 10 percent to one-fourth of the CIO's leadership were Communist activists. Roosevelt managed to funnel would-be radicals into the more acceptable CIO and the New Deal Coalition, cutting the strength out from under a broad class based movement.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Mike Davis, "The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party," *New Left Review* 124, (November-December, 1980): 56.

¹⁵¹ Davis, "The Barren Marriage of American Labour," 56; Horowitz and Carroll, *On the Edge*, 198..

PART FOUR: The End of History and the End of Exceptionalism

Cultural Studies, Neoconservatives and Socialism's Plight, 1970s-2000s

As New Left historiography peaked with the end of the Vietnam War in 1973, a New Social History was increasingly focused on culture. Combining the New Left's attention to ordinary people with the Consensus school's desire for an overarching ethos, the "Cultural Turn" led to examinations of institutions and systems and how they influence the way people construct their identities and make sense of their world. Such an approach has implications for studying the degree of radicalism in the United States. "Why can't there be socialism in the United States?" some scholars asked.

At the same time the country was experiencing a backlash against the remnants of the New Left. This rightward shift changed the nation politically as well as academically. Mainstream scholarship on the alleged failures of radicalism took an increasingly congratulatory tone, citing the success of capitalism as the most prevalent reason for the collapse of socialism. The end of the Cold War and a period of relative stability and prosperity in the early 1990s led Neoconservative scholars to proudly declare the end of history and a restatement of American Exceptionalism. "There can be no socialism in the United States!" they seemed to say.

I.

An important legacy of New Left scholarship conveyed disenchantment with the U.S. political system, and the belief that real progress was impossible through the established order. This led to an examination of whether the nature of the political system in the United States was

particularly inhospitable to radicalism. Such disillusionment, however, proceeded beyond politics to new fields of academia that questioned the very concepts of rationality in human affairs and the efficacy of political programs. Much of this scholarship emerged in response to the white backlash against forced busing, open housing, and urban disorder in the form of inner city race riots that emerged during the later stages of the Great Society. For its opponents like George Wallace, the Alabama Governor and pro-segregation presidential hopeful, and Ronald Reagan, the Republican, anti-radical governor of California who would be elected president in 1980, civil rights legislation seemed to be an overextension of government power favoring blacks at the expense of whites. This aversion to the welfare state, defense of limited government, opposition to the civil rights agenda, and animosity to the counterculture and militant blacks began to erode the once strong New Deal Coalition of the Democratic Party.

As the public turned against both liberalism and radicalism, so did much of the working class the New Left was seeking to emancipate. The youth-oriented antiwar movement was garnered resentment for its disruptions and disrespect for authority, particularly when many activists came from elite universities and were exempt from the draft. There were even examples of violent reprisals, like the “Hard Hat Riot” of 1970, where two-hundred construction workers mobilized by the AFL-CIO attacked a group of college protesters in Lower Manhattan, resulting in seventy injuries and six arrests. Many in the U.S. working class saw the elites in Washington D.C., on college campuses, and in the media as looking down their noses at ordinary people. And when the Vietnam War finally did end with the Nixon administration's withdrawal of combat forces in 1973, the activist New Left lost the major issue that had united its disparate forces.

With the collapse of New Left hopes, its supporters in academia abandoned their quest for a usable past. In 1979, New Left Sociologist Charles Leinenweber, reflecting back on his

earlier work, acknowledged, “the practical aspect is less interesting to us now, since the movements of the 1960s have long subsided and no new ones have arisen to take their place.”¹⁵²

At the same time, New Left’s focus on “history from the bottom up” had inspired an outpouring of scholarship on slavery and other issues that emphasized the role of African-American agency.¹⁵³ The proliferation of scholarship on Black History, combined with the formation of Black or African-American Studies, offered fresh perspectives on the failure of socialism in the United States. Sally Miller, a professor of social sciences, argued in the *Journal of Negro History* in 1971 that the Socialist Party “undertook no meaningful struggle against second-class citizenship,” and this helped to explain its failure. The Socialist focus on class consciousness, contended Miller, often ignored other factors such as race:

The Negro might be noticed by the part in his economic role as a worker, but he was not seen to be a worker with peculiar difficulties imposed by the existing semi-caste system. Marxist ideology, instead of leading Socialists to seek out the Negro as the worker with absolutely nothing to lose but his chains, reinforced the existing national tendency to overlook his comprehensive exploitation.¹⁵⁴

Even if the Socialist Party had reached out to the African-American community, Miller insisted, it was “unlikely that a fruitful relationship would have evolved.” Despite the existence of Black socialist leaders like A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, the majority of the black community “demonstrated very little interest in the abolition of capitalism. What he wanted was his opportunity to prosper within that system.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Leinenweber, “Reply to ‘Comment on *Socialism and Ethnicity*,” 285.

¹⁵³ John Wesley Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).; Leon Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1979),

¹⁵⁴ Sally Miller, “The Socialist Party and the Negro, 1901-1920,” *Journal of Negro History* 56, no 3, (July, 1971): 221

¹⁵⁵ Miller, “The Socialist Party and the Negro,” 229.

Another academic shift in the 1970s and 1980s that influenced the way scholars addressed the absence of U.S. socialism involved the increased attention paid to the lives of women. Women's Studies arose from both the New Left legacy of emphasizing the experience of ordinary people and the resurgence of a strong women's rights movement in the United States in the 1970s addressed reproductive rights, domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and economic, political, and social discrimination. Works such as Sheila Rothman's *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present* (1978), and Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (1980), tried to focus on the experiences of ordinary women, as opposed to only focusing on the "Great Women," of the past.¹⁵⁶

Like African American Studies, Women Studies breathed fresh air into the study of U.S. socialism. Sally Miller, for example, argued that another important factor that contributed to the downfall of the Socialist Party was its failure in fully harnessing the potential power of women. Miller pointed out how there were numerous instances of overlap between women's rights issues, such as literacy, temperance, women's labor and suffrage, and the Socialist program. And unlike the dominant political parties, she noted, the Socialists had a relatively large female contingent that made up over a tenth of the party's membership and played a large role in its abilities:

Women served the party as organizers, propagandists, pamphleteers, and candidates for public office. In 1912, the party sent sixty speakers throughout North America on a lyceum circuit, and over one-fifth of these were women. Party journalists were women almost as often as men, with copy editors and staff people tending to be women.

¹⁵⁶ Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*. (New York: Basic, 1978),; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800*. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980).

Autonomous women's socialist study groups... coordinated their programs and their lobbying around party initiatives. Women party members raised funds for strike benefits and campaign expenses, distributed propaganda, served as poll watchers, established and taught socialist Sunday schools and in general, built bridges to nonsocialist women and women's organizations.¹⁵⁷

Despite such involvement, Miller argued, the political leadership of the Socialist party, dominated by patriarchal white men, insisted on keeping the struggle for women's rights separate and the women's groups detached and subordinate to the national organization. "Party treatment of the so-called Woman Question and of women members often seemed perfunctory, more lip service than genuine commitment," she noted.¹⁵⁸ In the end, she concludes, the socialist movement suffered from such exclusion.

II.

While social history thrived in the new subfields of women's and African-American studies, the topic of culture emerged as a major area of scholarly focus. The "cultural turn" was inspired by works like Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973), Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (1973), Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment: The Birth of Prison* (1977), and Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977).¹⁵⁹ The new interdisciplinary field of Cultural

¹⁵⁷ Sally Miller, "Women in the Party Bureaucracy: Subservient Functionaries," in *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism*, ed. Sally Miller, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981), 14-15.

¹⁵⁸ Miller, "Women in the Party Bureaucracy," 15-16.

¹⁵⁹ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973.); Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973.); Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage, 1977.); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Studies drew its inspiration from the concepts of cultural anthropology, post-structuralism, and linguistic analysis to examine the way humans explain and assign meaning to their experiences in the world through cultural constructs, such as language or systems of representation.¹⁶⁰

Cultural studies insists that culture must be viewed within the social relations and system through which it is produced and consumed, and is intimately bound up with the assessment of society, politics, and economics. U.S. culture and society, in other words, is a contested terrain with various groups and ideologies struggling for control.¹⁶¹

U.S. scholars such as sociologists Charles Leinenweber, John Alt, Stanley Aronowitz, and historian Lawrence Goodwyn applied this new emphasis on culture to their understanding of U.S. radicalism and its shortcomings using the concepts of Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci was an Italian writer, politician, political theorist, philosopher, sociologist, linguist, and founding member of the Italian Communist Party in the interwar period until his imprisonment by Benito Mussolini's Fascist regime. After his death, his work gained prestige by moving Marxism beyond economic issues with his concept of cultural hegemony, which describes how the ruling class uses cultural norms and ideology to maintain power in capitalist societies.¹⁶² Borrowing this notion, John Alt, a scholar of sociology and anthropology, outlined a framework of "Liberal hegemony," in his article for the journal *Telos*, "Beyond Class: The Decline of Industrial Labor and Leisure (1973)," in which the the working class is transformed into the consuming class and neutered its revolutionary potential

One of the great social and cultural transformations of the twentieth century is the historical shift from the primacy of labor to that of consumption—the mediation of social

¹⁶⁰ Mark T. Gilderhus, *History and Historian: A Historiographical Introduction*, 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ.: Prentice Hall, 2010), 102.

¹⁶¹ Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 15-49, 93-122.

¹⁶² Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism," *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 285.

relations and consciousness by consumer goods. This relatively recent phenomenon eclipses the class experience of wage-labor and raises commodity fetishism to a new form of domination: from extensive exploitation and misery (wage-labor), to reduced work time (leisure) and increased material comforts (consumerism). Integrated by increased leisure and higher wages, modern employees are culturally and politically dislodged from the world of work and from a class experience in the traditional Marxian sense. Concerned primarily with the immediate gratifications of familial intimacy and consumerism, they come to tolerate the exploitation of labor and even political authoritarianism so long as the system sustains a rising standard of living.¹⁶³

If “working-class culture,” the true driver of revolution, derived from the shared experiences of material conditions, the dominance of capitalist hegemony had eliminated that culture, radical theorists suggested. Social life, according to labor historian Stanley Aronowitz, “is no longer organized around the common relation to the production of both culture and commodities. The working class public sphere is dead.”

Social historian Eric Foner explored the implications of this perspective. “The seedbed of socialist politics is a counter-hegemonic set of cultural institutions, rather than the polity or the work place.”¹⁶⁴ In this model, culture became important to radicals through the formation of “counter-cultures” that allowed the development of the revolutionary spirit. Lawrence Goodwyn’s *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (1976) illustrated the necessity of countercultures through a history of the Texas branch of the People’s Party in the late nineteenth century. The shared struggles of farmers produced what Goodwyn termed an “Alliance culture” where experiences became shared understandings, expectations, and values:

¹⁶³ John Alt, “Beyond Class: The Decline of Industrial Labor and Leisure,” *Telos* 28, (June, 1976): 55.

¹⁶⁴ Foner, “Why is There No Socialism in the United States?,” 64.

The cooperative movement led to political education in terms of farmer-merchant, farmer-creditor, and farmer-shipper relations and ... such education led to the ... energizing self-perception of the farmer's subordinate place in the industrial society...only the cooperative experience over a period of time provided the kind of education that imparted to the political movement the specific form and substance of the greenback heritage.¹⁶⁵

This alliance culture is what gave the Populist their strength. However, as the movement grew it lost much of its cooperative features. The national movement tried to reproduce it, but without the actual shared experiences, it became a cheap imitation of the original. By the time the Populists backed Democrat William Jennings Bryan for president in 1896, the party had become "virtually issueless," Goodwyn argued, and "represented little more than a quest for honorable men who would pledge themselves to forsake corrupt practices."¹⁶⁶

A surprising result of the historiographical cultural turn was that it was, in a way, reviving the "ethos" Consensus argument. Once again, one of the central concerns of cultural scholars became the values of radicals and how they conformed to or diverged from the dominant value system of the working class and the rest of society. Reviving the debate of Consensus scholars Adolph Sturmhthal and Marc Karson, authors such as social and literary critic Irving Howe, and historian David DeLeon argued that the people of the United States were more independent than their counterparts in Europe.

DeLeon pointed out in *The American as Anarchist: Reflections on Indigenous Radicalism* (1978), how U.S. radicals have been prone to anti-statism. Whereas European radical movements such as Scandinavian social democracy, Fabian bureaucratic socialism, and Soviet communism

¹⁶⁵ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 80-81.

¹⁶⁶ Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise*, 312.

all entailed a high degree of state collectivism, U.S. radicals have been wary of centralization. This has surfaced on both the extreme right, leaning towards libertarianism, as well as the left, elements of which favor some form of anarchy or syndicalism.¹⁶⁷ “American exceptionalism,” Irving Howe notes in *Socialism and America* (1985), “has often taken the guise of querulous anti-statism... It can veer toward an American version of anarchism, suspicious of all laws form, and regulations... Tilt toward the right and you have the moralism of American reformers.”¹⁶⁸

Specific examples of this can be seen in U.S. history. Historian Nick Salvatore in his biography *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (1982) defended the perennial socialist presidential candidate when he lamented "the task of affirming a collective identity in a culture that boasted of its individualistic mores."¹⁶⁹ Historian William M. Dick, exploring *Labor and Socialism in America* (1972), looked at the individualism of the U.S. labor movement and argued that for much of its first half century, the AFL was in fact syndicalist, or advocated for worker-controlled industries. Gompers even described himself as “three-quarters anarchist.” And its radical competitor, the IWW, went even farther and advocated anarcho-syndicalism, or the proposed co-operative organization of society into a revolutionary, decentralized collection of industrial worker syndicates. For a time, according to Dick, both regarded the state, as much as private industry, as the enemy, and advocated for worker-controlled economy.¹⁷⁰

Even the New Left evolved from anti-statist values, according to sociologist Richard Flacks. One of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a major student activist movement of the 1960s, Flacks wrote in the 1990s,

¹⁶⁷ David DeLeon. *The American as Anarchist: Reflections on Indigenous Radicalism*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978), 4, 32-34.

¹⁶⁸ Irving Howe, *Socialism and America*, (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1985), 136.

¹⁶⁹ Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 271.

¹⁷⁰ William M. Dick, *Labor and Socialism in America: The Gompers Era*, (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1972), 183-184, 116.

The dominant spirit of the 60s was neither social-democratic nor statist/Stalinist/Leninist, but owed more to anarchist/pacifist/radical democratic traditions: Students and workers should claim voice in the institutions they inhabit; communities and neighborhoods should have democratic control over their futures; co-ops, communes, and collectives should be the places to try alternative futures and practice authentic vocation... Here in short was a thoroughgoing critique of statism, advanced not by the right but by young Black and White activist/intellectuals devoted to a decentralizing, devolutionary, radical-democratic politics.¹⁷¹

Scholars such as Gordon Wood in *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787* (1969), and J.G.A. Pocock in *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (1975), speculated that the anti-statist value-system stemmed from the small producer values of preindustrial United States. Unlike the Consensus academics who emphasized the persistence of liberalism, these scholars contended that classic republicanism had a greater influence on the nascent nation. Republican values such as popular sovereignty, hostility to large accumulations of property, and the importance of industrial enterprise as the bedrocks of an autonomous citizenry, they argued, created a small producer, artisan rural culture which in turn produced an anti-statist tradition, even in U.S. radicals.¹⁷²

III.

The cultural turn brought previously unstudied aspects of popular culture to the forefront of academia. Works such as Burton J. Bledstein's *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle*

¹⁷¹ Richard Flacks, "Reflections on Strategy in a Dark Time," *Boston Review* 20, (December-January, 1995-1996): 25.

¹⁷² Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).; J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975).

Class and the Development of Higher Education in America (1976) and David F. Noble's *America by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (1977) explored the effects of the institutional and cultural transformation of the emergence of the professional-managerial class in corporate America.¹⁷³ Barbara and John Ehrenreich used this new focus to explain U.S. radicalism in an article in *Radical America* entitled "The New Left and the Professional Managerial Class (1977)." The Ehrenreichs contend that a two-class method, where everyone is in the proletariat except for a tiny ruling class, is not useful to explain the United States, and needs to be updated to include the large and important professional sector that lie between them. The fact that many of the nation's radicals have come from this professional-managerial class, they argued, reduces the revolutionary potential of the United States. According to this view, the managerial class serves to reduce class consciousness by absorbing a certain percentage of the working-class and acts as a buffer by deflecting conflict away from the capitalist class:

...the very existence of the PMC (professional-managerial class) is predicated on the atomization of working-class life and culture and the appropriation of skill once vested in the working class. The activities which the PMC performs within the capitalist division of labor in themselves serve to undermine positive class consciousness among the working class. The kind of consciousness which remains, the commonly held attitudes of the working class, are as likely to be anti-PMC as they are to be anti-capitalist – if only because people are more likely, in a day-to-day sense, to experience humiliation,

¹⁷³ Jean-Christophe Agnew, "Main Currents in American Cultural History," in *A Century of American Historiography*, ed. James M. Banner Jr. (Boston, New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010), 45.; Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1976); David F. Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977).

harassment, frustration, etc. at the hands of the PMC than from members of the actual capitalist class.¹⁷⁴

Ethnic studies was another academic specialty transformed by the infusion of cultural parameters. Historian of immigration Rudolph Vecoli argued against the notion that immigrants to the United States left their cultures behind. Instead Vecoli insisted that immigrants clung to their traditions and developed strategies to retain their heritage and defy pressures to assimilate into the U.S. social and economic system. It was this cultural aspect that, Vecoli asserted, made immigrants unsusceptible to the appeals of socialism:

More important than the 'material conditions of American capitalism' in determining the politics of ethnic groups appears to have been a calculus of cultural influences. Religion, nationalism, and radicalism competed for the loyalty of the immigrants... religio-nationalistic identity proved to be highly resistant to the radical virus. Among the Catholic and Slavic immigrants, such as the Poles and Slovaks, the socialist appeal, regardless of the horrors of the steel mills and the packing houses, went largely unheeded. Even among the radicals, the predominance of patriotism over internationalism was conclusively demonstrated during the First World War. Following the outbreak of hostilities, many socialists, especially those from subject nationalities of Eastern Europe, rallied to the cause of national independence.¹⁷⁵

Charles Leinenweber also acknowledged the importance of the cultural turn in the investigations of ethnic and class history. "Cultural investigations of class formation stand as our greatest achievement so far in developing a social history of twentieth-century working-class

¹⁷⁴ Barbara and John Ehrenreich, "The New Left and the Professional-Managerial Class," *Radical America* 11, no. 3, (May-June, 1977): 19.

¹⁷⁵ Rudolph J. Vecoli, "Comment on *Socialism and Ethnicity*," in *Failure of a Dream: Essays in the History of American Socialism*, 2nd ed., eds. John H.M. Laslett and Seymour Martin Lipset (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 277.

America,” noted Leinenweber. However, he pointed out “there are serious problems with this cultural approach, which by now dominates historical thinking on the working class:

It attempts to leap past the tedious nuts-and-bolts work of building a literature on the material conditions surrounding American working-class development simply by asserting that they aren’t very important... Yet even as this approach claims a distinction between culture and material conditions, it smuggles material factors back in as cultural... Practically speaking, culture and material conditions don’t separate for the very good reason that values, traditions, and institutions depend on certain material circumstances for their flourishing.¹⁷⁶

IV.

The academic focus on culture and diversity led to the academic doctrine of Multiculturalism, or the preservation and exploration of diverse cultures or cultural identities. Universalism was replaced with relativity, while inclusion and diversity became the creed of the day. Meanwhile, a conservative backlash emerged in the United States against the remnants of New Left activism. In 1991 sociologist James Davidson Hunter coined the term “Culture Wars,” to describe the United States of the 1980s and 1990s. Society, according to Hunter, was split on ideological lines across a number of “hot-button” issues such as abortion, gun control, separation of church and state, privacy, homosexuality, and censorship. The United States had gone from an increasingly fragmented society of the 1970s to a polarized one by the 1990s. These conflicts had been growing since the collapse of the New Deal electoral coalition in the 1970s, which set the stage for the “Reagan Revolution” of the 1980s, during which the nation experienced a rightward

¹⁷⁶ Leinenweber, “Reply to ‘Comment on *Socialism and Ethnicity*,” 288-9.

shift under President Ronald Reagan's supply-side economics policies, austerity plans, anti-communist rhetoric, and hostility to unions.¹⁷⁷

A concurrent movement in the academic and intellectual sphere replicated the "Neoconservative" drift in U.S. politics, influencing the way scholars addressed the absence of socialism in the United States. Aileen Kraditor, a New Left Historian turned Neoconservative, used a conservative perspective to elucidate her views on U.S. radicalism. In *The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917: Aspects of the Intellectual History and the Historiography of Three American Radical Organizations* (1981), Kraditor pointed to the prevalence of values that workers held over tradition, ethnicity, community, religion, and family that made radicalism unappealing to the average person. Beyond the prevalence of traditional values, Kraditor contended that workers in the early twentieth were able to carve out independent enclaves where they could live their lives according to these beliefs in a certain degree of autonomy:

The millions of anonymous John Q. Workers who went to work every day and went home to their families every night and could never see the radicals' ideology as a better explanation for their lives than the ones that they subscribed to and that made their experiences meaningful to them¹⁷⁸

In addition to attributing traditional values and identification with small communities to U.S. workers, Kraditor also laid blame on radicals themselves. The I.W.W., the Socialist Labor Party, and the Socialist Party were all guilty of foolish and incorrect strategies, she maintained, based on a false view of workers in the United States. This was because their theories "had been formulated aprioristically.... It was the gap between the abstraction they called the Worker and

¹⁷⁷ Gilderhus, *History and Historian*, 104; Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 104.; James Davidson Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

¹⁷⁸ Aileen Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion, 1890-1917: Aspects of the Intellectual History and the Historiography of Three American Radical Organizations*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 53.

the real John Q. Worker that, in the final analysis, defeated them."¹⁷⁹ Radical scholars, admonished Kraditor, treat "John Q. Worker's life and belief system as having had no meaning other than in relation to capitalist oppression and the historically assigned mission to destroy it."¹⁸⁰

A similar take on the failure of U.S. socialism characterized the work of American Studies Professor James Nuechterlein, who simply suggested that U.S. capitalism was better, and therefore won. Nuechterlein traced this reading to Werner Sombart's affluence and social mobility theses. Yet radical historians refused to accept this. "Rather than ponder the obvious," he contended,

Radicals prefer to take refuge in the obfuscations of "false consciousness." The people may choose, but they do not choose well, bemused as they are by the encompassing "hegemonic" values of bourgeois culture.

Not only is this interpretation wrong, Nuechterlein claimed, but it also robbed workers of agency:

If, however, we free ourselves from obscurantist categories and begin to address on their own terms the decisions made by people in the past, we might obtain a less condescending view of working-class consciousness. We might see that most workers and their families, recognizing instinctively the limits and trade-offs all social systems impose, sensed that life within the American industrial system, for all its burden offered them more than did any realistic alternative...

Nuechterlein insisted that radical scholars treated workers as fools. However, if they took a moment to consider the benefits of capitalism, he suggested, workers could be viewed as not

¹⁷⁹ Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion*, 33.

¹⁸⁰ Kraditor, *The Radical Persuasion*, 2,

misled, but making a conscious decision to participate in the system that provided them the highest likelihood of benefit. And the benefits were indeed tangible:

As Stephan Thernstrum and others have reminded us, that rags-to respectability was a real possibility. In that sense, the American Dream was not a fraud; social mobility did exist, as did rising real wages. So also the political system... offered more participation, more accessibility, more responsiveness to the concerns of people like themselves than did that of any other country.¹⁸¹

Nuechterlein's emphasis on the success of U.S. capitalism was unsurprisingly popular with many neo-conservative thinkers. And this victorious attitude was seemingly vindicated as the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 triggered the collapse of worldwide Communism and signaled the apparent supremacy of U.S. capitalism. U.S. political scientist Francis Fukuyama summed it up as the "end of history." The worldwide struggles had been decided and now Western liberal capitalist democracies would spread across the globe as the endpoint of humanity's sociocultural evolution.¹⁸²

The end of the Cold War seemed to herald the ostensible defeat of radicalism just as a conservative turn had shifted the U.S. political landscape to the right. The once menacing specter of socialism now seemed ridiculous or puerile. The question of why it had failed began to fade out of view. And when it was approached it often times took a regretful lament.

Historian Mark Pittenger's 1993 intellectual history of socialist movements in the United States, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought: 1870-1920*, argued that nineteenth century evolutionism had affected socialist thought. Evolutionist principles had supplanted theoretical Marxism, contended Pittenger, leading U.S. socialists to accept the gradual, seemingly

¹⁸¹ James Nuechterlein, "Radical Historians," *Commentary* 70, no. 4, (October, 1980): 56-64 (quote from 63).

¹⁸² Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man Standing*, (New York: Free Press 1992).

inevitable evolution of society through reform. Evolutionary thought also explained why U.S. socialists were not as critical of racism, sexism, and nativism, as they could have been.¹⁸³ Brian Lloyd's *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism* (1997), pursued the same line but insisted that during and after Debs, Socialists relied too heavily on experience and pragmatism. This moderate version of U.S. socialism supposedly watered down Marxist principles to the point where they were no more significant than the reformism of the Progressives.¹⁸⁴

These accounts have an unmistakable tinge of regret for what might have been. Both Pittenger and Lloyd accuse the socialists of having played it too safe and been defeated as a result. Reflecting his disappointment with the collapse of the left in contemporary United States and a cynical view of political movements, Lloyd wrote that,

No matter how patiently it was awaited or urgently it was summoned, no natural agent of revolution emerged from the cauldron of modern industry. Trade unionism has never, of its own volition, transmuted into anti-capitalism; no electoral socialist, on either side of the Atlantic, has used a bourgeois state to dismantle capitalism.¹⁸⁵

The rest of the explanations around the turn of the millennium took the form of self-congratulatory vindications. Consensus era political Scientist Seymour Lipset's essay "The End of Exceptionalism?" proclaimed that not only did U.S. capitalism's benefits outweigh socialism's, but it also did a better job at achieving socialism's goals than socialism ever could. The United States, Lipset claimed, "is closer to their ideological goal of a socially classless and weak state society than any system they knew in their lifetime." Repeating Samson's line from

¹⁸³ Mark Pittenger, *American Socialists and Evolutionary Thought, 1870-1920*, (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

¹⁸⁴ Brian Lloyd, *Left Out: Pragmatism, Exceptionalism, and the Poverty of American Marxism, 1890-1922*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

¹⁸⁵ Lloyd, *Left Out*, 414.

the 1930s, he noted, “American radicals were unable to sell socialism to a people who believed they already lived in a society which operationally, though not terminologically, was committed to egalitarian objectives.”¹⁸⁶

The United States’ victory not only ended the Cold War, Lipset argued, but ended American Exceptionalism as well. “No major tendency, left or right, retains a belief in a utopia, in a solution for all major problems by dramatically reconstructing society and polity... The United States is no longer as exceptional politically.”¹⁸⁷ This was not because the United States had lost anything, but because it had remade the world over in its image. Lipset’s consensus had once again returned. And this time it was worldwide. There was now no socialism anywhere.

¹⁸⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset, “The End of Political Exceptionalism?,” *Estudios-Working Papers*, vol. 144 (Madrid: Juan March Institute, 1999), 24.

¹⁸⁷ Lipset, “The End of Political Exceptionalism?,” 23-24.

CONCLUSION

For over a century the Question “Why is there no socialism in the United States” has plagued thinkers both revolutionary and reactionary. But for all the effort put into it, are we really any closer to finding an answer? The responses have ranged from consideration of U.S. extremism to notions of U.S. passivity, from political freedom in the United States to its crushing repression, from the failure to tap the treasure trove of potential in The United States’ immigrant or working class populations to radical movements dragged down by the conservatism of those same groups.

Often times if a question has no clear answer, it is because we have been asking the wrong question. Agreeing with this sentiment, Eric Foner has suggested a reexamination of the way we approach the absence of U.S. socialism. Scholars generally are not actually asking “why is America not a socialist nation?” or even “why is there no major socialist party in the United States?” contends Foner. In reality they are simply asking why does the United States not have more of a working class consciousness or labor-based party like the ones in Western Europe. Yet after examining the movements of Western Europe, Foner concludes that they too have been “incapable of using their impressive political strength to reshape fundamentally their societies:”

They have, one might say, promoted liberalism and egalitarianism more successfully than socialism, and presented themselves as the proponents of modernization and social rationalization rather than class rule, thus operating in way more analogous to American political parties than either Americans or Europeans would care to admit.¹⁸⁸

Akin to Seymour Lipset’s conclusion, New Left social historian Eric Foner suggests that rather than lagging behind Europe, perhaps it is as Marx put it so many decades ago, “the

¹⁸⁸ Foner, “Why is The No Socialism in the United States?,” 74.

country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future” In other words the U.S. system may hold the key to the future:

Perhaps, because mass politics, mass culture, and mass consumption came to America before it did to Europe, American socialist were the first to face the dilemma of how to define socialist politics in a capitalist democracy. Perhaps, in the dissipation of class ideologies, Europe is now catching up with a historical process already experienced in the United States... Only time will tell whether the United States has been behind Europe in the development of socialism, or ahead of it, in socialism’s decline.¹⁸⁹

Unlike Foner, economic and intellectual historian James Livingston posits that perhaps the question is not “why is there no socialism in the United States?” but rather, “why is there *still* socialism in the United States?” Livingston pointed out in *The World Turned Inside Out: American Thought and Culture at the End of the 20th Century* (2009), that even after the Reagan revolution and the rightward shift of the nation, there was still a “dizzying range of regulatory agencies, federal statues, and executive orders which, then as now, limit the reach of the market” as well as “thousands of nongovernmental organizations and nonprofit institutions that stand athwart the free market, modulating and containing its arbitrary forces.”¹⁹⁰ Behind the rhetoric, insisted Livingston, the United States was still devoted in many ways to a welfare state, the ultimate expression of the desire for economic egalitarianism.

Even U.S. culture, Livingston suggests “was much more liberal, open, and electric in 1990 than in 1980, and then again in 2000, no matter how you frame the issues of gender, sexuality, and race, no matter how you characterize music, movies, and other performance

¹⁸⁹ Marx, *Capital*, 8-9, Foner, “Why is The No Socialism in the United States?,” 74-76.

¹⁹⁰ James Livingston, *The World Turned Inside Out: American Thought and Culture at the End of the 20th Century*, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 19.

arts.”¹⁹¹ Historian and writer Michael Kazin goes even further, in *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (2011), by claiming that, in a way, socialism has succeeded. Though the left had failed to produce a sweeping political program, he argues, it had succeeded in transforming society through altering and redefining its “moral culture.” Kazin claims that the left can claim victory for bending the political discourse of the nation towards justice and is directly responsible for the contemporary movements for gay rights, eco-sustainability, civil rights, and social justice.¹⁹²

When looked at from this perspective, the discord over U.S. radicalism becomes understandable, as we can see that, in fact, scholars have not even all been asking the same question. Each exploration of the topic is really asking an entirely different question. The early socialists were asking, “When will there be socialism?” while the Progressives asked, “How can there be no socialism?” During the Consensus Era it was, “Why, thank God, is there no socialism?” and for the New Left it was either “Why, Goddammit, is there no socialism?” or “How can there be socialism?” The Cultural Studies scholars asked, “Why can’t there be socialism?” and the Neoconservatives proudly declared, “There can be socialism!”

Instead of Seymour Lipset’s assessment that we have moved beyond American Exceptionalism to a new worldwide consensus, it is more likely that Lipset offers us a particular point of view from a particular vantage point. Writing at the turn of the 21st century, there was much to be hopeful for. The United States emerged from the Cold War as the solitary undisputed superpower. Its economy remained the most productive in the world and was spurred along even further by the technological and communications boom following the invention of the World Wide Web. “These post Cold War conditions,” boasted a hopeful Lipset,

¹⁹¹ Livingston, *The World Turned Inside Out*, 20.

¹⁹² Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 2011), xiiii.

bode well for democratic stability and for international peace. It has become an undocumented truism that democracies do not wage war against each other and most of the world is now democratic. While extremist movements and parties exist, all of them are weak...¹⁹³

As is often is the case, however, just when peace and stability finally seemed within grasp, they slip through the cracks. In the United States, the new millennium started with a recession resulting from the collapse of the dotcom bubble, followed shortly by the terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001. The ensuing decade witnessed wars, terrorism, and instances of U.S. initiated torture, which split the political and social fabric of the country to levels unheard of since the 1960s. The collapse of the housing market in 2008 then brought about the Great Recession as the economic stability of millions of people in the United States was thrown into doubt.

As the nation's youth entered the worst job market since the 1930s, with levels of student debt at unprecedentedly high levels, some young people began to reconsider the utopian claims surrounding capitalism. This leftward turn found expression in the groundswell of support for Barack Obama's presidential candidacy and the Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011, which brought income inequality to the forefront of U.S. discourse once again.

To this generation the Soviet Union was either a distant, or non-existent memory. Freed from this burden, some dissidents turned to Marxism to explain the problems within society. Starting journals like *Jacobin*, *n+1*, and *Dissent*, these "Millennial Marxists" for the first time in decades readdressed the issues surrounding U.S. radicalism.¹⁹⁴ The French Economist Thomas Piketty's work on income inequality, *Capital in Twenty-First Century* (2013), has quickly

¹⁹³ Lipset, "The End of Political Exceptionalism?," 23.

¹⁹⁴ Timothy Shenk, "Thomas Piketty and Millennial Marxists on the Scourge of Inequality: Capitalism's New Critics Take on an Economics Run Amok," *The Nation*, May 5, 2014.

become a best seller and Alyssa Battistoni, a graduate student in political science at Yale, has captured attention with her calls for the merging of Marxism with the modern environmental movement in a piece for *Jacobin* entitled “Toward a Cyborg Socialism (2014).”¹⁹⁵

Rather than suppose that this generation will be the one to usher in socialism in the United States, the resurgence of radical discourse should instead be appreciated for the opportunity to examine modern society a little closer. Nikil Saval, an editor at *n+1*, attempts to tie the lack of U.S. socialism to emergence of the white-collar sector. In his book *Cubed* (2014), Saval claims that the post-industrial U.S. workforce has been trapped in the white-collar factories of “the office,” and become more isolated and alienated.¹⁹⁶ Saval and other Millennial Marxists reveal the distrust and despair of this new generation toward the promises made by the U.S. capitalist system. But perhaps more importantly, they show us that there will never be an end of history. There will always be someone to imagine a different way of organizing society, and to wonder “why not?”

And this reveals the true value of this exercise. It is not the answers, nor the questions, that are important to this inquiry, but rather, the glimpse they afford into both the mind and soul of the United States. These examinations tell us as much about U.S. radicalism as they do about the academic community that studied them. And as Sally Miller observed, “historians, creatures of the U.S. experience, were molded by forces in society, as was the Socialist Party. It, too, was shaped and formed by the attitudes of the nation.”¹⁹⁷ Scholars are just as much a product of their environment, as are the radicals they study. And by tracing the evolution of the question “why is there no socialism in the United States?” we not only gain insight into the history of the United

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Alyssa Battistoni, “Toward Cyborg Socialism,” *Jacobin* 13 (January 2014).

¹⁹⁶ Nikil Saval, *Cubed: A Secret History of the Workplace*, (New York: Doubleday, 2014), 184-258.

¹⁹⁷ Miller, “The Socialist Party and the Negro,” 219.

States and radical politics, but also come to appreciate how the history of ideas and historical trends shape intellectual discourse and are, in turn, shaped by them.

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