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

I

THE WORK ETHIC remains a central theme in the American experience, and to study this subject afresh means to re-examine much that has been assumed as given in the writing of American working-class and social history. Such study, moreover, casts new light on yet other aspects of the larger American experience that are usually not associated with the study of ordinary working men and women. Until quite recently, few historians questioned as fact the ease with which most past Americans affirmed the "Protestant" work ethic.[1] Persons much more

1. See especially the splendid essays by Edmund S. Morgan, "The Labor Problem at Jamestown, 1607–18," *American Historical Review*, 76 (1971), 595–611, and C. Vann Woodward, "The Southern Ethic in a Puritan World," in

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

prestigious and influential than mere historians have regularly praised the powerful historical presence of such an ethic in the national culture. A single recent example suffices. In celebrating Labor Day in 1971, the nation's president saluted "the dignity of work, the value of achievement, [and] the morality of self-reliance. None of these," he affirmed, "is going out of style." And yet he worried somewhat. "Let us also recognize," he admitted, "that the work ethic in America is undergoing some changes." [2] The tone of his concern strongly suggested that it had never changed before and even that men like Henry Ford and F. W. Taylor had been among the signers of the Mayflower Compact or, better still, the Declaration of Independence.

It was never that simple. At all times in American history—when the country was still a preindustrial society, while it industrialized, and after it had become the world's leading industrial nation—quite diverse Americans, some of them more prominent and powerful than others, made it clear in their thought and behavior that the Protestant work ethic was not deeply ingrained in the nation's social fabric. Some merely noticed its absence, others advocated its imposition, and still others represented an entirely different work ethic. During the War of Independence a British manufacturer admitted that the disloyal colonists had among them many "good workmen from the several countries of Europe" but insisted that the colonists needed much more to develop successful manufactures. "It is not enough that a few, or even a great number of people, understand manufactures," he said; "the spirit of manufacturing must become the general spirit of the nation, and be incorporated, as it were, into their very essence. . . . It requires a long time before the personal, and a still longer time, before the national, habits are formed." This Englishman had a point. Even in the land of Benjamin Franklin, Andrew Carnegie, and Henry Ford, nonindustrial cultures and work habits regularly thrived

his *American Counterpoint, Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston, 1971), 13–46.

2. Quoted in *The New York Times*, April 2, 1972.

and were nourished by new workers alien to the "Protestant" work ethic. It was John Adams, not Max Weber, who claimed that "manufactures cannot live, much less thrive, without honor, fidelity, punctuality, and private faith, a sacred respect for property, and the moral obligations of promises and contracts." Only a "decisive, as well as an intelligent and honest, government," Adams believed, could develop such "virtues" and "habits." Others among the Founding Fathers worried about the absence of such virtues within the laboring classes. When Alexander Hamilton proposed his grand scheme to industrialize the young republic, an intimate commented, "Unless God should send us saints for workmen and angels to conduct them, there is the greatest reason to fear for the success of the plan." Benjamin Franklin shared such fears. He condemned poor relief in 1768 and lamented the absence among English workers of regular work habits. "Saint *Monday,*" he said, "is as duly kept by our working people as *Sunday;* the only difference is that instead of employing their time cheaply at church they are wasting it expensively at the ale house." Franklin believed that if poorhouses shut down "Saint Monday and Saint Tuesday" would "soon cease to be holidays." [3]

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

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

teach its Polish common laborers the English language. "Lesson One," entitled "General," read:

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

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

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

Nearly a century and a half separated the International Harvester Corporation from Benjamin Franklin, but both wanted to reshape the work habits of others about them. Machines required that men and women adapt older work routines to new necessities and strained those wedded to premodern patterns of labor. Half a century separated similar popular laments about the impact of the machine on traditional patterns of labor. In 1873 the Chicago *Workingman's Advocate* published "The Sewing Machine," a poem in which the author scorned Elias Howe's invention by comparing it to his wife:

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

What do you think of my machine,
Ain't it the best that ever was seen?
'Tisn't a clumsy, mechanical toy,
But flesh and blood! Hear that my boy.

Fifty years later, when significant numbers of Mexicans lived in Chicago and its industrial suburbs and labored in its railroad yards, packing houses, and steel mills (in 1926, 35 percent of Chicago Inland Steel's labor force had come from Mexico), "El Enganchado" ("The Hooked One"), a popular Spanish tune, celebrated the disappointments of immigrant factory workers:

I came under contract from Lorelia.
To earn dollars was my dream,
I bought shoes and I bought a hat
And even put on trousers.
For they told me that here the dollars
Were scattered about in heaps
That there were girls and theatres
And that here everything was fun.
And now I'm overwhelmed—
I am a shoemaker by trade
But here they say I'm a camel
And good only for pick and shovel.
What good is it to know my trade
If there are manufacturers by the score
And while I make two little shoes
They turn out more than a million?
Many Mexicans don't care to speak
The language their mothers taught them
And go about saying they are Spanish
And denying their country's flag . . .
My kids speak perfect English
And have no use for Spanish,
They call me "fadder" and don't work
And are crazy about the Charleston.

I am tired of all this nonsense
I'm going back to Michogan.

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

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

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

6. Helpful summaries of recent scholarship in American labor history are Thomas A. Kruger, "American Labor Historiography, Old and New," *Journal of Social History*, 4 (1971), 277–85; Robert H. Zieger, "Workers and Scholars: Recent Trends in American Labor Historiography," *Labor History*, 13 (1972), 245–66; and Paul Faler, "Working Class Historiography," *Radical America*, 3 (1969), 56–68. Innovative works in the field that have broken away from the traditional conceptual framework include especially Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946); David Brody, *Steelworkers*

"Marxist" labor historians of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s and the few New Left historians who have devoted attention to American labor history, rarely questioned that conceptual framework.[7] Commons and his colleagues asked large questions, gathered important source materials, and put forth impressive ideas. Together with able disciples, they studied the development of the trade union as an institution and explained its place in a changing labor market. But they gave attention primarily to those few workers who belonged to trade unions and neglected much else of importance about the American working population. Two flaws especially marred this older labor history. Because so few workers belonged to permanent trade unions before 1940, its overall conceptualization excluded most working people from detailed and serious study. More than this, its methods encouraged labor historians to spin a cocoon around American workers, isolating them from their own particular subcultures and from the larger national culture. An increasingly narrow "economic" analysis caused the study of American working-class history to grow more constricted and become more detached from larger developments in American social

in *America: The Non-Union Era* (Cambridge, 1960); Stephan Thernstrom, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City* (Cambridge, 1964); David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862–1872* (New York, 1967); Montgomery, "The Working Class of the Preindustrial American City, 1780–1830," *Labor History*, 9 (1968), 1–22; Montgomery, "The Shuttle and the Cross: Weavers and Artisans in the Kensington Riots of 1844," *Journal of Social History*, 5 (1972), 411–46; Alfred F. Young, "The Mechanics and the Jeffersonians: New York, 1789–1801," *Labor History*, 5 (1964), 247–76; and Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, 1971).

7. The best example of orthodox "Marxist" labor history is Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States* (New York, 1947–1965). Emphasis in so-called New Left history on the relationship between "corporate liberalism" and American labor is found in James Weinstein, *Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900–1918* (Boston, 1968), and in Ronald Radosh, *American Labor and United States Foreign Policy* (New York, 1969). A different approach is found in Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 25 (1968), 371–407.

and cultural history and from the writing of American social and cultural history itself. After 1945 American working-class history remained imprisoned by self-imposed limitations and therefore fell far behind the more imaginative and innovative British and Continental European work in the field. In Great Britain, for example, the guideposts fixed by Sidney and Beatrice Webb have been shattered by labor and social historians such as Asa Briggs, Eric Hobsbawm, Henry Pelling, Sidney Pollard, George Rudé, E. P. Thompson, and Brian, J. F. C., and Royden Harrison, among other scholars who have posed new questions, used new methods, and dug deeply into largely neglected primary materials.[8] As a consequence, a rich and subtle new history of the British common people is now being written. Much of value remains to be learned from the older American labor historians, but the time has long been overdue for a critical re-examination of their framework and their methodology and for applying in special ways to the particularities of the American working-class experience the conceptual and methodological breakthroughs of our colleagues across the ocean.

The pages that follow give little attention to the subject matter usually considered the proper sphere of labor history (trade-

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

union development and behavior, strikes and lockouts, and radical movements) and instead emphasize the frequent tension between different groups of men and women new to the machine and a changing American society. Not all periods of time are covered: nothing is said of the half-century since the First World War when large numbers of Spanish-speaking and rural Southern white and black workers first encountered the factory and the machine.[9] Much recent evidence describing contemporary dissatisfactions with factory work is not examined.[10] Neither are

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

10. The publication in late 1972 of "Work in America" by the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, a study financed by the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, revealed widespread dissatisfactions with work among contemporary blue- and white-collar workers and even their supervisors. The dispute over this finding in government circles is described in *Newsweek*, January 1, 1973, pp. 47–48, and Howard Muson, "The Ranks of the Discontent," *The New York Times*, December 31, 1972. Other evidence of dissatisfaction among factory workers with work routines is reported in *The New York Times*, January 23, April 2, and September 3, 1972. The April dispatch reported that a University of Michigan survey team described twenty-five aspects of their jobs to factory workers and then asked the workers to rank them in order of importance. Interesting work ranked first; pay was listed second. Absenteeism, the three large Detroit automobile manufacturers reported, had doubled between 1965 and 1972, "increasing from 2 to 3 percent . . . to 5 to 6 percent." In some plants, up to 15 percent of the workers were absent "on Fridays and Mondays." Quite interesting discussions of contemporary work dissatisfactions are found in Bennett Kremen, "No Pride in This Dust. Young Workers in the Steel Mills," *Dissent* (Winter 1972), 21–28, and Steve Kline, "Henry and His Magic Kabonk Machine," *Boston Globe Magazine*, July 16, 1972, pp. 8–10, 20–24. See also Rochester (N.Y.) *Times-Union*, November 29, 1971, for a discussion of obstinate work and leisure habits among Southern white workers fresh to Northern-owned factories. And a brief feature story in the Rochester (N.Y.) *Democrat and Chronicle*, April 30, 1972, told about an artisan Santo Badagliacca who seemed to belong to another era. He had moved to Rochester from Sicily in 1956 with his wife and five-year-old daughter. He was then forty and worked for nearly twelve years as a "tailor" for the National Clothing Company, Timely Clothes, and Bond Clothes, Inc. He quit the clothing factories in 1968 and opened a small custom tailoring shop in his home. In four years, not a single order came for a custom-made suit. Three or four persons visited his place weekly but only to have alterations made. Badagliacca explained his decision to quit the factory: "Each day, it's just collars, collars, collars. I didn't work forty years as a tailor just to do that." See also Richard Sennett and

bound workers (factory slaves in the Old South) or nonwhite free laborers, mostly blacks and Asian immigrants and their descendants, given notice. These groups, too, were affected by the tensions that will be described here, a fact that emphasizes the central place they deserve in any comprehensive study of American work habits and changing American working-class behavior.

Nevertheless the focus in these pages is on free white labor in quite different time periods: 1815–1843, 1843–1893, 1893–1919. The precise years serve only as guideposts to mark the fact that American society differed greatly in each period. Between 1815 and 1843, the United States remained a predominantly preindustrial society and most workers drawn to its few factories were the products of rural and village preindustrial culture. Preindustrial American society was not premodern in the same way that European peasant societies were, but it was, nevertheless, premodern. In the half-century after 1843 industrial development radically transformed the earlier American social structure, and during this Middle Period (an era not framed around the coming and the aftermath of the Civil War) a profound tension existed between the older American preindustrial social structure and the modernizing institutions that accompanied the development of industrial capitalism. After 1893 the United States ranked as a mature industrial society. In each of these distinctive stages of change in American society, a recurrent tension also existed between native and immigrant men and women fresh to the factory and the demands imposed upon them by the regularities and disciplines of factory labor. That state of tension was regularly revitalized by the migration of diverse premodern native and foreign peoples into an industrializing or a fully industrialized society. The British economic historian Sidney Pollard has described well this process whereby "a society of peasants, craftsmen, and versatile labourers

Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York, 1972), and William Serrin, *The Company and the Union: The "Civilized Relationship" of the General Motors Corporation and the United Auto Workers* (New York, 1973).

became a society of modern industrial workers." "There was more to overcome," Pollard writes of industrializing England,

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

That same process occurred in the United States. Just as in all modernizing countries, the United States faced the difficult task of industrializing whole cultures, but in this country the process was regularly repeated, each stage of American economic growth and development involving different first-generation factory workers. The social transformation Pollard described occurred in England between 1770 and 1850, and in those decades premodern British cultures and the modernizing institutions associated primarily with factory and machine labor collided and interacted. A painful transition occurred, dominated the ethos of an entire era, and then faded in relative importance. After 1850 and until quite recently, the British working class reproduced itself and retained a relative national homogeneity. New tensions emerged but not those of a society continually busy (and worried about) industrializing persons born out of that society and often alien in birth and color and in work habits, customary values, and behavior. "Traditional social habits and customs," J. F. C. Harrison reminds us, "seldom

11. Pollard, "The Adaptation of the Labour Force," in *Genesis of Modern Management* (Cambridge, 1965), 160–208. Striking evidence of the preindustrial character of most American manufacturing enterprises before 1840 is found in Allen Pred, "Manufacturing in the American Mercantile City, 1800–1840," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, 56 (1966), 307–25. See also Richard D. Brown, "Modernization and Modern Personality in Early America, 1600–1865: A Sketch of a Synthesis," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2 (1972), 201–28.

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

Much in the following pages depends upon a particular definition of culture and an analytic distinction between culture and society. Both deserve brief comment. "Culture" as used here has little to do with Oscar Lewis's inadequate "culture of poverty" construct and has even less to do with the currently fashionable but nevertheless quite crude behavioral social his-

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

tory that defines class by mere occupation and culture as some kind of a magical mix between ethnic and religious affiliations.[13] Instead this paper has profited from the analytic distinctions between culture and society made by the anthropologists Eric Wolf and Sidney W. Mintz and the exiled Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. Mintz finds in culture "a kind of resource" and in society "a kind of arena," the distinction being "between sets of historically available alternatives or forms on the one hand, and the societal circumstances or settings within which these forms may be employed on the other." "Culture," he writes, "is *used;* and any analysis of its use immediately brings into view the arrangements of persons in societal groups for whom cultural forms confirm, reinforce, maintain, change, or deny particular arrangements of status, power, and identity." Bauman insists that for analytic purposes the two (culture and society) need always be examined discretely to explain behavior:

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

Such an analytic framework allows social historians to avoid the many pitfalls that follow implicit or explicit acceptance of what

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

the anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls "the theoretical dichotomies of classical sociology—*Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, mechanic and organic solidarity, [and] folk and urban cultures." Too often, the subtle historical processes that explain particular patterns of working-class and other behavior have been viewed as no more than "the expansion of one at the expense of the other." [14] An analytic model that distinguishes between culture

14. Eric Wolf, "Specific Aspects of Plantation Systems in the New World: Community Sub-Cultures and Social Class," in *Plantation Systems of the New World* (Washington, 1949), 142; Sidney W. Mintz, "Foreword," in Norman Whitten and John F. Szwed, eds., *Afro-American Anthropology: Contemporary Perspectives* (New York, 1970), 1–16, but especially 9–10; Zygmunt Bauman, "Marxism and the Contemporary Theory of Culture," *Co-Existence*, 5 (1968), 171–98; Clifford Geertz, *Old Societies and New States* (Glencoe, Ill., 1963), 32–54, 109–10, 154–55. See also Emilio Willems, "Peasantry and City: Cultural Persistence and Change in Historical Perspective, A European Case," *American Anthropologist*, 72 (1970), 528–43, in which Willems disputes the proposition that "peasant culture is incompatible with industrialization" and shows that in the German Rhineland town of Neyl there existed significant "cultural continuity of urban lower class and peasantry rather than cultural polarity between the two segments." A brilliant article which focuses on West Indian slaves but is nevertheless methodologically useful to students of all lower-class cultures is S. W. Mintz, "Toward an Afro-American History," *Journal of World History*, 13 (1971), 317–33. The confusion between race and culture greatly marred early twentieth-century American labor history, and no one revealed that more clearly than John R. Commons in *Races and Immigrants in America* (New York, 1907), 7, 11–12, 153–54, 173–75, *passim.* "Race differences," Commons believed, "are established in the very blood and physical condition" and "most difficult to eradicate." Changes might take place in language and other behavioral patterns, "but underneath all these changes there may continue the physical, mental and moral incapacities which determine the real character of their religion, government, industry, and literature." The behavior of the recent immigrants confused historians like Commons. His racial beliefs and the crude environmentalism he shared with other Progressive reformers encouraged that confusion. "Ireland and Italy," he could write, "have nothing to compare to the trade-union movement of England, but the Irish are the most effective organizers of the American unions, and the Italians are becoming the most ardent unionists. Most remarkable of all, the individualistic Jew from Russia, contrary to his race instinct, is joining the unions." "The American unions, in fact," Commons concluded, "grow out of American conditions, and are an American product." But he could not explain how these "races" so easily adapted to American conditions. How could he when he believed that "even the long series of crimes against the Indians, to which the term 'Century of Dishonor' seems to have

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

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

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attached itself with no protest, must be looked upon as a mob spirit of a superior race bent on despoiling a despised and inferior race"?

And, finally, attention is given to some of the larger implications resulting from this recurrent tension between work, culture, and society.

II

THE WORK HABITS and the aspirations and expectations of men and women new to factory life and labor are examined first. Common work habits rooted in diverse premodern cultures (different in many ways but nevertheless all ill fitted to the regular routines demanded by machine-centered factory processes) existed among distinctive first-generation factory workers all through American history. We focus on two quite different time periods: the years before 1843 when the factory and machine were still new to America and the years between 1893 and 1917 when the country had become the world's industrial colossus. In both periods workers new to factory production brought strange and seemingly useless work habits to the factory gate. The irregular and undisciplined work patterns of factory hands before 1843 frustrated cost-conscious manufacturers and caused frequent complaint among them. Textile factory work rules often were designed to tame such rude customs. A New Hampshire cotton factory that hired mostly women and children forbade "spirituous liquor, smoking, nor any kind of amusement . . . in the workshops, yards, or factories" and promised the "immediate and disgraceful dismissal" of employees found gambling, drinking, or committing "any other debaucheries." A Massachusetts firm nearby insisted that young workers unwilling to attend church stay "within doors and improve their time in reading, writing, and in other valuable and harmless employment." Tardy and absent Philadelphia workers paid fines and could not "carry into the factory nuts, fruits, etc.; books or paper." A Connecticut textile mill owner justified the twelve-hour day and the six-day week because it kept "workmen and children" from "vicious amusements." He forbade "gaming . . . in any private house." Manufacturers elsewhere worried about the example "idle" men set for women and children. Massachu-

setts family heads who rented "a piece of land on shares" to grow corn and potatoes while their wives and children labored in factories worried one manufacturer. "I would prefer giving constant employment at some sacrifice," he said, "to having a man of the village seen in the streets on a rainy day at leisure." Men who worked in Massachusetts woolen mills upset expected work routines in other ways. "The wool business requires more man labour," said a manufacturer, "and this we study to avoid. Women are much more ready to follow good regulations, are not captious, and do not clan as the men do against the overseers." Male factory workers posed other difficulties, too. In 1817 a shipbuilder in Medford, Massachusetts, refused his men grog privileges. They quit work, but he managed to finish a ship without using further spirits, "a remarkable achievement." An English visitor in 1832 heard an American complain that British workers in the Paterson cotton and machine shops drank excessively and figured as "the most beastly people I have ever seen." Four years later a New Jersey manufacturer of hats and caps boasted in a public card that he finally had "4 and 20 good, permanent workmen," not one infected with "the brutal leprosy of blue Monday habits and the moral gangrene of 'trades union' principles." Other manufacturers had less good fortune. Absenteeism occurred frequently among the Pennsylvania ironworkers at the rural Hopewell Village forge: hunting, harvesting, wedding parties, frequent "frolicking" that sometimes lasted for days, and uproarious Election and Independence Day celebrations plagued the mill operators. In the early nineteenth century, a New Jersey iron manufacturer filled his diary with notations about irregular work habits: "all hands drunk"; "Jacob Ventling hunting"; "molders all agree to quit work and went to the beach"; "Peter Cox very drunk and gone to bed. Mr. Evans made a solemn resolution any person or persons bringing liquor to the work enough to make drunk shall be liable to a fine"; "Edward Rutter off a-drinking. It was reported he got drunk on cheese." [15]

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

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

all such devices worked to the satisfaction of workers or their employers. Sometime in the late 1830s merchant capitalists sent a skilled British silk weaver to manage a new mill in Nantucket that would employ the wives and children of local whalers and fishermen. Machinery was installed, and in the first days women and children besieged the mill for work. After a month had passed, they started dropping off in small groups. Soon nearly all had returned "to their shore gazing and to their seats by the sea." The Nantucket mill shut down, its hollow frame an empty monument to the unwillingness of resident women and children to conform to the regularities demanded by rising manufacturers.[16]

First-generation factory workers were not unique to premodern America. And the work habits common to such workers plagued American manufacturers in later generations when manufacturers and most native urban whites scarcely remembered that native Americans had once been hesitant first-generation factory workers.[17] To shift forward in time to East and South European immigrants new to steam, machinery, and electricity and new to the United States itself is to find much that seems the same. American society, of course, had changed greatly, but in some ways it is as if a film—run at a much faster speed—is being viewed for the second time: primitive work rules for unskilled labor, fines, gang labor, and subcontracting were commonplace. In 1910 two-thirds of the workers in twenty-one major manufacturing and mining industries came from Eastern and Southern Europe or were native American blacks, and studies of these "new immigrants" record much evidence of

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

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

preindustrial work habits among the men and women new to American industry. According to Moses Rischin, skilled immigrant Jews carried to New York City town and village employment patterns, such as the *landsmannschaft* economy and a preference for small shops as opposed to larger factories, that sparked frequent disorders but hindered stable trade unions until 1910. Specialization spurred anxiety: in Chicago Jewish glovemakers resisted the subdivision of labor even though it promised better wages. "You shrink from doing either kind of work itself, nine hours a day," said two observers of these immigrant women. "You cling to the variety . . . , the mental luxury of first, finger-sides, and then, five separate leather pieces, for relaxation, to play with! *Here* is a luxury worth fighting for!" American work rules also conflicted with religious imperatives. On the eighth day after the birth of a son, Orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe held a festival, "an occasion of much rejoicing." But the American work week had a different logic, and if the day fell during the week the celebration occurred the following Sunday. "The host . . . and his guests," David Blaustein remarked, "know it is not the right day," and "they fall to mourning over the conditions that will not permit them to observe the old custom." The occasion became "one for secret sadness rather than rejoicing." Radical Yiddish poets, like Morris Rosenfeld, the presser of men's clothing, measured in verse the psychic and social costs exacted by American industrial work rules:

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

The clock—I shudder—Dost hear how it draws me?
It calls me "Machine" and it cries [to] me "Sew"! [18]

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

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

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

More than irregular work habits bound together the behavior of first-generation factory workers separated from one another by time and by the larger structure of the society they first encountered. Few distinctive American working-class populations differed in so many essentials (their sex, their religions, their nativity, and their prior rural and village cultures) as the Lowell mill girls and women of the Era of Good Feelings and the South and East European steelworkers of the Progressive Era. To describe similarities in their expectations of factory labor is not to blur these important differences but to suggest

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

that otherwise quite distinctive men and women interpreted such work in similar ways. The Boston Associates, pioneer American industrialists, had built up Lowell and other towns like it to overcome early nineteenth-century rural and village prejudices and fears about factory work and life and in their regulation of lower-class social habits hoped to assure a steady flow of young rural women ("girls") to and from the looms. "The sagacity of self-interest as well as more disinterested considerations," explained a Lowell clergyman in 1845, "has led to the adoption of a strict system of moral police." Without "sober, orderly, and moral" workers, profits would be "absorbed by cases of irregularity, carelessness, and neglect." The Lowell capitalists thrived by hiring rural women who supplemented a distant family's income, keeping them a few years, and then renewing the process. Such steady labor turnover kept the country from developing a permanent proletariat and so was thought to assure stability. Lowell's busy cotton mills, well-ordered boarding-houses, temples of religion and culture, factory girls, and moral police so impressed Anthony Trollope that he called the entire enterprise a "philanthropic manufacturing college." John Quincy Adams thought the New England cotton mills "palaces of the Poor," and Henry Clay marveled over places like the Lowell mills. "Who has not been delighted with the clock-work movements of a large cotton factory?" asked the father of the American System. The French traveler Michel Chevalier had a less sanguine reaction. He found Lowell "neat and decent, peaceable and sage," but worried, "Will this become like Lancashire? Does this brilliant glare hide the misery and suffering of the working girls?" [20]

Historians of the Lowell mill girls find little evidence before 1840 of organized protest among them and attribute their

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

collective passivity to corporation policing policies, the frequent turnover in the labor force, the irregular pace of work (after it was rationalized in the 1840s, it provoked collective protest), the freedom the mill girls enjoyed away from rural family dominance, and their relatively decent earnings. The women managed the transition to mill life because they did not expect to remain factory workers too long. Nevertheless frequent inner tension revealed itself among the mobile mill women. In an early year, a single mill discharged twenty-eight women for such reasons as "misconduct," "captiousness," "disobedience," "impudence," "levity," and even "mutiny." The difficult transition from rural life to factory work also caused tensions outside the mills. Rural girls and women, Harriet Robinson later recalled, came to Lowell in "outlandish fashions" and with "queer names," "Samantha, Triphena, Plumy, Kezia, Aseneth, Elgardy, Leafy, Ruhamah, Almaretta, Sarpeta, and Florilla . . . among them." They spoke a "very peculiar" dialect ("a language almost unintelligible"). "On the broken English and Scotch of their ancestors," said Robinson, "was engrafted the nasal Yankee twang." Some soon learned the "city way of speaking"; others changed their names to "Susan" or "Jane"; and for still others new clothing, especially straw hats, became important. But the machines they worked still left them depressed and with feelings of anxiety. "I never cared much for machinery," Lucy Larcom said of her early Lowell years. "I could not see into their complications or feel interested in them. . . . In sweet June weather I would lean far out of the window, and try not to hear the unceasing clash of sound inside." She kept a plant beside her and recollected an overseer who confiscated newspaper clippings and even the pages of a "torn Testament" some women had slipped into the factory. Years after she had left the textile mills, Lucy Larcom ridiculed her mill-girl poems: "I continued to dismalize myself at times quite unnecessarily." Their titles included "The Early Doomed" and "The Complaint of a Nobody" (in which she compared herself to "a weed growing up in a garden"). When she finally quit the mill, the paymaster asked, "Going where you can earn more money?" "No," she

remembered answering, "I am going where I can have more time." "Ah, yes!" he responded, "time is money." [21]

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

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

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

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

21. Roll Book of the Hamilton Company, 1826–1827, printed in Caroline Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture* (Boston, 1924), 266–67; Harriet Robinson, *Loom and Spindle* (New York, 1898), 62–69; Lucy Larcom, *A New England Girlhood* (Boston, 1889), 138–43, 152–55, 174–76, 180–85, 209–19, 226–31.

Contemporary labor critics who scorned the *Lowell Offering* as little more than the work of "poor, caged birds," who "while singing of the roses . . . forget the bars of their prison," had not read it carefully. Their attachment to nature was the concern of persons working machines in a society still predominantly "a garden," and it was not unique to these Lowell women. In New Hampshire five hundred men and women petitioned the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company's proprietors in 1853 not to cut down an elm tree to allow room for an additional mill: "It was a beautiful and goodly tree" and belonged to a time "when the yell of the red man and the scream of the eagle were alone heard on the banks of the Merrimack, instead of two giant edifices filled with the buzz of busy and well-remunerated industry." Each day, the workers said, they viewed that tree as "a connecting link between the past and the present," and "each autumn [it] remind[s] us of our own mortality." [22]

Aspirations and expectations interpret experience and thereby help shape behavior. Some Lowell mill girls revealed dissatisfactions, and others made a difficult transition from rural New England to that model factory town, but that so few planned to remain mill workers eased that transition and hampered collective protest. Men as well as women who expect to spend only a

22. William Scoresby, *American Factories and Their Mill Operatives* (Boston, 1845), 21–23, 58–66, *passim;* Norman Ware, *Industrial Worker*, 1840–1860 (New York, 1924), 85; "New York Industrial Exhibition," *Sessional Papers* (Commons) 1854, vol. 26, p. 10; Ray Ginger, "Labor in a Massachusetts Cotton Mill," *Business History Review*, 28 (1954), 67–91 (a brilliant study of mobility among New England factory women). Useful works on the early New England cotton mills and their female workers include Caroline Ware, *op. cit.;* Hannah Josephson, *Golden Threads, Mill Girls and Magnates* (New York, 1949); Vera Shlakman, "Economic History of a Factory Town: A Study of Chicopee, Massachusetts," *Smith College Studies in History*, 20, nos. 1–4 (1934–1935); Edith Abbott, *op. cit.*

few years as factory workers have little incentive to join unions. That was just as true of the immigrant male common laborers in the steel mills of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (when multiplant oligopoly characterized the nation's most important manufacturing industry) as in the Lowell cotton mills nearly a century earlier. David Brody has explained much about the common laborers. In those years, the steel companies successfully divorced wages from productivity to allow the market to shape them. Between 1890 and 1910, efficiencies in plant organization cut labor costs by about a third. The great Carnegie Pittsburgh plants employed 14,359 common laborers, 11,694 of them South and East Europeans. Most, peasant in origin, earned less than $12.50 a week (a family needed fifteen dollars for subsistence). A staggering accident rate damaged these and other men: nearly 25 percent of the recent immigrants employed at the Carnegie South Works were injured or killed each year between 1907 and 1910, 3,723 in all. But like the Lowell mill women, these men rarely protested in collective ways, and for good reason. They did not plan to stay in the steel mills long. Most had come to the United States as single men (or married men who had left their families behind) to work briefly in the mills, save some money, return home, and purchase farmland. Their private letters to European relatives indicated a realistic awareness of their working life that paralleled some of the Lowell fiction: "if I don't earn $1.50 a day, it would not be worth thinking about America"; "a golden land so long as there is work"; "here in America one must work for three horses"; "let him not risk coming, for he is too young"; "too weak for America." Men who wrote such letters and avoided injury often saved small amounts of money, and a significant number fulfilled their expectations and quit the factory and even the country. Forty-four South and East Europeans left the United States for every one hundred that arrived between 1908 and 1910. Not a steelworker, a young Italian boy living in Rochester, New York, summed up the expectations of many such immigrant men in a poem he wrote after studying English just three months:

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

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

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

Immigrant expectations coincided for a time with the fiscal needs of industrial manufacturers. The Pittsburgh steel magnates had as much good fortune as the Boston Associates. But the stability and passivity they counted on among their unskilled workers depended upon steady work and the opportunity to escape the mills. When frequent recessions caused recurrent unemployment, immigrant expectations and behavior changed. What Brody calls peasant "group consciousness" and "communal loyalty" sustained bitter wildcat strikes after employment picked up. The tenacity of these immigrant strikers for higher wages amazed contemporaries, and brutal suppression often accompanied them (Cleveland, 1899; East Chicago, 1905; McKees Rock, 1909; Bethlehem, 1910; and Youngstown in 1915 where, after a policeman shot into a peaceful parade, a riot caused an estimated one million dollars in damages). The First World War and its aftermath blocked the traditional route of overseas outward mobility, and the consciousness of immigrant steelworkers changed. They sparked the 1919 steel strike. The steel mill had become a way of life for them and was no longer the means by which to reaffirm and even strengthen older peasant and village life-styles.[24]

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