

## Class, Culture and Empire: E.P. Thompson and the Making of Social History\*

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**Abstract** In this article, the author asks: How has the legacy of E.P. Thompson helped shape the emergence of Social History in the United States? How have ideas about race, gender and empire, largely absent from Thompson's work, been incorporated in writing on labor, immigration, and American exceptionalism? Is it now possible to synthesize race, class, and gender? Or, have histories based on class analysis so elided race and gender that such grafting has been foreclosed? With a bit of gossip here, a gesture to historiography there, and as little charm as possible, the author wonders: Is there any justice for "the Subaltern" in this profession? Or, is it just another "Organization Man" gone West?

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*Middle-man* (to Author): If you do not identify your composition a history, how then do we itemize it? The rank and file is entitled to know.

*Author* (to middle-man): Sir, I identify it a *gesture*. Sir, the rank and file is entitled to know.

*Middle-man* (to Author): There is no immediate demand for *gestures*. There is immediate demand for history. We are historical agents not free agents.

*Author* (to middle-man): Sir, I identify it a history. Sir, itemize it accordingly.

- with apologies to G.V. Desani

Infamy, infamy, they've got it in for me.

- "Carry on Cl[...]"

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### Prologue: Can the "Subaltern" Write History?

**WALLY:** ... And I'm really quite self-satisfied. I'm happy with myself. I have no complaint about myself. I mean, if I'm just one more nice guy in the Dalton School in the seventh grade, well then, I'm just as nice as the next guy in the seventh grade. But the thing is, you know, let's face it, there's a whole enormous world out there that I don't ever think about, and I *certainly* don't take responsibility for how I've lived in *that* world.

"My Dinner with André"<sup>1</sup>

In early 1968, about the time of the Tet Offensive, a leading member of the fraternity of South Asian historians wrote a thirty-page prospectus for other members of his coterie outlining what American scholars needed to do to open the door to the subcontinent and to establish their own school of South Asian history.<sup>2</sup> The Cambridge School in England was apparently too obsessed with theories of Nationalist conspiracy to be left unchallenged, while the failings of the historians from the subcontinent lay in their obsession with the work of great men, resulting from a conception "of their own recent

history, which tends to be seen in terms of 'giants,' and insufficient attention to social historical concerns.

This scholar's vision did not go unchallenged. The facts of the characterization of English or South Asian historiographies were never questioned, nor was the overall outline of what American historians of the subcontinent should be attempting to accomplish. Rather, the major concern was whether or not this new school should be dominated by scholars from Chicago. Both Columbia (which received no mention in the prospectus) and the University of Pennsylvania, one historian noted, had equal if not better claims to lead, having had Area Studies programs (language courses, archeology, history, anthropology, and the like) in place since the 1950s – as compared with Chicago, which, for all its pretensions in the field of Sociology, was a new kid on the block.<sup>3</sup> Dollars, and many of them covert, were available in abundance, and squabbles would continue to revolve around the question of which institution should be getting what portion of this pie. The assumption that American scholars had a mandate to study India seemed to be taken for granted.<sup>4</sup>

An echo of this debate could be heard in an introductory graduate seminar at a major research university in the middle of the 1980s, not long after the invasion of Grenada, where a class of students was informed by an American, Harvard-trained specialist of China that Americans needed to be the ones to write the history of China because Chinese historians are too biased to do so objectively.<sup>5</sup> It can also be heard today (at a time when we are reminded by events in central Africa of the CIA-sanctioned killing of Patrice Lumumba) in African scholars' complaints that their work is discredited unless they can get published in Euro-American journals, and in American scholars' assumptions that African-based scholars' limited access to resources is a determining factor in their ability to write "good" histories.<sup>6</sup>

Such statements, reflecting a form of imperial prerogative, have a long history. Edward Thompson (E.P. Thompson's father) pronounced in 1925, a few years after the 1919 Amritsar massacre, that Indians were not historians. "They rarely show any critical ability," he wrote, and "even their most useful books, books full of research and information, exasperate with their repetitions and diffuseness, and lose effect by their uncritical enthusiasms."<sup>7</sup> These assumptions, what W.E.B. Du Bois would have considered examples of "the propaganda of history," have remained with us into the 1990s, under the guise of notions of "proper historical practice" (Edward Thompson's "solid highways to scholarly esteem and approval").

There may have been some improvement from Edward Thompson's time. We have moved from self-consciously racist and "orientalist" assumptions to cultural, economic and political ones (distinctions between working class and underclass, worthy and

unworthy poor, migrants and refugees, artisans and others, for example), where one of a pair can be "rescued" or may represent itself, and the other cannot or may not. But the ascribed "deficiencies" remain, as does the belief in the "objectivity" and unassailability of bourgeois historiography.<sup>8</sup> What such things suggest (to me at least) is that the development of historical practice has paralleled the process whereby imperial privilege has become naturalized as "progress" or "civilization"; those who question the trajectory are dismissed as biased, beset by "uncritical enthusiasms," and, in short, just not historians.<sup>9</sup>

The latest group to be so described are members of the Subaltern Studies Collective (though not all to the same extent). Before we proceed further, therefore, it is worth glancing at the work of this collective, as their work has contributed to destabilizing western historical practice in quite significant ways. At first it did not appear that this would be the case. One reading of the early years of the Collective might be that it represented the application of Social Historical methods and concepts to Indian History.<sup>10</sup> As Gyan Prakash has ably demonstrated, however, it became evident very quickly to members of the group that these concepts "hit their historical limit in colonialism."<sup>11</sup> Prakash writes:

It is true that the effort to retrieve the autonomy of the subaltern subject resembled the "history from below" approach developed by social history in the West. But the subalternist search for a humanist subject-agent frequently ended up with the discovery of the failure of subaltern agency: the moment of rebellion always contained within it the moment of failure. The desire to recover the subaltern's autonomy was repeatedly frustrated because subalternity, by definition, signified the impossibility of autonomy: subaltern rebellions only offered fleeting moments of defiance, "a night-time of love," not "a life-time of love."<sup>12</sup>

The Collective's historians realized, therefore, that Subaltern Studies "could not just be the Indian version of 'history from below' approach; it had to conceive the subaltern differently and write different histories."<sup>13</sup> As such, they were already receptive to the kind of criticism leveled at them by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her deconstruction of Subaltern Studies historiography<sup>14</sup> (and their response was not as defensive as social historians' reaction to Joan Wallach Scott's somewhat similar critique of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*<sup>15</sup>). When, later, Spivak asked "Can the Subaltern Speak?" following a discussion of a woman's *sati*, many of the problems of attributing "agency" to "subalterns" were readily apparent.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Social Historians in America remained largely oblivious to these developments among Subaltern Studies historians, perhaps assuming that the latter would eventually make the leap from their second stage insurgency (the study of colonialism), to the third stage (historical materialism) once

they had access to funding and other western resources. Instead, however, it seems that what Thompson dismissed as a case of the "French" flu (but, which for a number of reasons, would be better called "Algerian"<sup>17</sup>), took root within the Collective in the guise of "postcoloniality" and has now begun to afflict British and American academic populations.

One of the first symptoms of this flu is the miscegenation of categories and narratives that had previously been kept in seclusion. In western historical practice, categories of race and class emerged out of almost separately constructed (but intimately related and intertwined) historiographical traditions, in situations where historical narratives were assumed to be divided along the axes of metropolitan (class-based) and colonial (race-based) – never a Mark Twain do we meet; not even a Rudyard Kipling.<sup>18</sup> Miscegenation between class and race categories and narratives clearly occurred but it was either ignored (hoping it would go away) or repressed. E.P. Thompson's *The Making of an English Working Class* needed to make no mention of race,<sup>19</sup> his father, Edward Thompson's work on India and the British Empire ignored class.<sup>20</sup> Many historians now question this dichotomy, but its legacy still affects the practice of history.<sup>21</sup> Since the two narratives were constructed in relation to one another, it is not enough now to try to superimpose one on the other. Class analysis has hidden within its interstices race, and vice-versa. Both have erased issues of gender. Uncovering these erasures and elisions is therefore the first step in the process of racializing class and classifying race.

In an attempt to reveal a miscegenation of narratives – the assembling together of metropole and periphery, class, race, and gender in a promiscuous gathering, the mixing of metaphors – this essay enlarges on "The Empire and Mr. Thompson."<sup>22</sup> In this article, Madhavi Kale and I endeavored to focus on an aspect of E.P. Thompson's work that has received minimal attention, namely his relationship to the British Empire within which he was born.<sup>23</sup> The paper highlighted the connections between the work of Edward Thompson, leading up to his final study of *The Making of the Indian Princes*, and his son in his similarly titled work on the English working class. After revealing the imperial residues in the son's work we commented on the fact that empire was so absent from his work, and wondered about the implications of this for his understanding of the "peculiarities" of the English and their contributions to the growth of "the liberty tree."

But this was only one part of our intent. We wanted, also, to suggest that E.P. Thompson's relationship with empire shaped the work of a whole generation of historians who followed in his wake. To understand the genealogy of social history and developments within

the Western historical profession over the last thirty years, we proposed, the lens needs to be widened so that it encompasses not just someone like E.P. Thompson, but, through him, Edward Thompson, Jawarhalal Nehru, and Vinayak Savarkar as well.<sup>24</sup> Unearthing such genealogies ought to make us more keenly aware of the politics of history writing, "its conditions of production, its contexts of utterance, its power to shape knowledge systems and to hide its own (in this case) Orientalist origins and presumptions."<sup>25</sup> Moreover, we wanted to suggest that what was alive and well in British India between the wars, the naturalizing of the imperial, is now what we witness in contemporary American political discourse. So natural has that which is socially constructed become that we do not realize the ways in which it seeps into our historical analyses.

The elision of empire in E.P. Thompson's work has had implications for the study of history. While Thompson continued a well-established tradition among English historians of treating the empire as peripheral, the weight of his enterprise was considerable. The fact that one of the most radical and acclaimed of historians ignored empire and all its aspects, enabled many others to adopt a category of class that was reductionist, even while it claimed to combat the reductionism of orthodox Marxism. In other words, in his focus on culture Thompson did not merely enlarge the historian's lens to "rescue" the lower orders as agents, so enabling further enlargement in the future (a Whiggish version of historical practice). Instead, his use of culture placed another "veil" (to use W.E.B. Du Bois's term) in front of History, another layer on the "palimpsest of history" (to appropriate Nehru's metaphor), making it in some ways more difficult to incorporate empire, non-metropolitan subjects, and race and gender perspectives into future historical analysis.<sup>26</sup> Efforts to focus on such things have faced resistance, often from people who invoke the name of E.P. Thompson. Such a focus, these people claim, will lead in the direction of nihilism, reactionary politics, "fashion", and a loss of the only truly radical historical category, that of class.<sup>27</sup>

The first of several sections that follow focuses on a conversation I had with a labor historian about "The Empire and Mr. Thompson," while the second section elaborates upon some of the points made in that paper about the omission of gender and race from *The Making of the English Working Class*. The last two sections discuss some of the work in American history that has been influenced by Thompson's analysis, focusing in particular upon two areas in which I have published – migration and American exceptionalism. I hasten to note that if these different sections are pieces of a single puzzle they are not intended to fit together smoothly. Each section is a "gesture"; collectively they may or may not constitute History.

### I. My Dinner with André

ANDRÉ: ... And they live with a sort of wild enthusiasm - you know, the word "enthusiasm" refers to "the god within," and they do somehow seem to see the god within everything. So all sorts of things that we would do sort of mechanically, just because we feel they have to be done, they do with an extraordinary intensity. I mean for instance, all the buildings at Findhorn just shine. And then things like the icebox, the stove, the car - well, they all have names. And since you wouldn't treat Helen, the icebox, with any less respect than you would Margaret, your wife, you make sure that Helen is as clean as Margaret ...<sup>28</sup>

At an impromptu tutorial with a senior scholar of labor history, I was being questioned about "The Empire and Mr. Thompson." The discussion was a friendly one, even when it became clear that there were fundamental differences of opinion dividing us. I had arrived at this historian's doorstep believing that I would be attending a meeting, only to learn that it had been postponed, and had been invited in for some cherry pie and a beer.

Since I had given my host a copy of the Thompson essay at our previous encounter, I had expected, perhaps hoped, perhaps feared, that he would have read it and that the conversation would at some point focus on E.P. Thompson. At our very first meeting about a year previously he had told me of his own close connection with Edward: that he had house-sat for him when the latter had gone on his speaking tour of India (the trip that would be the starting point of our essay).<sup>29</sup> On this occasion, I heard again about this relationship. But our initial point of departure was his comment, "I have read the beginning and the end of your paper, which is very long, and I have the basic idea of what you are doing, but I do not think I will read more. It seems to be an indictment of Edward for not seeing and denouncing the imperialism of his father." But before I could respond to this statement, we turned to a discussion of the nature of the father's imperialism. What exactly was it? Wasn't he pro-Nationalist? Didn't he convert from Methodism to Buddhism?<sup>30</sup> How did it compare with that of other members of his generation? If E.P. Thompson was raised in this milieu, can we blame him for not transcending it? What really was Edward, the son, supposed to do about this?

Most of these questions were considered in the bulk of our article so I will not rehash them in full here. Suffice it to say that the paper was not meant as an indictment of either Edward John or Edward Palmer. It was intended as an exposé of an aspect of imperialism, and an analysis of the way that anti-imperialists (as we like to think we are) can miss the extent to which these aspects of imperialism find their way into our analyses. The essay was harsh in places, particularly when it attempted to show how different kinds of Indian

nationalism were discredited in Edward John's sometimes pro-nationalist writings; but imperialism was and is harsh. We cannot pass over it by saying that we are so much better than everyone else, so what we do is fine. Perhaps we can say we are politically justified, that we are endeavoring to expose that imperialist discourse, and that this is an on-going commitment. But we have to locate ourselves in that imperial landscape. We are not critics, above the fray.<sup>31</sup> And if we think that we might be (and to some extent, this is directed at Thompson's understandings of both empiricism and objectivity), then we are both fooling ourselves and replicating imperial discourses.<sup>32</sup>

Was E.P. Thompson supposed to denounce his father? Of course not. Why would he? What would be the point of doing this, even if he were able to recognize his father's "limitations"? No, the point is to understand what E.P. Thompson's defensive reaction to criticism of his father, and what his own impression of his father's "alien homage" to Rabindranath Tagore in particular and India in general, suggest about him and his ideas.<sup>33</sup> Once we have examined these, we can then ask informed questions about the son's writings. Are the British empire and certain kinds of people within it written out of, or elided in his work?<sup>34</sup> What is the significance, for example, of the absence of mention of slavery, slaves and abolition in *The Making of the English Working Class*? Where are the Irish? And what about India? All this was the subject of the central part of our paper, which talked about aspects of the father's work that seemed to have been carried over, consciously or unconsciously, into the work of the son.

Up to this point, our discussion had been going relatively smoothly, the fact that the paper remained unread meant that some of my colleagues' questions were not as penetrating as they might have been. Nevertheless, there was some sparring going on. My senior colleague seemed to be waiting to pounce on a stray comment, should it present itself (which it almost inevitably would).

In the meantime, though, we discussed our own debts to Thompson. I located my own "conversion experience," as my discussant described that moment when one decides to become a historian, in my reading of *The Poverty of Theory*. This was clearly a romantic exaggeration of my own intellectual development (the length of unemployment lines in England were equally compelling reasons to apply to study history in the United States), but it did nevertheless speak to the fact that this text had influenced me greatly. My fellow communicant's "light on the road to Damascus" came, apparently, while reading Hobsbawm's *The Age of Capital*. I then said something that my soon-to-be adversary thought was going to suggest that I had felt betrayed by Thompson, perhaps accounting for some of our invective against him. I said, "That is not

it at all, that is not what I meant, at all." Rather, I was about to suggest that the fact that I had been started down the road to becoming a historian by reading Thompson, there was some degree of freedom to be derived from the fact that he no longer seemed to be practicing history within the rigid confines of the academy, but was instead engaged in anti-nuclear and other political concerns (my one experience of seeing Thompson was at an anti-nuclear rally sponsored by the Westminster Borough Council). Being a "disciple" of Thompson was not a limiting experience. The same critical thinking that he applied to Althusser, his no-holds-barred, take-no-prisoners writing could be used anywhere.<sup>35</sup> All very romantic stuff.

I continued by finally responding, as forcefully as possible, to my colleague's initial point asserting that this was not a diatribe against Thompson for being an imperialist. For my part (and I only speak for myself here), I was trying to bring to the paper my changing understanding of myself: a former English public school boy brought up on a "healthy diet" of imperial propaganda dressed up in the guise of "common sense" and "proper" behavior (rugby not cricket!); a member of a middle-class English family, which when one scratches beneath the surface owes much of its (in)coherence to the (one-time?) existence of an empire; an American citizen who has written about African American history and now is preoccupied with writing on comparative historical concerns; and, the father of two children who have roots in the Bombay Presidency as strong as those in the Home Counties of England. My strong desire was to examine myself and my own intellectual baggage to consider the way in which the things that I have taken for granted have their origins in imperial relationships. What better way for a historian to do this than to consider perhaps the "seminal" text in Anglo-American social history – *The Making of the English Working Class*?

Inexorably, we were heading toward a disagreement. My cherry-eating assailant seemed happy enough so far, but he was there lurking, I felt sure. And then I stumbled into the present and toward the trap. We wanted to suggest further, I asserted, that if there were these imperial links hidden in Thompson's work, perhaps they also lay in the work of those people who had used his ideas on the American side of the Atlantic. This opened the door to a discussion of how Thompson has been appropriated by historians in different political contexts. But before considering American appropriation, we turned to consider that of Indian historians. Why had the Subaltern Studies Collective found E.P. Thompson so useful, if all these imperial links/limitations were manifest? I mentioned that we had focused on this question in our consideration of Ranajit Guha's critique of Thompson's ideas about the universal benefits of the "rule

of law" which he described the British bringing to India, and in Dipesh Chakrabarty's discussion of the problems of simultaneously applying Thompson's concepts of culture and class-consciousness to India;<sup>36</sup> and that, moreover, the Collective had seemingly caught a case of "French flu", so that many of its members had changed their opinions of Thompson's usefulness to their endeavors.<sup>37</sup>

The trap was laid, but still I was not within it – until, that is, I mentioned the word "privileging." I must have said something to the effect that one of the problems is that Thompson doesn't see how his analysis privileges certain groups and still ends up denigrating others. I did say that this had been one of my points of departure in my own contribution to social history.<sup>38</sup> For it had always seemed to me that the way social historians had studied migration, the area with which I was most familiar (to which I will return), and that I felt owed much to Thompson's legacy, almost always tended to privilege certain groups and narratives over others.<sup>39</sup>

My antagonist pounced. "That is where we part company, I'm afraid. I find the use of that term [privileging] in critiquing Thompson wholly misguided and unhelpful." This is not verbatim testimony since I had no pen and my fork was filled with a chunk of pie, but it gets across the intent. I was then treated to a diatribe against some of those who have criticized Thompson along these lines, particularly, I felt (though no names were mentioned), Joan Scott.<sup>40</sup> This had not been Thompson's intent, I was told. He was trying to get at the history of the inarticulate using those sources that were available to him. He was not trying to elevate the status of the artisans, but was trying to use them to give him access to this world about which the historical record was silent. He was rescuing them from universal condescension. This he felt was clear from his introduction to *The Unknown Mayhew*.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Thompson was akin to Eugene Victor Debs, I was told: "when one man is not free, he feels that he is not free." Thompson, he could assure me from his personal interactions with the man, was concerned about opening the doors to everyone. He was very radical. He was not interested in imposing his ideas on others, by privileging some and being condescending to others.

Without question, the presentation was more impressive than my rendering of it here. I had been happily eating away, only to realize finally that these cherries were indeed a little sour. I needed time to think and it was already late, so I replied, "That is an interesting perspective, and I need time to think about a response, and it's getting late. I should go." But I didn't budge. Instead I made the mistake of quipping that Thompson may have felt that way, but he was no Debs, thereby implicitly endorsing the formulation as presented to me. Debs, I argued, was in the prison alongside the

convicts who cheered him when he was released. Thompson, by contrast, I said (remembering the comment of a historian at Edinburgh University who had suggested that Thompson's romantic picture of the working class was typical of an outsider), was, by his own admission, more of a patrician, one of the gentry.<sup>42</sup> This was a side-track, perhaps stalling for time, and I was only digging the hole deeper. For my adversary's response was to say that that kind of critique might have resonance for historians from Britain and India, but Americans were unmoved by claims about Thompson's patrician status. It didn't really mean much to them; which is why, he stressed, it has been useful to have Americans assess Thompson's legacy.

Order had been restored. I was pigeon-holed as a misguided English critic of Thompson, my co-author a misguided Indian – citizenship denied. No more really needed to be said on the topic, especially as American Thompsonians had been immunized from the imperial infection. The last part of our paper (as it was then, and which I rehearse below), trying to make these connections across the Atlantic had been discounted in the acceptance of the exceptionalism of American historians. I tried to resurrect Du Bois for my purposes, but this only took us down that Avenue named "The Meaning of W.E.B. Du Bois." It ended at a roundabout that we circled trying to decide which exit to take (the one that would allow us to employ him for our previous discussion), but we disagreed as to which one looked most attractive. And now it was very late. I needed to go, and go I did.

## II. Of Mr. Edward P. Thompson and Others

Now one of the chief errors of thought is to continue to think in one set of forms, categories, ideas, etc., when the object, the content, has moved on, has created or laid premises for an extension, a development of thought.

C.L.R. James, *Notes on Dialectics*<sup>43</sup>

In the last few years social history has witnessed a rush among historians into discourse analysis, what Bryan D. Palmer has described as a "descent into discourse."<sup>44</sup> Palmer believes, as many other Social Historians do, that a lot has been lost in the process of this descent.<sup>45</sup> In particular, it is argued, a politically vital historical method based on class analysis, has been replaced by one that apparently has no radical possibilities, and which ends only in a kind of Nietzschean nihilism.

In part, the success of Social History has created its own difficulties. The idea of looking at history "from the bottom up," while first applied to lower classes generally, was also an invitation to

look at oppression from many different perspectives (sexual, racial and ethnic discrimination along with economic exploitation). Thus, while class analysis seemed to hold sway initially (especially as Karl Marx, turning Hegel on his head, was the first person noted for looking at history from this bottom-up perspective), African Americans, women, so-called "ethnic-Americans" and so on, also began to approach history from this direction. The result has been that class has been challenged as the most useful tool for social analysis. "What about working-class racism, or patriarchy?" have become common complaints (clearly evident in discussions of gender and the roles of women in migrant communities, explored in the next section).<sup>46</sup>

The first response of Social Historians has been to loosen the hold of class on their analysis. Large numbers of people have followed E.P. Thompson's less rigid and doctrinaire analysis of class and his assertions (following Engels) that class is a determinant only "in the last analysis."<sup>47</sup> New emphasis has been placed upon ethnicity, race, gender, religion and so on, which has led to a further erosion of class's categorical supremacy. But, once historians focus on these other variables, class ends up only in the position of *primus inter pares*, sometimes losing even that position.<sup>48</sup> Things have fallen apart. Many of the old-guard Social Historians and their sympathizers believe that these new departures (the emphasis, for example, on identity politics) are less capable of producing change than the old class politics.<sup>49</sup>

Worse than merely "hypocritical," it is often argued, linguistic theorists have been prone to psychotic behavior and borderline fascism. And indeed, some of them may not be particularly appealing people. But resorting to such *ad hominem*, un-"civil" attacks on "discourse radicals" does not allow us to consider carefully what they are saying about the nature of Social History and the problems with some of its assumptions. For, while Marx should not be dismissed for what came after his death, we must nevertheless recognize with the new "radicals," that his analysis of exploitative and oppressive societies was formed at a particular historical conjuncture. Living in western Europe at the height of the industrial revolution and seeing the formation of an industrial proletariat, it was not surprising that he would see the economic category as foundational – fundamental to all social problems and essential for social analysis. If one wanted to bring about a social revolution in the mid-nineteenth century, it would have been very difficult to ignore such developments to locate gender, ethnic or racial conflicts at the core of social ills.

This does not mean, however, that these conflicts were not there; nor does it mean that when social change occurred, either in its

"evolutionary" or "revolutionary" forms, that it dealt with these other conflicts. In fact, the very particularistic nature of class analysis, its tendency towards its own form of essentialism, led to gender and race being neglected and placed under erasure, so that dealing with or acting on the basis of class tensions often led to the hardening of sexual and racial oppression (and, in the end, the creation of new forms of class exploitation).

As a result of the inadequacies of such an economic and class model, then, new approaches to history have emerged. Seen from a narrow perspective, as many of their detractors have tended to view them, the practitioners of such approaches have revealed a tendency towards "nihilism." If the category of class is displaced by another category, why cannot it also be displaced by still another, and another, and so on. At first one moves towards a "holy trinity" (race, class, gender), but pretty soon one is given these three plus a few more – region, ethnicity, religion, and sexual preference. Finally, one might suggest that whenever the list is terminated it should always be done with an "et cetera" at its end, in case any category that might have some influence on the object under study has been omitted. Soon, the same event can be examined from so many different perspectives that it has multiple meanings, with each having as much importance as another – post-foundationalism, nihilism.

Nevertheless, any impulse in this direction is preferable to the status quo among radically-minded historians. Of course, many scholars argue that such approaches play into the hands of reactionaries, who have been attacking class analysis all along, and who would be happy to emphasize one or other of these social categories. There may be some validity to this charge. One only has to think of members of the Dunning school of historians at Columbia University who argued that race was of prime significance in the American South. Such an approach legitimated Jim Crow and other forms of racial oppression.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, the courage of a C. Vann Woodward focusing on class issues helped to undermine such legitimacy.<sup>51</sup>

But, while a system of economic exploitation may be overthrown and replaced by a less exploitative system, it is questionable whether this system would be considered liberating were it to be examined from an another vantage point. From a gender perspective, for example, the replacement of a patriarchal slave system by a patriarchal "free labor" system would not necessitate any change in condition for some of the enslaved.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, from the perspective of race, any radical social transformation that brought about social equality for all "white" people, but which, like Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, left black people as hewers of wood, could not be considered liberating.<sup>53</sup> Of course, a so-called "historical materialist" would argue that class analysis should

incorporate the experiences of African Americans and women and that, used correctly, it would help to eliminate all forms of exploitation; but it need not do so. And anyway, many of those same historical materialists have proved quite capable of making their own rush towards reactionary politics.<sup>54</sup>

The type of change that occurs might be shaped by a particular discourse which limited the potential for liberation and rationalized "a new kind of slavery."<sup>55</sup> Unless we believe that class is a transhistorical category, then it is shaped by a particular social environment. One part of this environment is economic (the means of production and who controls them); but other parts will be gendered and racial. The way particular people respond to their economic position in society, in other words, how they feel about their relative economic disempowerment, will be determined in part by current gender and racial beliefs and practices. Thus, skilled white artisans losing their foothold in the labor market or finding their jobs deskilled, and thereby losing their prestige, will respond differently on the basis of a number of factors. If they see this as a loss of once cherished masculinity, and believe that they now have no more value than "their" womenfolk, they are likely either to contest it vigorously with management or attempt to assert their will over women in other, sometimes violent, ways. If they are told they are no better than "wage slaves," and so explicitly compared to the most despised and believed-to-be-emasculated group in society, their responses will often be similar, perhaps incorporating disfranchisement, segregation and lynching to maintain or increase the distance between themselves and the despised group.

Faced with such situations, historians have been tempted to argue that these people were economically exploited, accounting for the misogyny and racism prevalent during these periods as products of their marginality and therefore the fault of their bosses, and ignoring the fact that such attacks on women and blacks might constitute part of their own understanding of the process of liberation. But this behavior cannot be dismissed so easily. Nor can we overlook historians' own tendency in the past to valorize these processes of liberation. When historians have found that the prerogatives of male laborers have been given precedence in periods of reform, such as the New Deal era when the "family wage" for men gained widespread currency, they have nevertheless praised the reforms, downplaying the fact that they were premised on a proscription of women's roles that might set the stage for future sexual oppression (not to mention the racial oppression that followed from the fact that such perquisites were not to be offered to poorer African Americans, who consequently appeared to be unable to create their own stable patriarchal families).<sup>56</sup>

And here we might consider E.P. Thompson's introduction to *The Unknown Mayhew*, referred to by my dinner companion. Thompson does indeed reveal a very radical Mayhew: a man of some cultural sensitivity and political acuity; a poet, a novelist, and social scientist; a contributor and, briefly, an editor of *Punch* (in its more politically-charged days before Thackeray); a man living at a time when Chartism seemed to be all but dead and when the English elites had seen revolutionary fires blazing on the continent but had been spared their own; a man, who through his study of London's working poor became sensitized to their needs and, very briefly, a spokesman for their concerns; finally, someone who made the leap from the partial journalist to impartial social scientist using the inductive method. [Any parallels that might be drawn here between Mayhew and Thompson would just be distracting, however revealing.] But in establishing this background, once again, nothing is made of slavery and London's position at the hub of an empire (except insofar as certain colonies are seen by some responding to Mayhew's articles as an outlet for London's 'excess' women). The Irish are not focused on, nor are other immigrants in London. Mayhew, Thompson notes, does refrain from resorting to some of the baser charges against the poor noted among the more provincial correspondents in the *Morning Chronicle*. But all-inclusive he is not.

In a way the empire is made more invisible by Thompson's selective representation of it.<sup>57</sup> The colonies to which he refers, those growing in the antipodes were seen as destined to become outlets for white labor, thereby also facilitating the establishment of a well-heeled working class at home (Lincolnesque republicanism). In the process, India, China, and the British Caribbean colonies are erased as areas of concern, even though these colonies are contributing to making Britain "the richest nation on the face of the earth," which simultaneously eased some potential social tensions and created a sense of outrage or shame that within Britain, "We ... have allowed our fellow-creatures to 'fust' in styes, reeking with filth, such as farmers, now-a-days, know that swine would pine and dwindle in" (p. 22). When Mayhew concentrates "his attention upon the evils of unregulated competition," the immediate reaction is to cheer that he is taking up the populist banner and defending the female slop-workers (p. 29). And yet, any reader of Gabriel Kolko would hear alarm bells going off, especially when, given this imperial terrain, we remember that concerns about over-competition would be associated with certain of the empire's capitalists (there's certainly nothing new about debates over NAFTA).<sup>58</sup> When Mayhew converts "to the protectionist views of the boot-maker," we certainly begin to worry. Momentary relief comes, when we find him addressing London tailors and declaring that "the best remedy [for their

problems] was a combination of working men in trades' unions" (though it is uncertain how this would help the women slop-workers). But this is immediately disrupted by Mayhew's attack "upon the importation of cheap foreign labour," during which "his rhetoric became xenophobic and anti-semitic" (p. 38). Thompson makes no comment about this and doesn't feel that this taints Mayhew's radical credentials, even though Mayhew was reported by *Bell's Weekly Messenger* to have uttered the following: "the magistrates were too ready to listen to any paltry Jew who might come from Judas Jacobs, or any other Hebrew, to swear, by Barabbas, or Iscariot, or any of the brutal race that were thus festering us (cheers [from the tailors])." A year later, Henry Mayhew is combining with his brother Gus to write a novel "with an intricately-worked plot of mistaken identities, supplemented with lavish backgrounds of seedy solicitors, retired Anglo-Indians, and spiced with anti-semitism" (p. 43). Again, no comment.

Clearly, we are all a lot more p.c. these days, and we worry more than a reader might have done in 1971 about this omission on Thompson's part. No doubt, Thompson would have argued that Mayhew's anti-semitism was characteristic of that time and should not be judged by today's standards. This is the defense provided for all populists.<sup>59</sup> But it misses the point, which is that this focus on imported labor, on Jews (Dickens' Fagin had made his appearance a few years earlier), on the Irish, as social problems occurred within a particular social and political context, one that seemed to many to require the elevation of "free-born Englishmen" and women above the status of "wage slave" and prostitute whether at home, or in Australia's and New Zealand's havens for Anglo-Celtic supremacy. Certainly there is nothing in the unknown Mayhew that makes one feel that the concerns for women laborers have been given full consideration beyond the parameters of Victorian moral strictures about women's roles in society.<sup>60</sup> Nor do we feel that we have come to grips with the complexities of the plight of the poor of London in 1851 (and in any inner-city today), when Mayhew condemns indiscriminate charity (apparently with Thompson's endorsement). Mayhew wrote: "The most dangerous lesson that can possibly be taught to any body of people whatsoever is, that there are other means of obtaining money than by working for it" (p. 42). Thompson through Mayhew privileges artisans; his approach "practically accepts the alleged inferiority" of "others".<sup>61</sup>

In contrast to Thompson, we need to recognize social power in all its relational and imperial manifestations. Joan Wallach Scott has argued for replacing "the notion that social power is unified, coherent and centralized." We must replace this, she writes in *Gender and the Politics of History*,



with something like Michel Foucault's concept of power as dispersed constellations of unequal relationships, discursively constituted in social "fields of force." Within these processes and structures, there is room for a concept of human agency as the attempt (at least partially rational) to construct an identity, a life, a set of relationships, a society within certain limits and language – conceptual language that at once sets boundaries and contains the possibility for negation, resistance, reinterpretation, the play of metaphoric invention and imagination.<sup>62</sup>

Bryan D. Palmer has made a noble attempt to defend E.P. Thompson's analysis from Joan Scott's onslaught. But Thompson's presentation of Mayhew provides a good example of the limitations of class analysis used alone. This is true of his other work also. In his chapter on community in *The Making*, for example, Thompson mentions the women who came to their husbands' support. "Their role was confined to giving moral support to the men," Thompson mentions, and he then notes that even this limited role brought forth great consternation from their opponents, who claimed that they were "putting off the 'sacred characters' of wife and mother." We can complain, as Scott does, that Thompson may have written the actual contribution of these women to the movement out of his narrative.<sup>63</sup> But, while noting Cobbett's opposition to women's suffrage, Thompson then juxtaposes "the women of England" and Negresses of Africa.<sup>64</sup> This one mention of "Negresses," almost the only mention of Africans in the volume, highlights one of the major absences from *The Making of the English Working Class*, namely the larger imperial framework within which the English working class was "making itself." Thompson shows quite clearly that this class was forming along with an emergent middle class, but does not discuss one of that latter class's major concerns, the emancipation of the slaves – a concern that could be encapsulated within the notion of "wage slavery." Thinking imperially, focusing on power – the concurrent impositions of one group, or several groups, of people over another or others – enables us to keep seemingly "dispersed constellations of unequal relationships" tied together.

When I first presented this paper at a conference on labor history at St. Antony's, Oxford, one fellow rose to ask me about E.P. Thompson's biography of William Morris. Was it really possible, he exclaimed indignantly, to suggest that Thompson had ignored empire when it featured so prominently in his very first published book? Unfortunately, I did not get a chance to answer this particular question at the time (owing to an unhelpful conference format which required that all questions be asked of the three panelists before any responses would be allowed; by the time my turn came to answer questions there was no time left so I sent everyone in for tea). I regretted not answering this question, however, not least because it left the impression that I did not have an answer for it (I knew this

because Terence Ranger came up to me afterwards wondering whether the man had been correct).

The question touched me as a little ironic, because when I read the pages in *Writing by Candlelight* that had turned me on to the question of Thompson and empire, I had immediately recalled reading *William Morris* as an undergraduate. And, as we started our research for "The Empire and Mr. Thompson," it was there I turned first to recall what Thompson had said about imperialism. What I found in this work surprised me, not for the extent empire was discussed but for its relative absence. And this awakened me to the distance I had traveled from my years as an undergraduate at Edinburgh and my early days as a graduate student at Penn, when I realized that I had stored away a different impression in my memory banks.<sup>65</sup> Interpreting the text anew, it seemed to me that empire and imperialism were indeed problems that Morris confronted and discussed. But these were reported by Thompson rather than absorbed and theorized. In terms of Morris's influences with regard to design, Egypt, India and Persia were mentioned, but little was made of them. Instead, such influences were subordinated to the description of Morris's efforts to rediscover the lost artisanal world of the decorative arts. Empire seemed to come into the study with the coming of the Turkish crisis of 1876, but (in Thompson's rendering) empire was mainly seen as something that was "over there," at the most excess jingoism that arose from the death of a Gordon, a distraction from the "real" concerns of Socialists and Fabians, a trick perpetrated by the "jew-wretch" (Morris's term for Disraeli) and "old Vic" on the people (p. 215). The fact of Morris's sympathies for Russia because it freed its serfs as we have 'freed our black men' (p. 209) is quoted but not commented upon. The discussion of *News from Nowhere* as a "Scientific Utopia" now seemed to me wholly dependent upon the erasure of empire – "the change" happened in Hammersmith, but what occurred elsewhere? The protagonist's constant return to the realities of the past amidst the romance of the present seemed to follow in part from the fact that Morris was never able to fashion a revolutionary message from the shards of empire that kept resurfacing in this dreamworld.

The problem really comes down to the fact that Thompson wanted this post-1880 imperialism to be "new." He did not want empire and imperialism to be a feature of Chartist and pre-Chartist England. It follows, rather than precedes or accompanies the making of the English working class. Why anyone might care so much about this, one might wonder. Why Thompson did, I think, is to be found in "The Peculiarities of the English." Unless imperialism and jingoism come late onto the English stage, then there really is nothing very peculiar about the English – nothing to be celebrated. There is no fall from

artisanal idyll, the essence of which Morris might want to plaster, Laura Ashley-like, on our walls. There is no English moral economy, land before time-work discipline, to laud. And these are surely what Thompson wanted to extol. If one looks at "Peculiarities" one sees that the working class movement "crashed into the Boer War; the syndicalist surge of 1911-14 was smothered by the first great war; while the potentialities of 1945-47 were abolished by the Cold War. It was the night of Mafeking, in which the most sacred class distinctions dissolved in nationalist hysteria, which signaled the entry into this terrible epoch."<sup>66</sup> We do not hear the answer to the question, why the crash? We also do not observe the potentialities of 1945-47 in "midnight's children"; that indeed the first great war that ended syndicalism also contributed to the demise of imperial privilege; that further the "terrible epoch" may have been in part fashioned by those who would halt such demise. We do not hear these things because Thompson wants to praise British reformism, founded in Englishness: "Though we must never forget the overhanging shadow of imperialism, Britain has remained a comparatively humane society" - thus forgetting what we must never forget.<sup>67</sup> If news has not reached us from nowhere, perhaps we should not worry unduly, for if we do not have a utopian future, other places don't either; but at least we have our peculiar past. We remain outside the whale. *Newthinkers urbellyfeel Ingsoc.*<sup>68</sup>

### III. Down in Jungleground

And the kids round there live just like shadows  
Always quiet, holding hands  
From the churches to the jails  
Tonight all is silence in the world  
As we take our stand  
Down in Jungleground.  
Bruce Springsteen, Lustral Canyon Music Ltd.

E.P. Thompson's influence on historians of immigration to the United States has been very pronounced. It is clear that immigration history was already moving away from consensus history (with its assumptions about uprootedness and assimilation) prior to Thompson's prominence, but the publication of *The Making of the English Working Class* and the two widely cited articles ("Moral Economy," and "Time-Work Discipline") with their explicit elaboration of the concept of "agency" were adopted very quickly by the new social historians of immigration.<sup>69</sup> Since Thompson is considered to have written gender (both male and female) out of his narratives,<sup>70</sup> I want to continue my discussion of the implications of Thompsonian history by considering the fate of gender in immigration histories.

An answer may be found by turning to Donna Gabaccia's article, "Immigrant Women: Nowhere at Home?" This article considers why there has been no intersection between women's history/studies and immigration history.<sup>71</sup> A number of reasons exist, Gabaccia claims, partly revolving around the different institutional developments of the two fields. But the most important, she asserts with good justification, is the different understanding of the family in the two fields.

Among historians of the immigration experience, there has been a conscious effort to combat the assumptions of Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*, which suggested that immigrants were stripped of their old cultures before assimilating into the American mainstream.<sup>72</sup> "Many community Studies of the 1970s," Gabaccia writes, "reacted against the Progressive Era portrayals of ethnic families as authoritarian, disorganized or plagued by generational and pathological conflicts." Consequently, these historians endeavored to reveal the level of continuity between pre-migration and post-migration cultures, and central to this has been what might be considered a celebration of the family as the pillar of immigration communities. "Had migration seriously undermined family life," such historians argued according to Gabaccia, "then neither ethnic groups nor ethnic identities should have survived into the 1960s - as they so obviously had." Gabaccia does not consider the extent to which ethnic identities and traditions may have been "invented" in the 1960s,<sup>73</sup> and instead concludes: "Thus family solidarity is interpreted positively, as benefitting the individuals who make up the family group" (p. 69).

Clearly, this positive image of the family is not going to sit well with Women's Studies scholars who see the nuclear family as the "key institution of patriarchy, and thus a place of conflict between the sexes and an arena of exploitation, not support of women." While immigrant histories tended to focus on the woman in the home, managing the family economy, women's studies histories, like Kathy Peiss's *Cheap Amusements* and Christine Stansell's *City of Women* for example, tended to focus on women in the workplace, in leisure activities and in popular culture, places where, in Gabaccia's words, women made their "first efforts to free themselves."<sup>74</sup> But their analyses of patriarchy, from the perspective of immigrant historians, "uncomfortably resembles old ethnocentric myths recently put to rest."<sup>75</sup>

Transcending this difference of presentation is difficult. Gabaccia herself is firmly rooted in immigrant history, and so her solution for Women's Studies historians is for them to lighten up.<sup>76</sup> First, they can see that while immigrant historians describe family positively it is sometimes because they are uncovering "women-centered"

families. "Frequently," she writes, "the kinship network and family are ... seen as arenas where women exercise considerable authority, an authority some scholars term matriarchal" (p. 71). Focusing on studies of Mexican immigrants, she points out that most recent histories have rejected the existence of patriarchy and have argued that women were "resourceful participants." She continues, therefore, "Early portrayals of dominating men and oppressed women, it is widely argued, were a myth invented by Anglos and perpetrated by social scientists to emphasize the otherness of the Mexican American." By implication then, women's studies historians have been victims of their own theoretical assumptions, which they now need to put aside:

Unless feminist theorists are willing to dismiss massive evidence of immigrant women's identifications and pleasure with their families as false consciousness, they will be forced to consider other possibilities. One of these will certainly be that immigrant women did indeed experience family life positively, in large part because the world beyond family and community has often meant economic exploitation and cultural alienation as autonomy and independence.<sup>77</sup>

Regarding this family question, then, no change is deemed necessary for recent immigrant historians, except perhaps to increase their attention to the women's contributions to the immigrant experience.

Where does this leave the immigrant family and the question of patriarchy? If we take a look at the book which Gabaccia praises highly for its treatment of the immigrant family, we can see some of the shortcomings of conceding all to the immigrant historians.<sup>78</sup> John Bodnar's *The Transplanted*, as its title suggests, adheres to the view that a great deal of continuity in ethnic traditions occurred in immigration experiences. As Gabaccia argues, the focal point for this lay in the family. In his chapter, "Families Enter America," Bodnar describes how commitment to family survival among immigrants and the rise of the family economy negated any tendency toward family breakdown. "The startling discovery of modern historical scholarship," Bodnar writes,

has made it quite clear that immigrant families did not wither in their encounter with American capitalism. Immigrant kinship associations not only continued to perform indispensable functions in the industrial city, such as helping to organize the movement of workers into the economy, but actually flourished. At times the relationship between the industrial economy and immigrant families could almost be described as symbiotic, as kinship groups proved very responsive to demands of the workplace, the city, and the individual.<sup>79</sup>

While the family is seen as an adaptive institution in Bodnar's hands, and so therefore, also dynamic, it makes its transition from pre-migration to post-migration experience seemingly without internal strife. Primarily, the women's role in this process is

described as being the manager of the family economy, controlling the purse (p. 73). Bodnar does record some generational conflict, as well as some fear among Irish fathers that they had "lost some influence in the household as their children began to earn more of their own income" (p. 74). But he does not consider the implications of these facts. Nor does he consider what might be involved when "immigrant women ... usually terminated toil outside the household with marriage and focused attention on the roles of wife, mother and homemaker" (p. 78). And finally, cultural preferences that infringed on women's freedom to choose are described uncritically: "Irish immigrants strongly believed that married women should not work at all. This view was rooted not only in the model family of Irish Catholicism but in a social belief that a working married woman diminished the status of her husband." Similarly, "Greek families actually considered it a disgrace for a wife, and sometimes a sister, to work outside the house." Bodnar, the social historian looking for immigrant agency, almost celebrates these decisions: "Whatever the reason for *keeping* married women at home, the pattern of working-class domesticity was established prior to its celebration by middle-class reformers in urban America. Culture did not simply flow downward from social superiors" (p. 79; italics added). Bodnar's account, then, is almost conflict-free. Women are forced by the market to work, or forced by culture not to do so, but no actual conflict between men and women seems to have occurred in each individual decision that was made.

Such conflict-free idealizations of immigrant families are most problematic because they lie at the root of "culture of poverty" theories. While Bodnar ignores conflict in these turn-of-the-century immigrant groups, and makes the stable immigrant family central to community formation, a comparison can be made with more recent immigrants and with African Americans that is very stark indeed. Clearly, there are tensions in such families undergoing the pressures of migration now, or unable to recover from that experience. The problem is that in analyzing families in this way, Bodnar implicitly equates breakdown with pathology. As such, the single-headed family, the focus of the feminization of poverty, is seen as "the problem", not because of its limited income-earning potential and the woefully inadequate social support provided in the United States, but because it is headed by a woman, not a man. Rather than joining Carol Stack in recognizing the healthy adaptation to stark social realities which is evident in this single-headed household, and that in a process of migration and impoverishment the two-headed household may be more appropriately considered pathological, historians of immigration have conformed to the culture of poverty model by default.<sup>80</sup>

This account of the immigrant family, free of any understanding of the workings of gender conflict, is what the immigrant historians have offered. It is also what Gabaccia feels Women's Studies scholars should accept. To do so, uncritically, however, would be a mistake. Another way to bring women's and immigration historians into alignment, is to ask at what price women accepted all the developments described Bodnar. While they may have taken certain decisions with apparent willingness, as immigration historians claim, what constraints were placed on them by their male relations and by the male-dominated community of which they were a part? Though it may be true that they felt alienated from the mainstream, they may have also feared the alienation that would come from being treated as a pariah within their own social group.

While immigration historians are no doubt correct that women also took pleasure in their families, this does not mean that they did so without experiencing a great deal of turmoil and conflict with their husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons (though mothers and daughters would also become sources of conflict). Even when one finds, as with the Mexican-Americans Gabaccia mentions, an almost matriarchal authority, that does not mean that conflict is not present. Indeed, women's greater responsibility and authority within the family, contrasted with a pre-migration situation of patriarchal authority, could be the cause of intense and sometimes violent conflict especially if the men involved considered their manhood subject to question (as in many people's minds, it was).

An alternative way of looking at this process can be gleaned from migration and immigration literature. Accepting the claims of immigration historians that "continuities" may have occurred, should not blind us to underlying conflicts caused by the destabilization of a patriarchal system. To a certain extent, both Bodnar and Handlin can be correct. The migration experience (which can be seen to have started not just when migrants left their homes, but when forces began to make them think about leaving) did indeed "uproot" migrants from their, generally patriarchal system, creating conflict and forcing an adjustment in roles between men and women.<sup>81</sup> This adjustment occurred under conditions in which men and women had different, unequal resources. Such resources arose out of commonly held assumptions in the larger society about gender roles, masculinity and femininity, in short, about what "proper" gender roles ought to be. They also arose out of an ethnic group's desire to combat images of their families as dysfunctional and pathological (defending themselves from the Progressives' characterizations, not by contesting the validity of those characterizations but by proving them inapplicable to the particular immigrant group). The very intensity of the "uprooting" led to the

stress on a patriarchal culture not merely for the purpose of continuing threatened traditions, but to facilitate the reestablishment of some patriarchal authority.<sup>82</sup>

In light of this discussion, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* takes on some significance. In this tale of the immigrant experience, which was intended as a justification of socialism, and which by the end reads more like a manifesto than a novel, we see all the relational aspects of immigration exposed. Amidst all the revelations about the appalling conditions in Chicago's meatpacking yards Sinclair gives us a story in which gender and race are central to the understanding of the immigrant experience. Jurgis's fall is embodied in the decline of his position within the family as a provider, and with the disintegration of his marriage. His emasculation is witnessed as his wife is forced into a position of giving herself sexually to her boss. The uprootedness of the immigrant community is witnessed in the break up of their families, the fact that the women resort to prostitution, and the children become essential income earners. The process of coming to America has reduced these immigrants from respectable people to mere animals inhabiting a "jungle."

In case the reader should miss the fact that these laborers are being treated as no better than slaves, like Africans – and that this is part of the symbolism of "the jungle" – Sinclair brings onto the scene African Americans. During the strike that begins Jurgis's conversion to socialism, the reader learns of the meatpackers' use of black strikebreakers: While it is true that "scabs" are often considered rhetorically to be "less than men" (hence Theodore Dreiser's use of the condition of scab labor to illustrate what Carrie has wrought in Hurstwood<sup>83</sup>), Sinclair's venomous description of African Americans is charged with a racism that takes it beyond the assumption that they are bad simply because they are taking others' jobs. "[The Negroes] [along with the 'lowest foreigners – Greeks, Roumanians, Sicilians, and Slovaks'] had been attracted more by the prospect of disorder than by the big wages; and they made the night hideous with singing and carousing, and only went to sleep when the time came for them to get up to work."<sup>84</sup> Further, "a throng of stupid black Negroes, and foreigners who could not understand a word that was said to them, mixed with pale-faced, hollow-chested bookkeepers and clerks, half fainting for the tropical heat and the sickening stench of fresh blood – and all struggling to dress a dozen or two cattle in the same place where, twenty-four hours ago, the old killing gang had been speeding, with their marvelous precision, turning out four hundred carcasses every hour!"<sup>85</sup> And Sinclair's coup de lack-of-grace: "the ancestors of these ['big buck Negroes with daggers in their boots'] had been savages in Africa; and since then they had been chattel slaves, or had been held down by a community

ruled by the traditions of slavery. Now for the first time they were free – free to gratify every passion, free to wreck themselves.<sup>86</sup>

Sinclair's description of blacks is important because it simultaneously reminds the reader that European immigrants had been brought down to the level of blacks, and, with its racial stereotyping, appeals to the reader's sense that this is indeed an injustice. The passage on African Americans immediately precedes Sinclair's manifesto for socialism, which he renders through two Socialists who resemble very closely Jack London and Eugene Debs ("a man of electric presence, tall and gaunt, with a face worn thin by struggle and suffering. The fury of outraged manhood gleamed in it – and the tears of suffering little children pleaded in his voice").<sup>87</sup> Given London's record on race (his desperate hope, for example, that a "great white hope" should appear to reassert white masculinity in the face of Jack Johnson's triumphs), we can feel fairly comfortable that he conforms to Sinclair's unwitting linkage between socialism and racism. And while Debs cannot so clearly be tied in with London and Sinclair on this score, once we get to the description of what the socialist family should look like in Debs's passages, we can see clearly that the remasculinized immigrant male has been "transplanted" to the head of his family, with his family wage, and his "wife in her proper place."<sup>88</sup> This is a powerful image because we have already been confronted by the ex-slave.

This analysis of the relational aspects of immigration histories and *The Jungle*, brings us to the question of Herbert Gutman's "greatness," which David Roediger endeavors to account for in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*.<sup>89</sup> Gutman's landmark text, "Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America," helped make Thompson's work foundational for labor history.<sup>90</sup> For Roediger, part of Gutman's greatness lies in his political commitment, the fact that he was of the old left, that he was not (as Ira Berlin put it so delicately) "soft." But the fact that Gutman did not link his analysis of immigrants with that of blacks, Roediger feels, was one of his weaknesses.<sup>91</sup> While it is tempting to agree on political grounds, one has to note that in this weakness, perhaps, lay his "greatness" – some of his appeal. Just as Thompson never tried explicitly to link his father's work on India to his work on the English working class, Gutman provided a model for the understanding of working class empowerment that could be used both to describe immigrants and blacks favorably, but never simultaneously. The result is we get the critique of Oscar Handlin's "uprooted" immigrants, the gritty studies of Paterson's politically active and unionized immigrants, and a whole model established for viewing immigrants as holding on to their own cultures and resisting immediate Americanization.<sup>92</sup> Alongside this we get the favorable depiction of the black family,

which likewise drew on the strength of the group's heritage, and which showed that African Americans too were not stripped of their culture and simply Americanized.<sup>93</sup> Slavery (black) and freedom (white) remain, in spite of all Gutman's efforts, carefully dichotomized once again.

It would be difficult to find one passage that sums up the predicament for a historian as accomplished and versatile as Gutman. Were one required to do so, however, one could hardly do better than to turn to a chapter from *The Black Family* entitled "To See His Grand Son Samuel Die." This is a wide-ranging chapter showcasing all of Gutman's great abilities – particularly that of drawing on diverse literatures in shaping his analysis. It begins with a comparison of other groups besides African Americans who have been denigrated by focusing on the nature and composition of their families. We learn that 18th- and early-19th-century England had its class stereotypes to match the mythic American slave. Sambo, J.H. Plumb had noted, could be found "in the deliberately stupid country yokel or in the cockney clown of later centuries."<sup>94</sup> The Irish in America were also characterized negatively; as were the "semi-barbarous" Russian serf, and the "uneducated" French peasant. Southern "poor whites" meanwhile were described as "semi-savages."<sup>95</sup>

Such characterizations, which bring into question historical judgment generally (for can we go beyond saying that all the above-mentioned people "were not as they seemed" to assertions about how they actually were?), are refreshing in their relativism.<sup>96</sup> They open the door to other questions about how some people come to be characterized more positively (how they move from the lowest rung of immigrants to become the solid archetypes of success), while others remain "on the trash heap of history." Such relativism can lead to an understanding of the relational universe in which people become "white" or "black", "ethnic Americans" or something else, according to how they differentiate themselves from others below them, and remove some of the distinctions from those above them. Gender and family patterns (particularly in the post-emancipation world, following a period when emasculation and dependence were believed to connote the status of a slave), would be key indicators in this process.

But such thoughts, wherever they may lead us, are circumvented in the middle of the chapter with Gutman's declaration: "Mid-nineteenth-century Afro-American slaves, southern 'poor whites,' and Irish immigrants differed very much from one another. They behaved differently. They were treated differently. The range of social and individual choices available to them varied greatly. Each group had a distinctive American experience."<sup>97</sup> Following the discussion

of similarities this certainly leaves a powerful impression on the reader. Each "group" now goes its separate way, and the author can turn to his discussion of the limitations in the work of Elkins and Genovese seemingly uninformed by his previous analysis.<sup>98</sup>

But the following questions are elided in Gutman's statement: Did all these people always behave differently? was there really no overlap? Were they always treated differently? was there really no overlap? How different was the range of their individual and social choices? In short, should we, as historians, ever feel comfortable saying that a "group" has "a distinctive American experience"? People are certainly privileged (socially and historiographically) and we need to be aware of this so that we do not attribute the success of a "group" to its members' distinctive behavior, rather than to those members' (and their historians') ability to render their histories as a singular narrative of a distinctive group acting distinctively. The point is that unless groups are comprised of clones (and cloning is something that historians achieved long before scientists), they vary. As such the art of writing the "distinctive" history of a "group" becomes an exercise in politics, the jockeying for position by obvious ("The Birth of a [Scotch-Irish] Nation") and subtle ("The Jazz Singer") comparisons with other "groups" – denying and accentuating for effect. In terms of the remainder of Gutman's chapter, his critique of Elkins and Genovese is beyond the scope of this paper, but we need to note that gender is missing from his analysis. "Distinctive" groups often seem less distinct when women and gender are introduced into the "group portrait."

Not surprisingly, the two strands of Gutman's work cannot really be held up together without revealing blacks in a very negative light. This is in part because Gutman's analysis of the family is based on as sexist a construction as the vision of the family he was trying to refute – those of Oscar Handlin and Elkins-Moynihan.<sup>99</sup> By busily searching for evidence for the strong family, Gutman valorized a particular kind of family (without the kinds of qualifications provided by the likes of Fox Piven and Cloward<sup>100</sup>). Moreover, Gutman's romanticism, in part inherited from the romantic Thompson, could reinforce the self-image of so-called white ethnics – in the same way that Sinclair had done years before. When applied to blacks, the description of the family could be dismissed with relative ease (and would be after a relatively short period when people claimed that doing so was "blaming the victim"). Nicholas Lemann, for example, effectively says, "Well, Gutman, may be right for the black family under slavery, but that was then. Now we have the 'sharecropper family' living in the ghetto, and it is clearly dysfunctional."<sup>101</sup> In terms of popular and academic discourses on the black family, from the Million Man March to universities' ameliorative interventions in

their surrounding neighborhoods, Gutman is hardly even remembered, and were he to be, he would probably be dismissed. What Gutman failed to transcend, then, was a debate founded on the acceptance of notions of pathology, which would denigrate somebody. "White-ethnic" Americans could look around and say, "It ain't us." Members of the so-called 'underclass' could say the same thing, but who bothers to listen? While this may seem a little exaggerated, it will seem less so when we bear in mind that the person who brought "The Problem of the Negro Family" and the "emasculated" black male to the attention of public policy makers, was also the historian responsible for remasculinizing the Irish immigrant experience in *Beyond the Melting Pot*.<sup>102</sup> On with welfare reform – and export it to Britain!

#### IV. Exceptionalism Revisited

I'm afraid that American theorists will not understand this, but the clue to everything lies in his proper appreciation of the game of cricket.

E.P. Thompson's eulogy for C.L.R. James<sup>103</sup>

E.P. Thompson's impact was arguably greater on the American side of the Atlantic than on the European. Peter Novick has noted that "no work in European history ever so profoundly and so rapidly influenced so many American historians," a point that both Bryan D. Palmer and Bruce Laurie have emphasized in their works.<sup>104</sup> Thompson's hold on American Labor and Social History has been so great, for example, that both advocates and their opponents of American "exceptionalism" (a concept of some importance given Thompson's accent on English "peculiarities" and Chakrabarty's analysis of the difficulties associated with trying to make his cultural interpretation of class generally applicable) have been able to invoke his work to make their case. For example both David Roediger and Sean Wilentz, who have taken opposing sides on this issue, would include E.P. Thompson in their lineage – Roediger perhaps noting Thompson's influence on Herbert Gutman (who wrote on race), and Wilentz paying close attention to Thompson's cultural interpretations of class.<sup>105</sup>

This example is particularly significant here as Roediger's criticism of Wilentz's *Chants Democratic* is in some ways related to our critique of Thompson. Roediger claims that Wilentz was insensitive to the ways in which race affected the emergence of working-class culture in New York. This similarity between Wilentz and Thompson is not altogether surprising, as *Chants* in many ways can be read as the "making" of an American or New York working class. As such, the same absences evident in *The Making of the*

*English Working Class* are to be found in *Chants*: both the Irish and African Americans are conspicuous by their absence; gender is hardly mentioned, even though the focus is on the same *City of Women* that would emerge from similar kinds of sources; slavery, in spite of the author's mention of David Brion Davis's influence on his "conception of the age as a whole," is not considered of great significance as laborers come to see themselves in the new "class ways."<sup>106</sup>

Roediger's critique falls short, however, because he assumes that by pointing out such absences in Wilentz's work he has made American working class formation seem different from working-class formation in Europe. Instead, he shows how unreliable making comparisons can be, and how ingrained assumptions about class formation based on Thompson's work have become. For example, he quotes from Nell Irvin Painter's attack on U.S. labor historians, which would include Wilentz: "They often prefer to wrap themselves in fashionable Europeanisms," she writes, "and to write as though their favorite, northern, European-American workers lived out their destinies divorced from slavery and racism, as though, say, Chartism meant more in the history of the American working class than slavery."<sup>107</sup> The first half of the sentence is all well and good. But the final phrase evinces an understandable (given British historiography) lack of appreciation for the imperial roots of Chartism – its own connections to slavery and emancipation. Indeed, Chartism could mean a lot to white American workers because it evoked the same solutions to the problem of sanctifying "free labor" in a world of racial slavery.

Roediger has also written in *The Wages of Whiteness*, "If, as [David Brion] Davis shows, the discourse of slavery and abolition shaped that of labor reform in mid-nineteenth-century Britain, which held no slaves, we should not be surprised that a similar process occurred in the United States, which held four million."<sup>108</sup> Clearly, therefore, he is keenly aware of the impact of empire on British class development, and yet he sidesteps this in his comparative assessment. Perhaps the reason for this lies in the fact that by mid-century Britain had emancipated the slaves in its colonies, while the United States had several more years of profiting from the system of slavery to go before emancipation would become a reality. But the questions of slavery and emancipation were still raging in Britain around the mid-century as new forms of unfree labor were dreamed up to replace slavery in the colonies; as the country declared its intention to stamp out the slave trade; as it transported its trade unionists to the colonies; as it debated whether to trade with slave colonies; and, as it responded to the American Civil War in the context of rebellions in India and at Morant Bay.<sup>109</sup>

Roediger is perhaps suggesting that Virginia and Alabama were closer to New York and Boston, than Demerara and Mauritius were to London and Glasgow, so that slavery can be considered an integral part of the American system and not that for Britain. Certainly John and William Gladstone, whose family fortune was based on slavery and plantation ownership, would have disagreed.<sup>110</sup> And, anyway, this formulation is itself founded on an interpretation of British history, to which E.P. Thompson was party, that gave such sugar-producing colonies a tertiary significance. It is unwarranted, not only because of the presence of slaves and free blacks in Britain and the power and influence of East India and West India lobbies, but also because of the way discussion of slavery filtered into all levels of public discourse.<sup>111</sup>

So glancing at the development of American labor history following Thompson we arrive at the problem of how to understand American, British and other histories when these are implicitly comparative, and when large chunks of imperial influence have been written off as incidental to the historical development of each country, mere flotsam and jetsam to be passed over. Roediger's critique of labor history is exactly right in calling for an enlargement of class analysis to incorporate race (and other mutually-constitutive categories, like gender). In addition to this, however, we need to see class and race as both historically contingent alongside an understanding that these categories themselves have been shaped by nations and national histories that are also historically contingent.<sup>112</sup> And if we try to incorporate "agents" into history, we need to be aware of the historical genealogy of the idea of agency itself and the fact that its use in the past has often obscured as much as it has revealed, granting to some while denying to others.

#### Epilogue: Can the 'Organization Man' Write History?

GARCIN [enters, accompanied by the ROOM-VALET, and glances around him]: Hm! So here we are.

VALET: Yes, Mr. Garcin.

GARCIN: And this is what it looks like?

VALET: Yes.

GARCIN: Second Empire furniture, I observe. ... Well, well, I dare say one gets used to it in time.

VALET: Some do. Some don't.

GARCIN: Are all the other rooms like this one?

VALET: How could they be? We cater for all sorts: Chinamen and Indians, for instance. What use could they have for a Second Empire chair?

Jean-Paul Sartre, *No Exit*

Robin D.G. Kelley has suggested that if academics are to look for a proletariat we can do no better than examine the movements for

better pay and conditions in the academy itself, which after all is comprised of some of the largest and most powerful corporations in the country.<sup>113</sup> Bearing this in mind, we should remember that we, historians, are among the aristocrats of labor in this academy, and that our perspectives on this and other matters are likely to be shaped in some way by this location.

These institutions of which we are representatives are not value free, scientific research centers. With more justification than many of us would like to admit, J.A. Hobson maintained that at universities teaching is "selected and controlled, wherever it is found useful to employ the arts of selection and control, by the business interests playing on the vested academic interests." We do not have to entirely believe in such instrumentalism to nevertheless agree with Hobson's formulation:

The real determinants in education are given in these three questions: "Who shall teach? What shall they teach? How shall they teach?" Where universities are dependent for endowments and incomes upon the favor of the rich, upon the charity of millionaires, the following answers will of necessity be given: "Safe teachers. Safe studies. Sound (i.e., orthodox) methods." The coarse proverb which tells us that "he who pays the piper calls the tune" is quite as applicable here as elsewhere, and no bluff regarding academic dignity and intellectual honesty must blind us to the fact.<sup>114</sup>

It is within this context (though perhaps a little more artfully formed) that Spivak demands that scholars recognize the "complicity between subject and object of investigation," and that we cannot be detached observers.<sup>115</sup> The astounding thing, to me at least, is that scholars describing a process of 'embourgeoisement', feel that they can still safely ignore their own location; that if they listen really hard, they will indeed be able to hear the subaltern speak – and render her/him comprehensible for people both within and without the academy; that, moreover, as members of the disengaged academy, they can act as umpires between that bourgeois world and colonial subjects. Such is the highest stage of Thompsonianism.<sup>116</sup>

We, as scholars, should not feel guilty about our location (our "occupational psychosis", as Dewey called it, or our "trained incapacity," to borrow from Veblen<sup>117</sup>); guilt is for those of a much higher calling than ours, and such feelings would probably only be sublimated into defensiveness or some other "sly civility."<sup>118</sup> Rather, we need to be aware of our own limitations. We can be certain that the people we are attempting to describe are not "as they seem"<sup>119</sup> – they will always be more than the narratives we construct to contain them – but we should not be so arrogant as to assume that our efforts to describe them transcend the political and become objective History.<sup>120</sup> The "rescue" mission that we perhaps should engage in is that of rescuing ourselves from our delusions that we have

transcended the parameters of bourgeois historiography. We need to rescue ourselves before imagining that we can rescue others. But then, this is just that "easy *ex post facto* 'radicalism' of Western guilt which assumes that, by definition, every cultural exchange must be read only in terms of colonial exploitation."<sup>121</sup> Or, it is just an example of what Cooper and Stoler or my dinner companion see as a postcolonial chip on the shoulder: "a neo-abolitionist denunciation of a form of power now safely consigned to history." Get over it, they tell us. The bourgeois world is here to stay, you might as well accept its parameters and recognize its universalizing qualities, which are not just mere self-serving hypocrisy.<sup>122</sup>

But the world hasn't reached this "stationary [bourgeois] state" quite yet. E.P. Thompson's relationship to empire can become a metaphor for understanding the relationship between Anglo-American historians and empire. One reason E.P. Thompson elided empire so thoroughly in his work was because his father's relationship with India had familiarized and naturalized empire to such an extent that it became quite invisible to him.<sup>123</sup> This state of amnesia would last until the waning of Cold War antagonisms terminated Thompson's prominence as a public intellectual "outside the whale," brought back to the fore (among western intellectuals) the realities of decolonization, and resituated him within the belly of the beast. It is no coincidence that the "Golden Age" of Academe ended and academics lost their tenure as Supervisors of the Public Trust (while still remaining Defenders of the Faith) during the last fifteen years. Pax Britannia and Americana can no longer be assumed or naturalized in the face of widespread legal and "illegal" migration to the metropole, bitter nationalist struggles worldwide, and the struggles for access to resources under present economic and ecological limits. But as long as we see Empire as a process of embourgeoisement and its discontents we are going to be perpetually yearning for its return as things that we associate with it (but not empire itself) disappear before us – as we perceive the angel of history flying backwards into the future surveying destruction in its wake.<sup>124</sup> Seeing the present and the past in this way, conforming to the underlying romanticism that has been evident in a great deal of social history, is truly pessimistic. There are optimistic alternatives, but they do not originate in battering down the hatches and falling back on the profession's past privileges – its notions of History, objectivity, meritocracy, standards, tenure (controlling the labor market), the family wage, Historical Societies, and all the rest. As Salman Rushdie has written, borrowing from Saul Bellow, "For God's sake open up the universe a little more."<sup>125</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the many scholars at the St. Antony's College Conference on "Classifying Race, Racializing Class" who signaled their support for some of the arguments I make in this paper, and to Shula Marks who, as commentator on my panel, provided some very thoughtful insights into the paper. I owe a special debt to Antoinette Burton, Rick Halpern, and Madhavi Kale for their ideas, encouragement, and overall wisdom, and the four readers for the *Journal of Historical Sociology* who wrote such positive and/or helpful comments. I would even like to thank my fifth reader, who, in her/his attempt to bury the article, gave me the incentive I needed to go ahead and publish the essay.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace Shawn and André Gregory, *My Dinner with André* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), p. 83.

<sup>3</sup> "Developments and Prospects in South Asian History in the United States." The paper, its author wrote, is a "rather hurriedly prepared potpourri of impressions and suggestions." He also noted that "I am sure on reflection that there is much I would not want quoted in any form." The document is noteworthy for what it says about the profession at the time, rather than as a reflection of the individual's writings, so I am choosing to withhold the author's name. Paper accompanied by letter between two other scholars of South Asia, dated April 18, 1968, in my possession. The "Open Door" is a suitable metaphor for these incursions into South Asia. Americans in China and the Middle East (with oil) wanted open access until they were established and then doors were closed after them; Noam Chomsky *World Orders Old and New* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 191.

<sup>4</sup> A block, one might add, that at least in the case of the Universities of Pennsylvania and Chicago, would have been noted for its widespread evictions of local dwellers to make way for university expansion and "gentrification." For the Chicago's record, see Arnold Hirsch *The Making of the Second Ghetto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Penn has escaped similar scrutiny.

<sup>5</sup> The blunders that had been witnessed with regard to the study of Russia and China were not seen as cause for doubt in this regard, because fortunately, this author felt, Harvard remained out of this race to lead in the field of South Asian Studies.

<sup>6</sup> This incident was reported to me by someone present in the classroom at the time.

<sup>7</sup> Both points are frequently heard and need no attribution.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Thompson *The Other Side of the Medal* (London: Hogarth, 1925), pp. 29-30.

<sup>9</sup> A term that seems to have fallen out of use - but seems to be appropriate for historians working within the so-called "bourgeois world." Robinson "Capitalism, Slavery and Bourgeois Historiography," in *History Workshop Journal* 23 (1987), pp. 122-140; Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 138-39. Cooper and Stoler "Between Metropole and Colony," in *Tensions of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 1-56.

<sup>10</sup> The claim that "X" is not a historian is a common one - I will not list all of the profession's venues in which it may be heard.

<sup>11</sup> Even though, as Rajnarayan Chandavarkar has argued, these historians may sometimes have misapplied Thompsonian ideas in their analyses of Indian history; "The Making of the Working Class: E.P. Thompson and Indian History," in *History Workshop Journal*, 43 (1997):

177-195; Ranajit Guha, ed. *Subaltern Studies*, I-IV (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982-85).

<sup>12</sup> Ranajit Guha "Dominance Without Hegemony And Its Historiography," in Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 276.

<sup>13</sup> Gyan Prakash "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *American Historical Review* (December 1994), p. 1480, drawing on Veena Das "Subaltern as Perspective," *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 315.

<sup>14</sup> Prakash "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism."

<sup>15</sup> Spivak "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 197-221.

<sup>16</sup> Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Spivak "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313; Spivak's focus on *sati* (and the problems it presents for historical analysis) makes Cooper's question in "Conflict and Connection," *American Historical Review* (December 1994), p. 1528, "Can the theorist listen?" seem insensitive.

<sup>18</sup> Robert J.C. Young *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 1-3.

<sup>19</sup> Cooper and Stoler, "Between Metropole and Periphery," p. 27. Americanists have crossed these boundaries more readily than British historians. Some good examples are David Montgomery *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Eugene Genovese *The World the Slaveholders Made* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); Edmund Morgan *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1975); and the model for them all, Du Bois *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1979). The United States as a political unit has incorporated metropolises and peripheries so some miscegenation has occurred. South African historiography has witnessed similar attempts to cross boundaries of class and color; see Gregg, "Apropos Exceptionalism: Imperial Location and the Comparative Histories of the United States and South Africa," in Rick Halpern and Jonathan Morris, eds. *American Exceptionalism? U.S. Working-Class Formation in an International Context* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 270-306.

<sup>20</sup> E.P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966).

<sup>21</sup> Edward Thompson *The Life of Charles, Lord Metcalfe* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937); *The Making of the Indian Princes* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943); *The Other Side of the Medal*.

<sup>22</sup> Clearly, the work of Subaltern Studies historians reflected, initially, the attempt to bring considerations of class to the periphery. Paul Gilroy's early work brought categories of race to resituate Britain; *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987). Among Americanists this need has been articulated most notably by David W. Roediger *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Press, 1991); Robin D.G. Kelley *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); and Cedric J. Robinson *Black Marxism* (London: Zed Books, 1983). For an excellent overview of some of these themes in the history of the American South see, Rick Halpern "Organised Labour, Black Workers, and the Twentieth Century South: The Emerging Revision," *Social History* 19 (1994).

<sup>22</sup> Robert Gregg and Madhavi Kale, "The Empire and Mr. Thompson: The Making of Indian Princes and the English Working Class," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32 (36): 2273-2288.

<sup>23</sup> Few of the many obituaries and articles spanning *The Nation*, *New Statesman*, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *American Historical Review*, *Economic History Review*, *Journal of Social History Monthly Review*, and *Commentary*, commented or dwelled on an imperial connection. See also, the articles in Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland, *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990). Peter Linebaugh comes close in, "Commonists of the World Unite!" *Radical History Review*, 56 (1992): 59-67. Frederick Cooper's "Work, Class and Empire: an African Historian's Retrospective on E.P. Thompson," *Social History* 20 (2, 1995): 235-41, considers Thompson's impact on historians of Africa, while Roger Wells's "E.P. Thompson, 'Customs in Common' and Moral Economy," *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 21 (2, 1994): 263-307, discusses the applicability of Thompsonian concepts to the interpretation of peasantries worldwide. Chandavarkar's compelling article, "The Making of the Working Class," focuses on Thompson's influence on Subaltern Studies scholars but does not consider the influence of Indian history and historiography on Thompson. The influence in James C. Scott's work, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Resistance in South East Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), and *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984) is obvious. But none of the aforementioned reverse the analysis to discuss the way empire influenced Thompson's writing. Bryan D. Palmer is the exception here: *E.P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London: Verso, 1994).

<sup>24</sup> And, I would add, other genealogies can be found that would require the intrusion into the profession's narrative people like W. E. B. Du Bois, Anna J. Cooper, C. L. R. James, Eric Williams, George Padmore, and a host of others who have been made to seem peripheral. See Robin D. G. Kelley, "Introduction" in James, *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 1995), pp. 1-33; Gregg, "Giant Steps: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Historical Enterprise," in Michael B. Katz and Thomas Sugrue, W. E. B. Du Bois's *Philadelphia Negro Reconsidered* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 77-99.

<sup>25</sup> Antoinette Burton, from personal correspondence with the author. See also, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); Gyan Prakash 1994 and 'Who's Afraid of Postcoloniality?' *Social Text* 49, 14 (4, 1996): 187-203; and Gregg, "Apropos Exceptionalism."

<sup>26</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989), passim; Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 69. Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); C. A. Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London: Longman, 1989); Antoinette Burton, "Rules of Thumb: British History and 'Imperial Culture' in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Britain," *Women's History Review*, 3 (4, 1994): 483-500; Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), and Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

<sup>27</sup> Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990) and *E.P. Thompson*, which he shows that Thompson himself felt this way (p. 185, fn 7).

<sup>28</sup> Shawn and Gregory, *My Dinner with André*, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> Thompson, *Writing by Candlelight* (London: Merlin Press, 1980), pp. 135-148.

<sup>30</sup> Edward Thompson's affinity for Buddhism, while highlighting his own disgruntlement with Methodism and aspects of Christianity, ought not to be seen (as E.P. Thompson and Bryan D. Palmer tend to argue) as an appreciation of Indian culture. His praise of Buddhism was generally accompanied by very critical and often dismissive assessments of Hinduism and Islam, the religions of the majority of people in the Indian sub-continent; Bryan D. Palmer, *E.P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 30; E.P. Thompson, "Alien Homage": *Edward Thompson and Rabindranath Tagore* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 2-10.

<sup>31</sup> Consider Matthew Arnold's attempt to establish this position for himself and the way in which, as Robert J. C. Young shows, his ideas were shaped by colonial discourses; *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 55-89.

<sup>32</sup> For a related discussion of these issues, see Gregg, "Beyond Silly Mid-Off: Ranjitsinhji, C. L. R. James and the Boundaries of Englishness," in *Inside Out: Outside In: Essays in Comparative History* (forthcoming, London: Macmillan).

<sup>33</sup> E.P. Thompson, "Alien Homage"; this defensiveness in the face of critics is taken up by Palmer in his biography, *E.P. Thompson*.

<sup>34</sup> As Paul Gilroy notes in *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 39.

<sup>35</sup> Though I am now inclined to agree with Spivak that Thompson's attack on Althusser is "trivializing" and serves to keep disciplinary boundaries distinct; *In Other Worlds*, p. 208, 284. The fear of many historians like Palmer is that there really are forces "massing on the borders of history," like Turks at the gates of Constantinople. Palmer, quoting Thompson, *Descent into Discourse*, pp. 199.

<sup>36</sup> Ranajit Guha, "Dominance Without Hegemony And Its Historiography": Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal, 1890-1940* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>37</sup> Clearly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 1985 exposé of the problems associated with Subaltern Studies Collective's adoption of the "subaltern as the subject of his history," led many within the Collective to develop further their "critique of humanism as produced in the West." These problems were most pronounced, Spivak noted, when women and gender were given consideration." Spivak, "Subaltern Studies," p. 209. Interestingly, while members of the Subaltern Studies Collective have responded to Spivak's essay by attempting to endorse and apply her ideas, similarly situated Social Historians, facing the cultural studies/postcolonial/multi-culturalism onslaught, have resorted to digging trenches and crying foul. For another description of this trajectory away from Thompsonianism, see Chandavarkar, "The Making of the Working Class," pp. 189-192.

<sup>38</sup> Gregg, *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890-1940* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

<sup>39</sup> Gregg, "Group Portrait with Lady," *Reviews in American History* 20 (3, 1992).

<sup>40</sup> A diatribe that, not surprisingly, fit quite neatly with that found in Palmer's *Descent into Discourse*.

<sup>41</sup> E.P. Thompson, "Mayhew and the Morning Chronicle," in Eileen Yeo and E.P. Thompson, eds., *The Unknown Mayhew* (New York: Pantheon, 1971), pp. 11-50. Kale and I had used Mayhew's categories of Artisans and Laborers, matched in *The Making of the English Working Class* by the chapter "Artisans and Others", to highlight the privileging of certain kinds of laborers.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, "An Elizabethan Diary," in *Writing By Candlelight*, pp. 91-97.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Paul Gilroy, "Nationalism, history and ethnic absolutism," in *Small Acts* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993), p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Palmer, *Descent into Discourse*.

<sup>45</sup> See Steven Watts, "Point of View: Academe's Leftists Are Something of a Fraud," in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 29, 1992.

<sup>46</sup> Thompson, "An Elizabethan Diary," in *Writing By Candlelight* (London: Merlin, 1980), pp. 91-97.

<sup>47</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class: The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978).

<sup>48</sup> Not surprisingly, some of the radicals nurtured on this analysis have lost their commitment to a radical agenda; sometimes seeing everything as ok in America, workers achieving their aims generally, or diverted to other concerns (seeing Americans as divorced from trends elsewhere; Wilentz "Against Exceptionalism"; Alan Dawley, "Peculiarities of the Americans").

<sup>49</sup> According to Steven Watts, for example, "the linguistic left has failed in its radicalism." In fact, it has succumbed to "academic narcissism," with the "stakes" being "almost exclusively academic: reputation, promotion, and publication." "Ultimately," Watts concludes, "the linguistic left seeks sanctuary in the rarefied, intertextualized world of a kinder, gentler academe. From this location its theoretical and political doctrines have emerged as the latest bankrupt expression of radical chic."

<sup>50</sup> U.B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1918); William A. Dunning, *Reconstruction, Political and Economic* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1907); Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, pp. 710-729; Gregg, "Giant Steps," p. 93.

<sup>51</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974); though it is noteworthy that Du Bois's earlier assault on these notions is generally overlooked (*Black Reconstruction in America*). As are other assaults from women like Ida B. Wells-Barnett (*The Red Record*) and Lillian Smith, which do not come from the same class perspective, and which deploy race and gender to telling effect. Thomas C. Holt, "Ida B. Wells-Barnett," in John Hope Franklin and August Meier, *Black Leaders in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982). In this vein, Lillian Smith wrote, "I use the word *we* on many pages of this book: yet, never in this movement backward or forward has there been any unity in the South. There have always been thousands of dissenters whose voices are muffled, whose acts are ignored." *Killers of the Dream* (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 223.

<sup>52</sup> Faith L. Smith, "Coming Home to the Real Thing: Gender and Intellectual Life in Anglophone Caribbean," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 93 (4, 1994): pp. 895-923; Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey, eds., *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996). Take Jacksonian Democracy, for example. Many historians have argued, from the Whiggish standpoint, that this was the beginning of a democratic impulse that could be spread to African Americans and women; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1945); Robert V. Remini, *The Jacksonian Era* (Arlington Heights: H. Davidson, 1989); Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power in the Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Noonday Press, 1990). Once class is no longer examined in isolation, however, it becomes clear that the formulation of 'democracy' was so dependent upon the subordination of black people and women, not to mention the American Indians with whom Jackson went to war, that any reforms that might arise out of the Jacksonian impulse would be, at best, mixed blessings and, at worst, downright oppressive. See

Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class, Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-century America* (London: Verso, 1990); Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*. All this is linked to points that I made about Populism in 'Apropos Exceptionalism.'

<sup>54</sup> I am thinking here, in particular, of Eugene Genovese, whose *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976) is explicitly influenced by Thompson, though in ways that differ from the work of Herbert Gutman. Other members of the new Historical Society would also fit within this group of neo-conservatives and "new liberals."

<sup>55</sup> Replacing slaves with Indian indentured laborers in some British Caribbean colonies was justified by the suggestion that denying the right of an Indian to improve 'his' lot by indenturing himself in the West Indies would be in some way limiting his freedom to sell his labor. Through such a rationalization, itself an outgrowth of anti-slavery discourse of free labor, a hierarchical and unfree labor system was maintained. Kale, "Capital Spectacles in British Frames: Capital, Empire and Indian Indentured Migration to the British Caribbean" in *International Review of Social History* 41 (1996): 109-133.

<sup>56</sup> Historians of the New Deal have paid insufficient attention to the sex discrimination embodied in the reforms of the period. They have been attuned to discrimination on the basis of race however. See, Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, eds., *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Anthony Badger, *The New Deal* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Alan Brinkley, *Voices of Protest* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983); Gerald Nash, *The Great Depression and World War II* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979). Along these lines, the GI Bill amounts to a form of white ethnic subsidy, enabling the children of immigrants to make their "white flight" to the "crabgrass frontier." This is forgotten, when it comes time to explain how it is that today's inner-city poor have failed to make this escape from the ghetto.

<sup>57</sup> This is a feature of his work *William Morris: From Romantic to Revolutionary* (London: Merlin, 1977) also, which could not fail but discuss the impact of imperialism on working class radicalism in the 1880s, but which keeps the empire at a distance.

<sup>58</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

<sup>59</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>60</sup> Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Philippa Levine, "Consistent Contradictions: Prostitution and Protective Labour Legislation in Nineteenth-Century England," *Social History* 19 (1, 1994): 17-35.

<sup>61</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, p. 36.

<sup>62</sup> Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Spivak writes ironically of the Subaltern Studies Collective: "The group is scrupulous in its consideration towards women. They record moments when men and women are joined in struggle, when their conditions of work or education suffer from gender or class discrimination." (p.215); these words can be applied less easily to *The Making of the English Working Class*.

<sup>64</sup> Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 417.

<sup>65</sup> A Labour-voting undergraduate (with Scottish Nationalist sympathies) and a socialist-inclined labor history graduate student, I did not attribute much significance to empire at this time.

<sup>66</sup> Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 277.

<sup>67</sup> Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, p. 285.

<sup>68</sup> With apologies to George Orwell.

<sup>69</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York* (Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1963) had already brought into question some of the assumptions embedded in Oscar Handlin's description of the immigrant experience; E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," in *Past and Present* (1971): 76-136; "Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," in *Past and Present*, 38 (1967): 56-97.

<sup>70</sup> Carolyn Steedman, "The Price of Experience: Women and the Making of the English Working Class," *Radical History Review*, LIX (1944): 108-119.

<sup>71</sup> *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 10, (4, 1991): 61-87. Quotes in parenthesis in the following paragraphs refer to this article.

<sup>72</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990).

<sup>73</sup> As in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); see Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

<sup>74</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Working Women and Leisure in New York City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

<sup>75</sup> Peiss, *Working Women and Leisure in New York City*; Stansell, *City of Women*.

<sup>76</sup> For example, Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street: Housing and Social Change Among Italian Americans, 1880-1930* (Albany: SUNY, 1984); and *From the Other Side: Women, Gender and Immigrant Life in the United States, 1820-1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>77</sup> Donna R. Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street; From the Other Side*.

<sup>78</sup> Gabaccia writes, "indeed, it was his understanding of family solidarity that allowed John Bodnar to revise Oscar Handlin's view of immigrants as 'the uprooted.'"

<sup>79</sup> John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 71. The page numbers in parenthesis in the following paragraphs refer to this volume.

<sup>80</sup> Carol B. Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (NY: Harper & Row, 1974), pp. 22-31. Historians of the "Great Migration" have also tended to conform to this model. Bringing their narratives into line with those of immigration histories, they have made a discussion of the family, community formation and ethnic continuities central to their studies. In so doing, they do not confront the erroneous assumptions of the immigration historians, but rather displace the "culture of poverty" from more elite African Americans to less elite: from migrants to refugees; from "Great Migration" people to post-WWII migrants. Joe William Trotter, Jr., ed., *The Great Migration in Historical Perspective: New Dimensions of Race, Class and Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); see Gregg, "Group Portrait With Lady."

<sup>81</sup> In *Issai, Nisei, War Bride: Three Generations of Japanese American Women in Domestic Service* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), Evelyn Nakano Glenn provides many examples of conflicts arising over such issues. Other studies in which such conflicts are featured include: Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shetlet: Life and labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); and especially, Mary E. Odum, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 1995). Kathie Friedman-Kasaba's, *Memories of Migration: Gender, Ethnicity, and Work in*

*the Lives of Jewish and Italian Women* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) largely omits gender conflict. Such conflicts are also staples in women's/feminist literature of migration and immigration; see, for example, Anzia Yezierska, *Bread Givers* (New York: G. Braziller, [1975] 1925) and *Hungry Hearts* (New York: Persea Books, 1985); Paule Marshall, *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (New York: Feminist Press, 1981); Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (New York: Random House, 1970); Dorothy West's *The Living is Easy* (Old Westbury, NY: Feminist Press, 1982); Toni Morrison, *Jazz* (New York: Plume, 1993); Bharati Mukherjee, *The Middleman and Other Stories* (London: Virago, 1988); Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage, 1976); Amy Tan, *The Joy Luck Club* (New York: Ballantine, 1989); and, for an interesting comparative perspective, Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood* (New York: George Braziller, 1979); see also her novels after she moved to Britain. Add to these novels several other works that also place gender at the heart of the immigration matter, though from different perspectives: Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (New York: Bantam, 1982); Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle* (New York: Bantam, 1981), to which we will return; Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land* (New York: Macmillan, 1965); James Baldwin, *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (New York: Bantam, 1981); and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), which might be read as a text dialectically combining migration genres - uprooted, transplanted, multicultural. These themes are taken up in Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Differences," in *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1 (Spring 1991): 24-44, reprinted in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 60-83; and Farah Griffin, *Who Set you Flowin? The African-American Migration Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). See also, Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: Bantam, 1984); Michele Wallace, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman* (New York: Verso, 1990); and Darlene Clark Hine, *Hine Sight* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Finally, Patha Chatterjee's discussion of the "nationalist resolution of the woman question," while perhaps not being directly transferable to the United States, does raise the question how ethno-nationalists in America "resolved" this question, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 116-157.

<sup>82</sup> This emphasis on culture did not limit the ethnic group's ability to assimilate. Rather, it enabled the group's members to stress that they were not as culturally impoverished as they had been described, that "their" women were not in charge, and that they (according to the imperial logic that discriminated against them on these grounds) deserved to be included in civil society on a more equal basis with those who governed. Of course, the emphasis on culture as a method of assimilation has not always been static during the last century. One only has to compare the 1950s and 1960s to see the different behavior of ethnic groups pursuing assimilation. In the 1950s - the age of the "organization man," the "family man," the "feminine mystique," and Levittowns (Pete Seger's "Little Boxes") - emphasis was placed on assimilation rather than on ethnic culture. While women were domesticated, so were the men - as Philip Roth is only too eager to point out in *My Life as a Man* (London: Penguin, 1985). The reaction to this assimilation formula was formidable during the 1960s, as re-masculinized ethnic and racial cultures were held up as preferable to the mundane and domesticated normality. If anything, women were seen not as victims of the suburban culture, but as

the perpetrators of it, tying men down, keeping the beat[nik] from the road; Barbara Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1983). Clearly the transformation from the consensus historical tradition to that of social historians reflected this change in social attitudes. But the notion of assimilation was not lost, merely displaced and deemphasized. The change was reflected in the movement "beyond the melting pot" to the social historian's vision of America as a kind of "pea soup."

<sup>83</sup> In one edition of *Sister Carrie*, Dreiser described Hurstwood as a "house-dog" or a canary kept in captivity so long that it is unable to fend for itself when released; p. 408.

<sup>84</sup> Sinclair, *The Jungle*, p. 269.

<sup>85</sup> Sinclair, *The Jungle*, p. 270.

<sup>86</sup> Sinclair, *The Jungle*, p. 274.

<sup>87</sup> Sinclair, *The Jungle*, pp. 326-327.

<sup>88</sup> One can see why Du Bois was skittish about committing himself to the Socialists in 1912 - better the Southern-bred racist you know than these Darwinian socialists.

<sup>89</sup> David Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics and Working Class History* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 39-46.

<sup>90</sup> *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919* (New York: Pantheon, 1976), pp. 3-87.

<sup>91</sup> Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*, p. 43.

<sup>92</sup> Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society*, pp. 212-292.

<sup>93</sup> Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976).

<sup>94</sup> Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, p. 296.

<sup>95</sup> Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, p. 298.

<sup>96</sup> Du Bois, in *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), makes some of the same comparisons in his conclusion with significant effect.

<sup>97</sup> Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom*, p. 303. Gutman clearly wanted to avoid falling into the trap of treating slaves as "white men with black skins," which had tainted Stamp's analysis in *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Vintage, 1956).

<sup>98</sup> Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*.

<sup>99</sup> This point was made clear to me a long time ago by Miriam King. For Gutman's discussion of family see *Work, Culture and Society*. "Tough familial and kin ties made possible the transmission and adaptation of European working-class cultural patterns to industrializing America," p. 43. In light of the foregoing discussion, see E.P. Thompson's essays, "Happy Families," *New Society* 8 (Sept. 1977), and "The Sale of Wives," in *Customs in Common*, p. 404-466. In the latter essay, Thompson endeavors to revalue the sale of wives in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rural England. These transactions should not be seen merely as reflections of the despicable and sexually oppressive behavior of members of lower classes. Rather, when they did occur, they constituted part of the "moral economy" of the community. Such analysis may not seem too disquieting when applied to rural English folk, but if utilized to describe other communities from inner-city Chicago to the Deccan hills above Mumbai, it seems more so. Social historians' attempts to "rescue" subjects from the condescension of utilitarian social reformers and Whiggish historians founder in romanticism when they assume that they can speak for the people who perform these acts. Is the woman sold from

one husband to another really able to "speak" her mind about this particular event? And is the attempt to revalue the transaction analogous to an overly romanticized picture of conditions in slavery that ignores the oppression by the master of the slave?

<sup>100</sup> "We make no judgment about the relative merit of different family systems, female-headed or otherwise. Our point is a different one - that any type of family undergoing rapid change is likely to be at least temporarily less effective as an agency of social control." Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage, 1971), p. 225.

<sup>101</sup> Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land*. Lemann writes: 'It is clear that whatever the cause of its differentness,' Lemann writes, 'black sharecropper society on the eve of the introduction of the mechanical cotton picker was the equivalent of big-city ghetto society today in many ways. It was the national center of illegitimate childbearing and of the female-headed family.' p. 31. For a response to this, see Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (NY: Pantheon, 1989) p. 203.

<sup>102</sup> Lee Rainwater and William L. Yancey, eds., *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1967); Nathan Glazer and Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*.

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Palmer, E.P. Thompson, p. 24.

<sup>104</sup> Novick, *That Noble Dream*, pp. 440-42; Palmer, E.P. Thompson, and *The Making of E.P. Thompson; Bruce Laurie, Artisans into Workers*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>105</sup> David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*; Sean Wilentz, 'Against Exceptionalism.'

<sup>106</sup> Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1984), 18, 427-428; Christine Stansell, *City of Women*.

<sup>107</sup> Quoted in Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, p. 11.

<sup>108</sup> Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, p. 11.

<sup>109</sup> Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 12, notes the transportation of trade unionists the year after the emancipation of slaves. His work provides a clear understanding of the imperial connections that went into the making of English and American working classes.

<sup>110</sup> Kale, "Projecting Identities: Empire and Indentured Labor Migration from India to Trinidad and British Guiana, 1836-1885," in Peter van der Veer, ed., *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

<sup>111</sup> Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 119; Paul Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); *Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*; Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*; Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others, Said, Imperialism and Culture*. For discussions of blacks in Britain, see Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain*; Gretchen Gerzina, *Black London: Life Before Emancipation* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Rozine Visram, *Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: The Story of Indians in Britain, 1700-1947* (London: Pluto, 1986).

<sup>112</sup> Antoinette Burton, "Who Needs the Nation?" *The Journal of Historical Sociology* 10 (1997): 227-248.

<sup>113</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Proletariat Goes to College," in *Social Text* 49 (1996), pp. 37-42.

<sup>114</sup> J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism: A Study* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965 [1905]), pp. 218-219.

<sup>115</sup> "This is the greatest gift of deconstruction: to question the authority of the investigating subject without paralysing him, persistently transforming

conditions of impossibility into possibility;" Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," p. 201. For another view of the historian's relationship to the academy, see Cary Nelson, *Manifesto of a Tenured Radical* (New York: NYU Press, 1977), and a compelling review of the same, by H. Aram Veeger, "The Barricades of Academe," in *The Nation*, June 23, (1997): 32-34.

<sup>116</sup> Cooper, "Work, Class and Empire," p. 235-241. This brings to mind Steve Biko's comment about white liberals in South Africa attempting to establish themselves as "go-betweens in the struggle for emancipation;" cited in Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 84.

<sup>117</sup> John Dewey, in Kenneth Burke, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp. 37-49.

<sup>118</sup> See Homi Bhabha, 'Sly Civility,' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 93-101.

<sup>119</sup> Robin D.G. Kelley, "We Are Not What We Seem": Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South, *The Journal of American History* (June 1993): 75-112.

<sup>120</sup> If one were permitted to quote Nietzsche, one might be tempted to interject: "only that which has no history is definable;" quoted in Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, p. 198.

<sup>121</sup> E.P. Thompson, "Alien Homage", p. 101.

<sup>122</sup> Cooper and Stoler, "Between Metropole and Periphery," p. 35; Cooper, "Conflict and Connection," p. 1544-45.

<sup>123</sup> Here, I paraphrase Antoinette Burton's comment on the naturalization and familiarization of empire; personal correspondence.

<sup>124</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History,' in *Illuminations* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1979), p. 259.

<sup>125</sup> Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, p. 21.

## The Cloth of Field of Gold: Material Culture and Civic Power in Colonial Ibadan\*

RUTH WATSON

**Abstract** The article focuses on a political controversy which occurred in Ibadan, a city in south-western Nigeria, during 1939. At face value, the contentious issue was a particular design of damask cloth. Ruth Watson suggests that the controversy was actually far more complex and argues that it cannot be understood unless one develops an historical reading of political culture in the city. This reading explores the cultural/symbolic meanings of political practices and how, at certain times, these practices served to generate material forms of civic power.

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On the 15th of May 1939, the Ibadan Native Authority passed the 'Restriction of the use of certain kinds of cloth Order'. The cloth to be restricted was a blue damask which incorporated this design:



Figure 1. The Olubadan Damask