SOLIDARITY INFRASTRUCTURE:
GENDER AND RACE SOLIDARITY AND CROSS-CLASS COALITIONS
IN THE KANSAS CITY GENERAL STRIKE OF 1918

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Doctor of Philosophy

by
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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School,
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SOLIDARITY INFRASTRUCTURE:
GENDER AND RACE SOLIDARITY AND CROSS-CLASS COALITIONS
IN THE KANSAS CITY GENERAL STRIKE OF 1918

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATION

For Megan

who always knew the right combination of listening, advice, distraction, prodding,
encouragement, socializing, family time, exercise, and delicious food

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AASERE	Amalgamated Association of Streetcar and Electric Railroad Employees
AFL	American Federation of Labor
AMCBW	Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America
BPW	Bureau of Public Welfare (Kansas City, Missouri)
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
DOL	Department Of Labor
EA	Employers' Association
IC	Industrial Council (Kansas City central labor union)
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
JCCND	Jackson County Council of National Defense
KCK	Kansas City, Kansas
KCMO	Kansas City, Missouri
KCPL	Kansas City Public Library
KCWTUL	Kansas City Women's Trade Union League
<i>L&L</i>	<i>Life & Labor</i>
LFM	Labor Forward Movement
<i>LH</i>	<i>Labor Herald</i>
LOA	Laundry Owners' Association
LOC	Library Of Congress
MOBLS	Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics
MOFL	Missouri Federation of Labor
MVR	Missouri Valley Room
NA	National Archives
NCCW	National Council of Colored Workers
NWLB	National War Labor Board
SHSMO	State Historical Society of Missouri
WHS	Wisconsin Historical Society
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League
WWI	World War One

SOLIDARITY INFRASTRUCTURE: GENDER AND RACE SOLIDARITY AND CROSS-CLASS ALLIANCES IN THE KANSAS CITY GENERAL STRIKE OF 1918

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Dr. Victoria Johnson, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates alliances across gender, race, and class in the dynamics of working class solidarity. The analysis examines the geographically bounded organizational networks, community spatial organization, and political cultures in Kansas City that resulted in a general strike in 1918. The general strike is historically unexpected because it occurred in sympathy with low-wage white and Black women with the support of white union men and middle-class clubwomen. The research is motivated by the following research questions: *How do we explain unexpected coalitions across class, gender, and race in Kansas City from 1910 to 1918? What collective action processes and unique historical conditions explain the militancy and solidarity exhibited during this time period?* Drawing on theories from social movements and political sociology, I do a longitudinal historical analysis and process tracing to answer the research questions. The data suggest that a temporally and geographically based meso-level network, what I call a “solidarity infrastructure,” helps explain unusual working class solidarity across gender, race, and class. A solidarity infrastructure is a set of formal and informal links with the support of Euro American men and middle-class women across movements, which articulate and coordinate a cross-class contentious front, mobilizing support of working class formation and solidarity. The concept speaks to why some locations in specific times exhibit inclusive collective action, a theoretical problem not adequately answered in the dynamics of solidarity literature.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Industrial general strikes transpire when workers in a city withhold their labor across occupations and industries, with a unified set of demands. Over 20,000 workers took part in the Kansas City general strike from March 27 to April 2, 1918, which was just the fourth major industrial general strike in US history, and the largest one to occur in the course of war mobilization efforts.¹ Working class militants called the general strike in sympathy with a walkout of commercial laundry workers demanding union recognition -- mostly low-wage white and Black women. As such, the general strike also comprised a rare trade union strike in solidarity with low wage women toilers.² A spokesperson for the general strike authorization committee declared that the conflict had “broadened out from one between laundry workers and laundry owners to one between capital and labor,”³ implying that class solidarity had come to override social and “skill” divisions⁴ within the labor movement.

The Kansas City general strike deserves attention because it happened during a major war, and it was in sympathy with racially diverse low-wage women workers. But a

¹ The first three were St. Louis 1877; New Orleans 1892; and Philadelphia 1910. Johnson (2008:25) provides a full list of American general strikes, including three other events from World War I. Unionists struck in Springfield, IL, in September 1917 for the right to assemble after the police violently broke up a labor parade. In April 1918, unionists initiated a short sympathy strike with streetcar workers in Waco, TX, and the Billings, MT, Employers’ Association locked out union members (Bing 1921:30). The number of participants in Kansas City almost certainly exceeded the combined totals across Springfield, Waco, and Billings. No major general strikes happened during World War II.

² Among general strikes, only the Oakland 1946 instance comes close. It occurred when city officials and police interfered in a Teamsters’ sympathy strike with women retail workers. The general strike ended, however, through a deal between the city and Teamsters, not the retail clerks and their employers (Rhombert 1995). Skill divisions have historically been difficult to overcome, including among women workers. Blewett (1988) analyzed the centripetal and centrifugal forces operating on solidarity between skilled and unskilled women boot and shoe workers in the nineteenth century.

³ *Kansas City Star* March 27, 1918.

⁴ Skill categories can point to in-demand abilities that are difficult to acquire, but they also reify lower wages for women, African Americans, and non-citizens, hence the scare quotes.

third element also bears mention: middle and upper class clubwomen supported the laundry strike. Even as strikers assaulted private laundry guards in residential areas, these clubwomen stood firmly with working class women and blamed the violence on the commercial laundry proprietors. They held public hearings and applied pressure to laundry owners and the mayor, helping to extend the conflict long enough for the general strike process to unfold when replacement workers began to break the unionization effort.

Despite the unique and compelling dimensions of this episode in labor history, the general strike has received very little scholarly attention.⁵ When I began investigating the social forces and dynamics relevant to explaining the general strike and other labor activities during US involvement in the First World War (April 1917, to November 1918), however, it became clear that my research would have to broaden far beyond the time frame and set of actors I initially expected to cover. The general strike was a dramatic episode, yet under closer examination, it also marked just one event within a much longer process of solidarity and class formation. As a result, this dissertation analyzes the Kansas City labor movement from 1910 to 1918, with the task of explaining wartime solidarity. Before we look closer at the scholarly literature on dynamics of solidarity and coalitions, let me make a case for why sociologists should care about a century-old labor movement.

In addition to the historical uniqueness of the Kansas City case, it raises theoretical and political issues regarding coalitions and organizational forms that support solidarities. Throughout the 1910s, Kansas City unions and workers built organizational

⁵ For a complete survey of published discussions of the strike: Bing 1921:30; Bucki 2009:199; Dodd 2002:100; Fink 1973:71-74; Foner 1987:172; Greenwald 1990:172-180; Haskell 2007:183-185; Schirmer 2002:62-64.

resources and alliances to further their diverse interests. Labor unions forged loyalties to the local labor movement through a central labor body, a newspaper, lobbying, and the Labor Temple. Revolutionaries developed an active branch of the Syndicalist League of North America, joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and sometimes voted for the Socialist Party. Women organized through the Women's Trade Union League. Black workers established the National Council of Colored Workers. At different times, these workers' organizations collaborated with each other, as well as with white and Black clubwomen.

The case poses the theoretical problem of why alliances across race, class, and gender arise in certain times and places. In other words, how did class loyalty come to override race and gender (to a high enough degree to initiate the general strike) within the working class, and how did inter-class alliances with clubwomen and social progressives support solidarity in 1910s Kansas City? What were the social conditions and processes that made this possible? The scholarly literature on collective behavior needs more theoretical development in answering why such alliances occur in specific times and places, an issue we will return to in the Conclusion.

Further, current conversations regarding anti-racism and allyship often lack a clear analysis of the kinds of collaborations and organizational forms necessary to build leverage over institutional power. These discussions have developed a sense of urgency on college campuses over the last ten years.⁶ Yet the concrete implications for collective

⁶ I did a few quick searches to bolster this claim on October 2, 2020. Using Ebsco, I searched *Chronicle of Higher Education* since 1991 and found that 57.7 percent of references to “anti-racism” have occurred since 2010. Searching “ally + rac*”, 46.0 percent have occurred since 2010. Using *Chronicle's* search function, I found far more articles referencing “anti-racism” since 1989, but 46.5 percent still occurred since 2010. Using *Inside Higher Ed's* website, I found only three articles referencing “anti-racism” prior to 2010, and 23 since.

action remain unclear, as much of the anti-racism discourse focuses on the personal transformation of white people and individual interventions within everyday interactions. Additionally, qualitative research at one public university has found that diversity and inclusion measures were institutionalized in ways that hid and deflected from the operations of power that continued to produce institutional racism (Thomas 2020). Collective action is necessary to make more fundamental institutional change. What are the kinds of organizational forms and coalitions that can make such changes possible? How are power dynamics within such coalitions transformed? We will revisit these problems in the Epilogue.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There are two areas of scholarship that explore processes of the kinds of collective action we find in the Kansas City case -- labor movement studies of the dynamics of working class solidarity, and social movement research on coalitions. This brief discussion is guided by a focus on explaining solidarity in particular times and places, and on power dynamics within coalitions.

Solidarity is a slippery word whose meaning is not consistent in the academy or activism. In this dissertation, solidarity refers to unified identification, interest, and action among, and in support of, working class people, across boundaries of “skill,” race, ethnicity, citizenship status, gender, or religion. It includes practical support for strikes and boycotts, as well as political support for the rights of segments of the working class, like suffrage for women. Certainly, our Kansas City characters did not uphold this standard of solidarity in any pure or consistent manner. My definition is a heuristic

device to sensitize us to solidarities that extended beyond historically-informed expectations.⁷

Dynamics of Solidarity

When reviewing the literature on dynamics of solidarity in US labor history, it is important to be clear what exactly we are talking about. Explanations can orient us toward the presence or absence of worker solidarity, and toward primary or contextual determinants. Further, the distinction between dynamics of solidarity and class formation is a necessarily fuzzy one, but makes categorization of theories difficult. Are we talking about unorganized worker solidarity at the point of production, collective identities of union members, political solidarity across a range of issues affecting diverse workers, or revolutionary movements? These threads often overlap in the literature. Explanations also vary by historical scope, with some causes confined to the early 1890s or late 1930s, for example, and others set in more sweeping narratives of US labor. Our main concern is with theories of primary determinants of the presence of inclusive class solidarity in the US labor movement. I have categorized these theories into five tendencies: spontaneity, community experience, work process, methodical strategy, and communication of material culture through networks. There are important differences within each category, and a scholar's work can overlap multiple categories, but they cover the basic range of perspectives for our purposes.

First, the spontaneity stance downplays organizational resources and organizing work prior to moments of militancy, and has little to say about place. No scholar makes

⁷ For more on the history of the solidarity concept both within sociology and among leftists, see Bayertz (1999); Hunt and Benford (2004); Liedman (2002); Roediger (2016); Schoenfeld and Meštrović (1989).

the case that solidarity is purely spontaneous. But those who see a sharp binary between the masses and union leadership, and who also disdain bureaucratic organizations, tend to emphasize the spontaneous dimensions of mass insurgency and solidarity. The best contribution to this perspective was Piven and Cloward's (1979) *Poor People's Movement*, which argued that mass revolts from below can force important structural reforms, but activist organizations do not create them, and in fact contain them to the benefit of political elites. Mass insurgencies, whether wildcat strikes or urban rebellions, are explained primarily by competition among elites, which can be caused by shifts in voting patterns. While Piven and Cloward do not exactly revere spontaneity per se, they do take pains to assert that mass membership organizations have a bureaucratic logic that favors elites over working-class struggle. Even as they leave the door open for alternative forms of organization (pp. xvi-xvii), they also state that activists cannot create moments of solidaristic struggle through correct analysis and strategy (p. 22). According to Piven and Cloward, even when mass defiance produces major and lasting structural change, they can only win reforms which "historical circumstances [have] already made ready to be conceded" (p. 36). Thus, conflict among elites and institutional contradictions prime the pump of reform, momentary insurgency from below operates the pump and increases revolutionary pressure, and labor movement organizations dissipate the energy by diverting it into institutional channels.

Second, New Social History scholars of labor movements focused their attention on the shaping of rank and file collective actors through everyday community experience. They rejected the notion that poor and working class people are docile when not in open revolt. Rather than look at the institutional practices of trade unions, as the Old Labor

History of John R. Commons and the Wisconsin School did, new social historians studied cultural practices in working class communities. Through historical analyses of small industrial and mining towns of the Gilded Age, American scholars inspired by E. P. Thompson's (1963) *The Making of the English Working-Class* concluded that working class culture was oppositional and independent. Thus, if we want to understand solidarity in working class formation, we should look to the churches, saloons, mutual aid societies, sport leagues, political education activities, and neighborhoods that shaped the perceptions and values of the workers themselves (Berlin 1987; Gutman 1987). Working class culture generates resources for militancy, but solidarity is most easily extended to workers coded as part of the culturally-defined in-group.

Political scientists Ira Katznelson (1981), Amy Bridges (1986), Martin Shefter (1986), and Aristide Zolberg (1986) took this concern with community-workplace interactions into urban environments and theories of political institutions. According to their twist on community experience, working class people still create their own cultures (as opposed to simply receiving bourgeois culture), but within the grooves of urban politics. Historically unique levels of workplace militancy alongside political divisions among American workers were explained by political institutions that prioritized ethnicity and distribution over class and production. Thus, workers were divided at home and at the ballot box, but united at work, a phenomenon Katznelson christened "city trenches." Historians Bruce Laurie (1980), Sean Wilentz (2004), and Michael Kazin (1987) also emphasized that ethnic unity and divisions occur through the interaction of ethnic cultures and urban politics.

Third, David Montgomery's (1979) argument about the American "syndicalist impulse" leading to struggles over workers' control of the work process inspired arguments accentuating the relatively spontaneous aspects of solidarity that are structured by the work process itself. For Howard Kimeldorf (1999), workplace collective action can either leverage the control of a key skill held by few in the production process, or leverage solidarity across a large number of workers. Rank and file militants' preferences were shaped not by culture or ideology, but by the logic of the situation. "Industrial syndicalism," the strategic logic based on broad solidarity, obtained in situations that required it for successful confrontation with employers. Worker militancy is taken for granted, and it is assumed workers have an un-culturally mediated interpretation of which logic of collective action is objectively most effective and desirable.

Rick Fantasia (1988) downplayed the concept of a syndicalist impulse in an analysis of wildcat strikes in the 1980s, in favor of work-group culture. In relatively spontaneous wildcat strikes, usually a particular work-group initiates collective action and calls for solidarity. The blend of personalities and the structuring of the work process creates a self contained culture that can encourage militancy. Thus, for Fantasia, solidarity is something that emerges during class struggle, and cannot be predicted by the cultures and values of individual workers (or their ethnic or political communities). His focus on spontaneous wildcat strikes also downplays the role of organizational resources, preferring instead to highlight decisions made in the back and forth of confrontation.

According to Jeffrey Haydu (1988), depending on the logic of the work process and the alignment of various grievances, many artisans linked their militancy over worker control with economic grievances of machine operatives in the early twentieth century.

The point is that class formation did not necessarily have to come with full proletarianization of the masses; it could happen through alliances across skill divisions present in the work process. Thus, when thinking about solidarity from the perspective of the work process, our concern is with how capital organizes the forces of production across business cycles, not processes of collective action across a particular urban environment.

Fourth, David Montgomery's (1987) emphasis on rank and file "militant minority" organizers inspired a more voluntaristic strand of theory.⁸ The militant minority concept raises the issue of agency and strategy in dynamics of solidarity. Recent research from this perspective, represented by Jane McAlevey (2016), values methodical organizing strategies that can be imported into any situation.⁹ McAlevey is a successful and experienced union organizer, and (perhaps ironically) Frances Fox Piven served as her dissertation advisor. Her primary concern is identifying simple and effective strategies that militant organizers can be trained on and practice in the field. McAlevey asserts that rank and file workers can create change quickly in almost any situation, as long as they have a good organizing strategy. By organizing, she means building power and leadership among rank and file workers, not bureaucratic-led mobilization. The goal

⁸ Revolutionary syndicalists, inspired by the radical French labor movement, pioneered the concept of the militant minority in the US in the 1910s (Ford and Foster 1990). These syndicalists viewed themselves as enlightened agitators of the working masses. They rejected political organizing and hoped to spark a revolutionary general strike to abolish capitalism and the state. V. I. Lenin (1902) and the Bolshevik organization developed a different concept of leadership. They viewed themselves as the vanguard of the working class in the realm of politics, and ultimately abolished the liberal democratic Russian parliamentary body (Duma) in the October 1917 revolution to hand political power to workers' councils (soviets) (Liebman 2017). In a third strand of thought on the relationship between revolutionaries and the masses, Rosa Luxemburg (2008) believed that a revolutionary vanguard could only emerge organically during a period of spontaneous mass strikes, which are inevitable in industrial capitalism.

⁹ Also see Moody 2017a, 2017b; Uetrict and Eidlin 2019; and the Labor Notes organization. Kim Moody specifically cites Rosa Luxemburg as an influence, who is associated with the spontaneity perspective. However, the focus of his work is on identifying opportunities where militants can organize the most pressure on the capitalist system, if they are only bold and skilled enough.

is to chart a path toward creating leadership and tight relationships across the workplace through a series of structure tests, with the ultimate goal of a supermajority strike. This form of collective action is high-risk, high-participation, and involves high moral standards, like weaving community needs into strike demands. While the particulars of strategies will vary across workplaces and communities, the whole point is that basic organizing tools can build effective solidarity anytime, anywhere.

The presence and communication of resonant material culture through networks is our final perspective on dynamics of solidarity. If American workers have a syndicalist impulse, and if militant minorities play a decisive role in creating solidarity, then an alternative and complementary approach is to accentuate the specific cultural currents, narratives, and practices resonant with workers and militants as an explanatory condition. In a comparison of the Seattle 1919 and San Francisco 1934 general strikes, Victoria Johnson (2008) illustrated the role that the communication of material culture through networks played in both events. In particular, the syndicalist impulse, rooted in artisan republican discourses, proved fertile ground for radical West coast political cultures, in contrast to the Communist Party's rhetoric and promotion of centralized organization. Where militant minorities had organized rank and file workplace-democracy factions, solidarity flourished at West coast ports. The political cultures of the rank and file workers and of militant minorities, then, mattered as democratic, racially inclusive, industrial unionism contributed to the success of the San Francisco general strike.

These are important insights to build on for developing an analysis for why a general strike occurred in Kansas City -- that is, in a particular place and time. The issue of political culture poses the debate regarding the role of ideologically motivated

militants. A common proposition is that their political ideologies were incidental to their effectiveness as organizers (Fantasia 1988; Kimeldorf 1999). However, Kimeldorf (1988) has also found that differences in political cultures between West coast and East coast docks, along with the divergent political ideologies of union organizers, led to wildly different outcomes in longshore unions from the 1930s onwards. The West coast ILWU unions produced tight-knit locals where members had fierce loyalty and collective identity, as well as left political commitments. Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin's (2003) examination of CIO unions in the 1930s and 40s similarly found that the ideology of union organizers mattered, along with organizational form. Communist-led and democratic CIO unions, were much more likely to obtain prolabor contracts to achieve worker control of the work process, win equal pay for women, support women's leadership and political rights, and combat racism among workers, regardless of the level of racial diversity of the union, compared to more conservative and bureaucratic CIO unions.¹⁰ With this final perspective, we have a basis for thinking about how agency and culture, within a context of available resources and power relations, unfold organizationally in a particular place.

Coalitions

Social movement scholars have demonstrated heightened interest in coalitions over the last twenty years (Brooker and Meyer 2019; McCammon and Moon 2015; Van Dyke and McCammon 2010; Van Dyke and Amos 2017). The work builds on insights from Zald and Ash (1966) and Suzanne Staggenborg (1986), as well as Sidney Tarrow's

¹⁰ See Johnson (2009) for analysis of variations in racial inclusivity among radical and democratic ILWU locals.

(1996) proposition that movement allies can be seen as a political opportunity. The coalitions approach is an attempt, however, to move away from perceiving movements in terms of uniform entities, and toward thinking in terms of clusters and networks. The hope is to “grasp more fully the varied constituencies, ideological perspectives, identities, and tactical preferences different groups bring to movement activism. Understanding movements as coalitions also reveals that tensions can surface among groups with different cultures, practices, and goals” (Van Dyke and McCammon 2010:xii).

Thinking in terms of coalitions, then, views movements as social fields rather than theorizing movements through supposedly independent organizations. McCammon and Moon (2015) define coalitions using the poles of mergers, where multiple organizations combine, and networks, where information is shared between groups, but no collaboration occurs. Coalitions, “might be said to reside on a continuum between mergers and networks, as a mid-range relationship entailing cooperative joint action while distinct organizational identities and structures remain intact” (p. 327). The coalition concept is very flexible, containing the individual and organizational levels, and tolerating a range in duration or formality (Van Dyke and Amos 2017:1).

The bridging work of individuals and organizations is recognized as a particularly important activity for the creation and maintenance of coalitions (McCammon and Van Dyke 2010:310). In the context of a labor movement, Silke Roth (2003) defines bridging organizations as those “that seek to make connections between different movements. This is especially important when the relationship between two movements (like the women’s movement and the labor movement) is of vital importance to its constituency (working women) but strained” (p. 2). The importance of bridging highlighted by social movement

scholars is an important theme of the analysis here, but it is not sufficient in itself for explaining the Kansas City case. We must also interrogate how organizational forms and resources relate to diversity.

Coalitions are most likely to occur when the groups in question face political threats, groups have abundant or different types of resources, groups are multi-issue organizations, and the organizations have a degree of centralization and set division of labor (Brooker and Meyer 2019; Van Dyke and Amos 2017). Less understood are how these organizational features relate to social diversity within coalitions. Scholars agree that diversity across race, class, and gender within coalitions is both a potential strength to movements and a serious challenge to collective identity and commitment to the shared project (Beamish and Luebbbers 2009; Booker and Meyer 2019; Gawerc 2019; Walker and Stepick 2014). The diversity of a coalition helps its messages carry more weight to a broader audience, enlarges the scope of conflict, and makes overcoming dilemmas in collective action more likely.

But diversity also makes agreement over goals, framing, tactics, and priorities more difficult. Coalitions with internal power imbalances are more fragile when hastily cobbled together in response to a threat, for example (Dixon, Danaher, and Kail 2013). Most of this scholarship centers on cases from the Civil Rights era to the present, and highlights how alliances have succumbed to, or surmounted, power and status asymmetries. Strategies to explicitly work through differences and power asymmetries, build bridges, exclude participants not committed to solidarity, and emphasize shared identities and enemies can overcome the challenges. However, the conditions that foster successful coalitions among diverse movements remains an understudied phenomenon.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The Kansas City case offers potential insights for answering why working class solidarity happens in specific times and places, as well as the relationship between organizational forms and diverse coalition formation and dissolution. This dissertation uses the Kansas City case to examine the processes and mechanisms in dynamics of solidarity through time and space. The research questions guiding this study are: *How do we explain unexpected coalitions across class, gender, and race in Kansas City from 1910-1918? What collective action processes and unique historical conditions explain the militancy and solidarity exhibited during this time period?* These research questions help us maintain a sharp focus on coalition building over time in a specific place, including between workplaces and in cross-class alliances, in order to develop a fresh look at building working class solidarity.

METHODS

The research design uses longitudinal process tracing to piece together an interpretive and causal analytic narrative to answer the research questions. Within historical sociology, the analysis is relatively interpretive because of its focus on a particular set of processes and outcomes, embedded in cultural meaning and contingent contexts (Skocpol 1984:368-369; Ragin 1987:3). Single case studies can provide credible causal explanations for outcomes within the case itself, produce new theoretical ideas, and lead us to rethink theoretical propositions (Bonnell 1980:160; Rueschemeyer 2003:318). When done well, causal narratives provide a vehicle for sociologists to build

history and theory together, and “to contribute most effectively to the cumulation of social science knowledge” (Stryker 1996:309).

The causal narrative component of the research design “explores the determinants of social phenomena” (Lange 2013:43). This involves collecting as much evidence as possible, and analyzing the data in an iterative process to make credible arguments. To structure the narrative towards causal mechanisms and processes, I draw from the rich sociological and political science literatures about process tracing methods (Collier 2011; Mahoney 2015; Trampusch and Palier 2016), temporal dimensions (Aminzade 1992; Lange 2013:70-85), and counterfactual probing (Mahoney 2015; Griffin 1993:1100-104; Moore 1978).

Although this is a single case study, comparative logics are embedded in the analysis of the solidarity infrastructure. To explain its emergence and disintegration, I draw on within-case comparisons across time to identify potential factors based on their timing within the case. The factors that result from this analysis are then briefly contrasted with other cities through secondary literature. I follow sociologist Chris Rhomberg in centering the urban environment of Kansas City. In his analysis of social movements and class formation in Oakland between 1920-1975, Rhomberg (2004) placed the city at the center of the analytic narrative, rather than the point of view of any particular movement. In this way, not only can political opportunity structures and spatial relationships be incorporated in movement analysis, but explanations for when and where collective actors become causal forces as well.

Data

I use documentary analysis with archival materials (newspapers, reports, correspondence, hearings, convention proceedings, speeches, pamphlets, census information, and so on), resulting in analytical factors that explain unusual elements of the case. Archival data were creatively pieced together and triangulated from thousands of pages of documents. Primary sources were drawn from the State Historical Society of Missouri, the University of Missouri's Ellis Library, Kansas City Public Library, National Archives II, Library of Congress, and Wisconsin Historical Society. For example, reports by the city's Bureau of Public Welfare have invaluable data and insights into the working conditions and lives of low-wage workers. Reports by the Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics have data on Kansas City workers, and conference proceedings of the Missouri Federation of Labor bring the political terrain of the labor movement into relief. The US Department of Labor papers include correspondence between Kansas City actors and the federal government, reports written by government mediators, and transcripts of NWLB hearings. The AFL archives have correspondence between local organizers and the office of president Samuel Gompers. The Women's Trade Union League papers contain conference proceedings, reports written by the Kansas City branch, and dozens of letters between Kansas Citians and New York WTUL organizer Leonora O'Reilly that give insights into the politics of the KCWTUL allies. The WTUL's monthly magazine, *Life & Labor*, contains valuable reports of KCWTUL activities. The US Census has information on neighborhood demographics and social institutions like churches. The Kansas City Chamber of Commerce papers provide

meeting minutes which provide a window into the disagreements between businessmen in Kansas City over how to deal with organized labor.

Newspapers were an invaluable source of information as well. The Kansas City *Star*, *Journal*, and *Post* were the most popular daily papers, and provide insights from progressive Republican, pro-business Republican, and progressive Democratic perspectives respectively. The weekly *Labor Herald* reported on decisions made at central labor meetings and gave a conservative craft and producerist perspective on current events. The *Sun* was a weekly paper produced in the Black community. It mostly reported from the perspective of the business and professional class, but also printed multiple editorials by Rucker Smith, a class and race conscious barber.

Secondary sources provided additional local context. Schirmer (2002) and Gotham (2014) have useful insights into processes of racialization and solidarity in the city. Thelen (1991) narrates the introduction of competitive markets to Missouri in the 1870s and 1880s, and the ways regular Missourians reacted to the associated urbanization in the following decades. Fink (1973) analyzes the politically active Missouri Federation of Labor. Fink (1983) provides background information for the local flavor of populism and Knights of Labor activities in Kansas City, Kansas, prior to our time frame. Coulter (2006), Hanzlick (2018), Haskell (2007), and Burke, Roe, and Herron (2018) lent deeper context for Progressive Era social and political relations. Palmer (2007) and Johanningsmeier (1994) include hard to find information regarding radical organizations in Kansas City. Several unpublished theses and dissertations deepened my understanding of city and state level processes.

There are a number of shortcomings to the data. Unfortunately, the internal records of the Kansas City Central Labor Union and Women's Trade Union League do not exist in any archive.¹¹ Additionally, the voices of Black workers are almost entirely absent from the historical record. Finally, I have not yet spent time with the Frank P. Walsh papers at the New York Public Library, no doubt a trove of correspondence.

THEORY AS SENSITIZING CONCEPTS

Qualitative historical analysis begins with open-ended research questions and develops theory inductively. The theoretical framework therefore takes the form of “sensitizing concepts,” which guide the analysis. To be clear, the sensitizing concepts below help to clarify and position the solidarity infrastructure concept. This framework emerged while struggling to specify and communicate my empirical findings.

Counter-Hegemony and Articulation

The concept of hegemony is most associated with Antonio Gramsci. Hegemony refers to the “ruling bloc’s” dominance in the civil sphere (sites of political and cultural exchange) on behalf of elites. Capitalists try to, and are often successful at, naturalizing their economic and political power to audiences of professionals, small business owners, religious leaders, farmers, and civic reformers, as well as atomized workers. Counter-hegemony occurs when exploited people organize as a class and exert influence beyond their own class boundaries, thereby undermining the reification of capitalist society and enabling consequential struggles over the balance of class forces. When capitalists reign

¹¹ The central labor body announced plans to hold their archives at the Kansas City Public Library during our time period, but the archivists there have confirmed they have no records of this.

with consolidated hegemony, oppositional social forces are unable to effectively challenge their legitimacy. When counter-hegemonic movements alter the balance of class forces through collective action, class struggle becomes more explicit, and individuals and organizations are forced to choose sides.

For Gramsci and other revolutionary Marxists, some sort of “composition” of individuals must come together to make a social force, as with working class formation (Mohandesi 2020). The composition of workers creates working class identities and consciousness through organization and contentious collective action. When multiple streams of social forces come together in a coalition, however briefly, the resulting bloc “articulates” a collective will. Some sort of “party” organization provides leadership, and articulates diverse social forces together in service of a revolutionary strategy. However, a counter-hegemonic “war of position” (or expansion of influence in civil society) must convince a significant proportion of society that the working class should rule, before a revolutionary “war of maneuver” (or frontal attack, like a general strike) can attempt to actually achieve the overthrow of the capitalist state (Egan 2014).

In political sociology, the idea of articulation has been refashioned to explain political interest formation in the normal exercise of liberal democracy. Neo-Gramscians Cedric de Leon, Menali Desai, and Cihan Ziya Tuğal (2015) argued that electoral parties perform a key function mediating between the state and civil society by articulating interests and identities for citizens,¹² and crafting policies to be implemented by the state (also see de Leon 2015; Eidlin 2018a; Mudge 2018). Rather than viewing parties as a reflection of pre-existing social relations in society at large, or as the outcome of

¹² From a Marxist perspective, in contrast, bourgeois parties *disarticulate* social forces by undermining counter-hegemonic bloc formation through partisan coalition building.

machinations by political elites, this perspective interrogates how political parties politicize objective social relations, social identities, and events in order to cobble together coherent political alignments.¹³ The authors take a social constructivist view of society, arguing citizens can be organized by class or other social categories (with material and institutional limitations), rather than fundamentally class-based. I agree that people can be articulated across a range of possible identities and interests -- as class, race, and gender are all rooted materially. However, as Dylan Riley's friendly critique argues (2015), "to show the importance of politics requires that its limits be carefully specified" (p. 184). In my view, this includes the limits imposed by the valorization of capital, which also encompasses the limits imposed by the racial state (Omi and Winant 2015) and racial capitalism (Robinson 2000).

It is clear from the historical record that the Kansas City labor movement (independently of electoral parties) articulated interest in working class solidarity in the 1910s, altered the balance of class forces, and enabled the "war of maneuver" tactic of the general strike during the First World War (even if it was not interpreted as a revolutionary tactic by most of its participants). Like political parties, labor movements "straddle the boundaries between state and society" (Eidlin 2018b:605; also see Rhomberg 1995), meaning labor movements can serve a similar institutional role as electoral parties in mediating between the people and the state. Thus, Gramsci and neo-Gramscian political sociology of parties provide a framework for examining the solidarity infrastructure process.

¹³ Specifically, "integral" parties that seek to articulate a new set of political cleavages do this.

Meso-level Movement Dynamics

The second sensitizing concept is meso-level movement dynamics. Research in this area often utilizes the “coalition” or “infrastructure” concepts, although it is not always consistent what scholars mean by infrastructure. I emphasize meso dynamics to be precise and consistent. Thinking in terms of the meso-level means, “a movement cannot be reduced to its constituent organizations” (Haunss and Leach 2007:72). One way to understand the significance here is through morphogenetic or emergentist models of structure and agency. Structures are what make certain actions and choices possible and thinkable. Social action can reproduce, modify, and destroy structure, which is always emerging. Meso-level structures are made up of relationships between smaller social units, where their *configuration* makes up a synergistic structure. In chemistry, for example, molecules are a meso-level phenomenon, which have different properties than the collection of properties that the individual atoms possess (Archer 1982; Elder-Vass 2005, 2007). The solidarity infrastructure concept emphasizes that the arrangement of organizations and networks in Kansas City created an emergent structure which made wartime militancy and solidarity a potentiality for a specific time period. As a synchronic phenomenon, the solidarity infrastructure’s causal force extended beyond the aggregation of the efforts of individual organizations. This approach meshes well with a Gramscian analysis of counter-hegemonic blocs that alter the balance of class forces.

Social movement scholars use the concept infrastructure in different ways, but it generally refers to a set of organizations and networks that provide resources for mobilization (outsider strategies) and institutional political pressure (insider strategies).¹⁴

¹⁴ One branch looks at organization and participant density in protest cycles. Infrastructure here can refer to high density moments, when movement tactics and frames diffuse easily, and when movements affect

The most relevant applications of infrastructure conceptualize the term as the structure supporting movement cultures, or as mechanisms creating meso-level dynamics. Several examples fit this theme. Hanspeter Kriesi (1996) defined an infrastructure as the collection of organizations within a social movement, including an expansive array of mobilizing structures. In an infrastructure, social movement organizations are joined in mobilization campaigns by supportive groups like churches, associations like mutual benefit societies, and political representation organizations like interest groups and parties. Gerhards and Rucht (1992) identified mesomobilization actors in West Germany who worked toward structural and cultural integration across organizations and networks, creating a “leftist-alternative infrastructure.”

Walter Julio Nicholls (2003) analyzed a progressive and proactive organizational infrastructure in Los Angeles, which linked labor unions, community organizations, and universities. He defines an organizational infrastructure as “a set of informal and formal networks of people and institutions that link and coordinate (*coordinating mechanisms*) different social movement organizations into a common contentious front; the coordinating mechanisms themselves being central components for the mobilization of collective resources towards loosely agreed upon goals” (p. 882). Similarly, Christoph Haug (2013) developed the meeting arenas concept to analyze how meetings, which include network, institutional, and organizational logics, form a meso-level movement

policy agenda setting (Andrews 2001; Johnson, Agnone, and McCarthy 2010; Minkoff 1997). In an often-cited chapter, Bob Edwards and John McCarthy (2004) defined infrastructure as freely available resources and examples of social organizational forms for collective action. However, in a move that does not appear to have gained traction, they contrasted infrastructure with organizations and networks, which can control and privatize resources. Infrastructure can also include abeyance structures, which provide some connective tissue through low density moments between movements (Whittier 2004).

infrastructure. In other words, infrastructure here is the emergent structure of organizational and network interactions within a broad contentious front.

Thus, infrastructure refers to geographically bounded coordinating mechanisms and civil society interactions that facilitate mesomobilization. Analogously, Paul Almeida (2019) reviewed the empirical literature on community resource infrastructures, finding infrastructures increase defensive capacities of communities under political threat. In other words, having networks of trust and resources in place when class conflict explodes, an often impossible thing to predict, is important.

Solidarity Infrastructure

Drawing upon the above stated sensitizing concepts, I propose that the original concept of “solidarity infrastructure” is essential for answering the research questions. The solidarity infrastructure is both a process and an emergent meso-level structure. A network across independently resourced labor unions, clubwomen, progressives, working class women, and working class and professional African Americans altered the balance of class forces, and created new possibilities for solidaristic action. Leftist, suffragist, and social progressive ideas and practices animated these organizations and network connections. Thus, the solidarity infrastructure linked the labor movement with social movement sectors, as well as multiple political cultures. This was a process rooted in a particular time and place.

Specifically, a solidarity infrastructure is a set of formal and informal links across multiple movement sectors, which coordinate a contentious front that, at the very least, articulates and mobilizes support for working class formation and solidarity. Singular

links can be emerging, reproducing, strengthening, in abeyance, or eroding, meaning a solidarity infrastructure is a process, and in constant flux. As an explanatory condition, its particular configuration exerts causal force at particular moments in time. The resources made available by a solidarity infrastructure can help extend and deepen working class solidarity in class struggle over commodity production or social reproduction. Further, the resource independence of groups within the solidarity infrastructure resist power asymmetries within coalitions. Solidarity infrastructures do not just support institutional forms of collective behavior, but also extra-institutional tactics found in militant labor movements or in confrontational civil disobedience.¹⁵ Single case studies and comparative research are needed to refine our understanding of solidarity infrastructures.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 provides descriptions of Kansas City that are contextually relevant to the analysis, from 1869 to 1910. The political geography is explained, along with demographic and economic information. Next, the political landscape and the political culture of social progressivism are described. Then, early experiences with women's activism, working class collective action under the Knights of Labor, and the local labor movement are highlighted.

The dissertation is then organized by three chronological empirical chapters.

Chapter 3 traces the origins of the solidarity infrastructure from 1910 to 1917 through

¹⁵ I should note that the historian Paul Le Blanc (2010) offered a similar concept with "radical labor subculture." As I understand it, the radical labor subculture is a useful meso-level context for explaining cultural resources available to militants and radicals at the national level over multiple generations. In contrast, however, solidarity infrastructures are more localized, fragile, and encompass a wider set of actors (e.g., trade unionists, radicals, and middle class allies).

organizational networks, political cultures, and leadership. The Kansas City branch of the Women's Trade Union League emerged as a bridging mechanism to firm up the solidarity infrastructure and articulate unity behind working class militancy and inclusiveness.

Chapter 4 explores the solidarity infrastructure's effects on the temporal unfolding of solidarity in the second half of 1917. During the First World War, worker militancy increased across America through walkouts for union recognition or strikes to force wages to keep pace with high inflation. Successful walkouts by transit workers and meatpacking employees in August and September of 1917 inspired a wave of walkouts across Kansas City, jumpstarting a series of events that led to the general strike. I argue that the solidarity infrastructure made these early successes possible, and that they solidified and revealed the presence of a solidarity infrastructure. The analysis centers on this temporal unfolding of events, wherein the solidarity infrastructure needed to be in place when conditions sparked working class militancy, in order for it to lead to the general strike.

Chapter 5 investigates the general strike tactical choice in early 1918. The week-long general strike in March and April was only the fourth industrial general strike in US history, and the only major instance during war mobilization. Yet widespread enthusiasm existed among rank and file unionists to use the general strike tactic in solidarity with a commercial laundry strike. The laundry strikers also enjoyed the unequivocal support of clubwomen, even as women strikers violently assaulted replacement workers and private guards throughout the streets of Kansas City. The analysis shows that the solidarity

infrastructure explains the opening to choose the general strike tactic, while the transnational influence of French syndicalism in Kansas City explains the choice.

The analytic Conclusion returns to the question of why a solidarity infrastructure emerged in Kansas City in the 1910s. Three causal mechanisms are identified with the aid of within-case temporal comparisons and comparisons to other cities using secondary literature. First, diffuse and fragmented political power created an organizing logic encouraging coalitions between clubwomen, social progressives, and the labor movement. Secondly, the spatial organization of African American residents undermined the reification of race and opened up chances for coalitional experimentation. Finally, uneven women's rights opened up organizing across class among women, and within class for workers, in support of women's suffrage and labor protections. The chapter also summarizes the findings and analytical contributions of the research.

The Epilogue first provides a bit of closure regarding what happened to the labor movement and solidarity among workers after the general strike. Then, I suggest what the implications of the Kansas City case might be for anti-racist practices and coalition building today.

CHAPTER 2: KANSAS CITY, 1869-1910

In order to avoid making an overly voluntaristic argument about the Kansas City solidarity infrastructure, it is crucial that we establish the particular characteristics of Kansas City's economy, municipal politics, spatial organization, and demographics that provided a framework through which activists exercised agency. Although my research focus rests with ways organizers created a structure of grassroots power in the form of the solidarity infrastructure, these social actors behaved within historical processes that shaped their desires and choices, and they could not completely predict or control the outcomes of their actions. Their political interests and menu of choices with which to exercise agency were shaped and articulated through relational politics, involving the cultural and material resources that networks and organizations provided.

Chapters 3 and 6 will describe and analyze the emergence of the solidarity infrastructure in the 1910s. Our concern in this chapter is to set up the economic, political, social, and organizational context which made it a possibility. Before we dive into this historical background, it may be useful to establish indicators of solidarity infrastructure development. Based on the Kansas City case, I propose six indicators to structure the narratives for this chapter and Chapter 3. These indicators are broad enough to be generalizable and comparable to other cases in future research, and to help us keep track of the particular developments of the Kansas City solidarity infrastructure through networks and organizations over time.

The first indicator is *municipal politics* as a political opportunity structure. The relative openness of political power, and the opportunities and threats which present

themselves to various interests, shape the pace of when different movements in a city pursue insider strategies or outsider tactics, when they retreat and go into abeyance, and when they seek out allies. Shifts in municipal politics help us account for shifts in organizational patterns and networks germane to the labor movement.

Second, the *spatial organization* of residential areas and places of employment points to the ways that various ethnic and racialized communities lived in overlapping neighborhoods. It also highlights how the locations of workplaces and the form of mass transit (streetcars) relate to this residential geography. Developments in spatial organization gesture toward changes in working class networks and the spatial dimension of vectors of collective action. Third, *demographics* compose an important context to the solidarity infrastructure, not as an independent causal force, but as a factor of “race relations” in the labor market and politics. The magnitude and rate of change in the proportions of various ethnic and racialized groups within a city interacts with political coalitions and labor markets. These changes over time pose specific logics of collective action that present varying risks and rewards for solidaristic behavior in organizational networks.

The first three indicators are relatively structural, while the remaining indicators incorporate a higher degree of agency on the part of working class actors. Fourth, the *political cultures* and communication networks of various movement organizations and communities are important to keep track of as they help to frame grievances, goals, strategies, and the appropriateness of various alliances and solidarities. While municipal politics, spatial organization, and demographics may constrain and enable actors with particular logics at particular times, collective actors still must interpret these processes

and decide whether they want to pursue exclusion or inclusion in their organizations. Attentiveness to the ideas circulating in communication networks in and around the labor movement aids in our quest to identify the emergence, development, and disintegration of the solidarity infrastructure. Fifth, the *leadership* of certain individuals in particular times illustrates how the choices that leaders make, who sit at nodes of overlapping networks, can be historically causal. Finally, *collective action* helps us follow the coalescence of social forces.

In the lead up to 1910, municipal politics developed along a fragmented path, with several centers of gravity vying for control of economic development. Because Kansas City lacked an integrated artisanal history (discussed below), the spatial organization of urban space placed wage-dependents' neighborhoods and large-scale industry close together, and along networks of mass transit. Unique racial demographics meant that these working class neighborhoods included a large number of Black residents compared to other industrial cities of the period. The political cultures, leadership, and collective action of social progressives, middle class women, the African American community, and the labor movement created the social forces that would converge in the solidarity infrastructure of the 1910s. This chapter examines how these ingredients, including a conducive political environment, came into being.

There are a few terms that require some clarification for the narratives that follow. The word organization will often refer to formal movement organizations, like labor unions or women's clubs. It will also come up to discuss geographic patterns, but I will specify those with "spatial organization." A network can refer to connections between formal organizations. It may also indicate friendship ties, communication networks, or

physical transit networks, depending on the context. Political culture refers to sets of ideas that shape organization practice, and collections of ideas rooted in communication networks.

Allow me to preview the development of the solidarity infrastructure in the 1910s, so the reader has an idea of the social forces that will eventually come together when reading this chapter. The solidarity infrastructure was composed of links between the trade union movement, middle and upper class white women's clubs, and social progressives. Syndicalist, suffragist, and relatively radical progressive political cultures animated these social forces and alliances. The Kansas City Women's Trade Union League transformed into an independent force within the solidarity infrastructure, pushing clubwomen to support working class militancy, and the labor movement to be more inclusive in its pursuit of working class formation.

Before 1869

Why do I begin the story in 1869? It is helpful to understand settlement patterns leading up to that year. The Kansa, Kickapoo, Očhéthi Šakówinj (Sioux), and Osage Indigenous peoples called the Kansas City area home prior to European settlement. The Osage officially ceded the land of Kansas City, Missouri, in 1825. Following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the United States forced several distant tribes to move to the Kansas Territory, including the Wyandot and Shawnee Nations, to what is now the Kansas City, Kansas, area. The Wyandots established Wyandotte, Kansas, in 1843, but the issue of slavery soon created political rifts among them. In 1856, anti-slavery Wyandots joined with other abolitionists to found Quindaro, the first stop on the

Underground Railroad for enslaved people fleeing northwest Missouri. But by the late 1860s, the Wyandotte and Shawnee Nations had been removed to Oklahoma. The settlers' frontier, and its genocidal Indian Wars, continued westward. A collection of small towns, including Wyandotte and Quindaro, later combined in 1886 to establish Kansas City, Kansas (Greenbaum 1982).

White settlement initially sprouted in the 1830s on the south banks of the Missouri River, just east of the mouth of the Kansas (or Kaw) River, where the Missouri bends east toward the Mississippi (the River Market area, see Figure 2.1). Independence to the east, and Westport to the south (annexed in 1897), serviced the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails. Straddling the state line sat the West Bottoms, a Sycamore forest prone to flooding that eventually hosted railroad warehouses, food manufacturing plants, graineries, and the stockyards. Downtown rested atop two hundred foot limestone and shale bluffs (where the West and North Terrace Parks are located, Shortridge 2012).

The Border War between abolitionist “free staters” (like John Brown) and pro-slavery “ruffians” (like the Jesse James family) reversed a population spike in the 1850s, as well as Union General Ewing’s General Order No. 11, which cleared the area of residents in 1863 (only 4,000 remained on the Missouri side by 1865, Montgomery and Kasper 1999:80). The Kansas side fared better due to a torrent of enslaved people escaping Missouri during the war, but many joined the Union Army and soon left the area (Greenbaum 1982:15-22). Missouri, a slave state, remained in the Union, though many important battles with rebels occurred across the state early in the war. A Black eyewitness later recalled his first impressions of Kansas City in 1868: only one paved

street, hotels with no roofs, trenches from the Civil War still in evidence, and covered wagons (Coulter 2006:21-23).

Thus, our story of class conflict in Kansas City begins after the destruction wrought by the Civil War. Industrial Kansas City materialized with the construction of the Hannibal railroad bridge in 1869 -- the first to cross the Missouri River -- less than two months after the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad. For people unfamiliar with the area, the most confusing geographical feature is that there is a Kansas City in both Kansas and Missouri, and that the older, more powerful city sits in Missouri. Unless otherwise specified, the events analyzed in this dissertation will mostly be in Kansas City, Missouri, although the two cities were experienced as one by working class people who routinely crossed the state border.

Culturally, politically, and economically, Kansas City blended a unique mix of the South, "East", and West (Hanzlick 2018:6, 43). To begin with, Missouri was a former slave state (166 enslaved people and 24 free Blacks living there on the eve of the Civil War, Schirmer 2002:27). White residents later greeted Jefferson Davis as a hero during an 1875 stop, illustrating a confederate pathos alongside Southern racial demographics (ie, a high proportion of Black residents, Hanzlick 2018:62-64). Yet Kansas City developed economically along Midwestern channels, to which we now turn.

Black Residential Enclaves

- 0 Church Hill
- 1 Hell's Half Acre
- 2 Hick's Hollow
- 3 Third Ward
- 4 Lincoln-Coates (Vine St.)

City Parks

- 5 Penn Valley Park
- 6 The Parade
- 7 Shawnee Park
- 8 West Terrace Park
- 9 North Terrace Park

Businesses

- A Armour Meatpacking
- B Stock Yards
- C Cudahy Meatpacking
- D Morris Meatpacking
- E Swift Meatpacking
- F Wilson Meatpacking
- G Proctor & Gamble Soap

Other Buildings

- H Union Station
- I City Hall
- J Convention Hall
- K KCK Union Halls
- L KCMO Labor Temple

Figure 2.1. Map of Kansas City, 1910s. Dotted lines represent major railroad paths.

Map by author, based on the Berry Map Company's 1914 Map of Greater Kansas City (available at kchistory.org, ID 106694). Enclave information from Greenbaum 1982; Schirmer 2002:32-42.

ECONOMICS

Gordon, Edwards, and Reich (1982) described the time from 1869 to 1910 as the end of “initial proletarianization,” and the rise and solidification of “homogenization,” in American labor markets. Initial proletarianization, lasting from the 1820s to the end of the century, primarily consisted of the introduction of the wage relationship in small artisan shops, putting an end to the apprentice-journeyman-master sequence among skilled workers. Homogenization, from the 1870s to the Second World War, involved capitalists seizing control of the work process through deskilling. During this Second Industrial Revolution, workers now had to sell their individual labor power on the market. This process occurred alongside patterns of urbanization where large factories and working class communities sprouted alongside each other in the city core. It molded a particularly militant period of labor history in America, as artisans and semiskilled operatives fought against impoverishment and loss of control of their workplaces (Montgomery 1979), sometimes together, and often with community support. Employers’ actions were motivated at least as much by asserting their dominance over workers, as they were by increasing short term profit. They introduced mechanization, foremen, centralized personnel departments, and ethnic and racialized management of workforces to divide their employees.

Industrial Kansas City grew firmly within the homogenization process, with an economy rooted in some of the largest and most bureaucratic industries of the time. The spatial organization of industrial workplaces and working class communities interacted with homogenizing labor market patterns and unique racial demographics. The combination of a significant number of African American residents and Black suffrage

prior to hypersegregation in an industrial city during this period of labor market homogenization is a unique feature of Kansas City history, a theme that will continue to come up throughout this chapter, Chapter 3, and Chapter 6.

The Hannibal Bridge immediately brought a nationally significant node of commerce and transit to the city's West Bottoms area. Because of the Civil War, the city lacked an integrated history of small artisan production, where journeymen worked to become independent masters. The wage relation and class immobility dominated the scene from its reincarnation as a railroad center, unlike larger cities like New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore, where journeymen labor agitation dated to the 1830s and 40s (Bridges 1986). The high proportion of rural migrants, both white and Black, reinforced this proletarian flavor since they arrived as wage-dependents.

The 1880 US Census provides a window into occupational categories for residents of Kansas City, Missouri, and the broader shape of the economy (unfortunately, aggregated occupational categories are not distinguished by race or nationality). Only thirty-two people were categorized as apprentices, with the majority of the 443 employed boys (between 10 and 15 years old) working as laborers, store clerks, brick and tile makers, teamsters, domestic servants, or printers. A plurality of adult males in 1880 toiled as general laborers. Significant numbers of railroad employees, building tradesmen, and printers rounded out the most common jobs for the working class as a whole.

Construction workers in newer cities often held significant leverage over city development, sometimes leading to greater political influence than usually present in American labor history. In San Francisco, building trades unions created a fortress of

closed-shop unionism on the west coast, but its ramparts defended the gates against not capital, but Chinese, Mexican, Japanese, and Filipino workers (Kazin 1987). In contrast, white Kansas City carpenters and plumbers were more amenable to sticking with Black hod carriers and masons through solidarity strikes, even as they excluded them from skilled positions (discussed below).

Kansas City developed through ties to agriculture, with its primary sectors being meatpacking, milling, baking, printing, metals, lumber, and petroleum refining (Neff and Williams 1954:3-12, 135-155). Kansas City also became a wholesale trade and banking center by the turn of the century. Much of the capital investments came from Chicago, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Boston, New York City, and Britain, rather than locally (Brown and Dorsett 1978:37, 55-60; Schirmer 2002:15; Snell 1999:129; Swofford 1923; Thelen 1991:33-34). Therefore, Kansas City could be considered both a scaled-down Chicago, and a precursor to Western towns like Los Angeles, where San Francisco's ruling class “invaded... and reshaped its economy” after the Civil War (Davis 2018:96). But in Kansas City, no one seemed particularly interested or able to rule from afar, nor consolidate power locally. We explore this trend with a discussion of the formation of a cohesive social elite, followed by the fractured political terrain.

Social Elite

Economic development not only interacted with racial demographics, but also with municipal politics, which proceeded in a fragmented and diffuse manner (analyzed in more detail in Chapter 6). Historian Richard Coleman (2006) found, with a remarkably thorough dataset, that a distinct social elite developed in Kansas City in the early 1880s.

However, as I demonstrate in this section, this social elite did not form a unified political force that could consolidate or polarize the political terrain. In fact, many of the most influential political figures were not members of the social elite at all. The fact that the social elite failed to impose their common interests on political developments helps explain political cleavages.

Coleman identified a social network of the exclusive “social establishment,” people at the top of the local status hierarchy and who participated in elite social institutions: “the credentials for membership have been a mix of assets, including, of course, ‘old family’ descent along with cultural enthusiasm, fashionable education, personal charm, talent for social leadership, community contribution, and economic competence” (p. 7). Significantly, many of the most politically influential and wealthiest figures were not part of this group. The *Star* owner William Rockhill Nelson’s progressive adversarialism, not to mention workaholic schedule, did not lend him to chumming with leading scions over lunch at the Country Club or Kansas City Club. The wealthiest resident, lumber baron Robert A. Long, embodied a Calvinist ethos, and eschewed social life (p. 44). The nearly equally wealthy German manufacturer of consumer goods, William Volker, preferred to spend his time and money supporting social welfare over motoring or playing golf (pp. 50-51).

Coleman also pinpointed four companies that dominated the economy at the turn of the century (p. 43). The Long-Bell Lumber Co. was owned by Long and Victor Bell, a cosmopolitan man who preferred travel over political intrigue (Bell died in 1905). Secondly, the massive Kansas City Central Coal and Coke owned mines across the Midwest and West, and operated coal retail establishments locally. Coleman did not list

its owner, Richard H. Keith, as a major figure in politics or the social elite. Thirdly, August R. Meyer, a member of the social elite, owned a large smelting and refining business on the Kansas side, and served as the major force behind the nonpartisan City Beautiful Movement in Missouri. Combining the Social Gospel and Social Darwinism, Meyer also presided over the charitable Provident Association, which attempted to address social problems through the supposed individual failings of poor and working people (Hanzlick 2018:101). Lastly, the Chicago Armour family's packinghouse on the Kansas side, out of which a small handful of Armour kids enjoyed elite circles. Although Meyer and the Armours cavorted with the social elite, the geographic location of high society rested in Missouri, while their main economic and political interests laid in Kansas.¹⁶

Politics are discussed more below, but how did businessmen overlap with the electoral arena, and in relation to the social elite? William T. Kemper represented business interests in the Democratic Party. Originally a salesman, Kemper married into a banking family and struck oil on a bankrupted railroad's property he was a receiver of. The labor movement perceived Kemper in the 1910s as the wizard behind the curtain of the Pendergast machine and of the anti-union Employers' Association (discussed below). For their part, the social establishment viewed Kemper as too greedy in his business practices and "too cozy" with machine politics to participate in their affairs (p. 75). Although historical scholarship finds that Kemper and the Pendergasts made up separate factions within the party, rather than an integrated and coordinated operation (Dorsett

¹⁶ The Armours did eventually invest heavily in the streetcar system on the Missouri side, which necessitated ensuring political support for favorable monopoly contracts with the city council.

1980:35), the larger point is that Kemper's Commerce Bank could not unite and funnel business and social elite interests into the Democratic Party.

The local GOP also included a machine element under Tom Marks, associated with clay pipe manufacturer Walter Dickey. Unlike Kemper, the social establishment accepted Dickey in their ranks, but he had few electoral successes (Coleman 2006:50-51). A large faction of the GOP included businessmen and the *Star* who were interested in good government, and they battled Dickey at party conventions.

The solidarity infrastructure will incorporate elite clubwomen, some of whom socialized in and around the social elite. The fact that the elite in Kansas City lacked a unified political outlook or organization translated into more degrees of freedom for political alliances than if their social life had been more tightly bound to a political regime.

MUNICIPAL POLITICS

The interaction of party politics and progressivism in Kansas City contributed to a fractured political environment. Boosters and politicians looked to the East for inspiration for development and in partisan organizing (Hanzlick 2018:89). The popularity of the *Star* (Haskell 2007), along with a robust City Beautiful parks and boulevards project between 1893 and 1915 (Schirmer 2002:16), revealed a booster elite obsessed with rising above the filth and stench of a Western outpost in order to join great Eastern cities.¹⁷ At

¹⁷ William Allen White said of KC in the 1890s: "an overgrown country town of a hundred thousand people. It was consciously citified like a country jake in his first store cloths [sic]" (quoted Muraskin 1969:93).

the same time, enterprising Irishmen founded Eastern style political machines in working class wards in the late 1880s and early 1890s (Dorsett 1980).

Until Tom Pendergast consolidated power after a 1925 city reform initiative ironically handed him a ready-made machine tool, ward heelers of both parties made up fairly independent centers of power. The competing Jim Pendergast and Joe Shannon organizations among Democrats in reality constituted shifting coalitions of ward heelers and county officials (“Goats” and “Rabbits,” respectively; Dorsett 1980:62-74; Muraskin 1969:80-81).

The unstable nature of Kansas City politics, alongside the myriad social problems created by industrial capitalism, inspired businessmen and elements of the middle class to organize for civic reform through the Commercial Club and Civil League. The exclusion of young men with political ambitions from state political party apparatuses also pushed young Democrats and Republicans into progressive revolts against party corruption (Muraskin 1969). Our primary concern here, however, is with social progressivism.

Progressives

The Progressive Era included several strains of reformism around the country (Stromquist 2006:36-44). Social progressives concerned themselves with labor disputes and what the rise of monopoly power around the turn of the century meant for public order, with some advocating trade union rights, and others administrative power for mediation and arbitration (Laugen 2010:1-10). Overall, “[r]eformers in the core movement acted on many fronts to purify democratic institutions, attack organized greed in business and public life, celebrate and guide the ‘public’s’ interest, design measures to

enhance efficient and humane treatment of the submerged tenth [those in permanent poverty], and defuse social conflict” (Stromquist 2006:9). The movement fought for a modernity based on cooperation, motivated by a liberal aversion to industrial violence, anarchist violence, political corruption, and urban vice.

Middle class women progressives in particular fought for suffrage, moral reforms, anti-corruption, and health regulations (Perry 2002). In Kansas City, at least a few of the most active women reformers included former teachers who had married into wealth, rather than been born into it, including Mary Harmon Weeks, Phoebe Ess, and Carolyn Fuller (Carls 2019; Hanzlick 2018:150, 173-174, 195; Lee 1999). These leaders lacked the extreme class snobbery and condescension found among clubwomen in Chicago, for example (Flanagan 1990), although this was certainly not the case for all clubwomen in Kansas City.

Historian K. David Hanzlick (2018) identified dominant themes of women’s activism in Kansas City, but each strain oriented toward alleviation, rather than attacking the roots of urban social ills. Accordingly, until their incorporation into the solidarity infrastructure, clubwomen were not destined to support working class militancy.

Reformers and civic housekeepers had organized by the turn of the century to counter the violence, poverty, disorder, and machine politics that emerged from economic crashes and natural disasters between 1877 and 1893 (Hanzlick 2018:91). Especially troublesome was the fact that by 1913, Kansas City only had 234 churches, compared to 248 sex workers and over 600 saloons (Board of Public Welfare 1913). Kansas became the first dry state in 1881, but the infamous “world’s wettest block” on 9th Street, just inside the Missouri border, caused constant consternation. The Provident Association and

Associated Charities coordinated ameliorative efforts of philanthropists, clubwomen, social workers, and Protestant and Jewish charitable arms to deliver poor relief. There were, however, other anti-monopoly progressives who came to influence clubwomen, and who eschewed bureaucratic methods of containing social problems, preferring instead to probe their structural causes.

When St. Louis based James “Millionaire Hobo” Eads How led a march of unemployed men through downtown Kansas City in late 1909, officials created the nation’s first municipal Board of Public Welfare (BPW) in 1910. Labor lawyer Frank P. Walsh helped organize the BPW, which was run by L. A. Halbert, along with William Volker, United Jewish Charities leader Jacob Billikopf, and the social worker Kate E. Pierson on the board. The BPW’s first of six operating principles proclaimed an “emphasis on justice before charity and on prevention rather than cure,” and the second principle declared a preference for taxation over philanthropy (Hanzlick 2018:107-108).

The BPW provided government jobs to the unemployed at a rock quarry, low interest rate loans to mothers, surveillance of youths at dance halls, factory inspections, and pressured employers to increase pay and benefits (Hanzlick 2018:105-124; Thelen 1991:258). Although the BPW had a bureaucratic form, Halbert emphasized attacking the structures that gave rise to the need for welfare, rather than simply managing social conditions. When Walsh chaired the federal Commission on Industrial Relations (1913-15), Halbert wrote to Walsh that he hoped they would “go directly at the question as to how much voice the laborers should have in determining the conditions under which they will earn their living,” and that he wanted them “to give the people power over industry and not be hindered by the ancient fetish of the rights of private property” (quoted in

Weinstein 1968:187). The BPW institution articulated a form of progressivism for middle and upper class actors within its orbit that facilitated cross class collaboration, rather than merely the social control of poor residents.

Frank P. Walsh's style of progressivism is an important case to examine more closely because he had direct influence on labor organizers and clubwomen, and because his biography is a good example of the complex and shifting nature of social progressivism in Kansas City. The labor movement's lawyer is a difficult figure to pin down given he both used the law as a weapon on behalf of regular people, and had little respect for the legal process. Everyone from revolutionary syndicalists in the IWW, to Samuel Gompers, to suffragists, to the Shannon machine, to traditional civic reformers loved him. Walsh's promiscuity when making political allies inspired historian James Weinstein (1968) to inaccurately paint Walsh as someone who never thought about the structural underpinnings of social problems (p. 187). Walsh rose to national prominence as the chair of the Commission on Industrial Relations in 1913, where he dramatically exposed John D. Rockefeller's hand in the 1914 Ludlow Massacre, and popularized the master frame concept, "industrial democracy."

Walsh grew up in poverty in a large Irish Catholic family in both St. Louis and Kansas City. He worked many jobs as a boy, but eventually became a corporate lawyer in 1889. After amassing a small fortune, he renounced corporate law on New Year's Day, 1900, and supposedly vowed to dedicate the rest of his life to helping the toiling masses.¹⁸ Although he used his legal skills as his weapon, he also exclaimed, "What we

¹⁸ More than likely this was a rebrand to launch a more conventionally progressive political career, and he only later turned more radical. On Walsh's politics in the early 1900s, see Muraskin 1969:63, 103, 127-28, 254-61.

need more than lawmakers and law governors is agitators” (Ancel 1992). Walsh viewed the law as a terrain of battle that the exploited could not neglect, rather than an abstract principle in and of itself. Until his death in 1939, Walsh worked tirelessly as a defense attorney of unionists and radicals in some of the biggest court cases of the 1910s to 1930s.

Locally, Walsh associated with the Shannon machine, but also battled machine corruption with his friend and *Star* owner, Nelson. Nationally, Walsh led a broad coalition of unionists and radicals behind Woodrow Wilson’s 1916 reelection after Wilson signed the “Second New Freedom” set of labor reform laws. As an anti-monopolist, Walsh had as little patience for corporate foundations, not to mention academic social workers and sociologists, as he did for the legal process. Walsh preferred to keep government bureaucrats and self-important professors out of industrial relations, similar to the voluntarism of Gompers, except he vigorously supported women’s suffrage and solidarity with radical working class activists (Fink 1997:81-106; McCartin 1997:12-37).

By 1910, Walsh had already become one of the few progressives in Missouri who concluded that isolated reforms would not get to the core of the problems of the poor... These men were almost alone among the social progressives in their willingness to see the problems of workers and the poor as ones which might require a restructuring of economic relations and change in social values. (Muraskin 1969:260)

Walsh’s close relationships with the labor movement, radicals, progressives, and clubwomen served as a bridge across class in the support of working people. His move to the left by 1910 meant his leadership at the conjunction of multiple organizational

networks and communication networks transformed militant, and at times, solidaristic, ideas into organizational patterns and practices.

The social progressivism of Walsh and the Bureau of Public Welfare viewed working class people as needing solidarity in challenging the structural power of private property, rather than as individuals who themselves required moral reform and charity. When clubwomen increased their political activities in the 1910s, the Bureau of Public Welfare served as an obvious vehicle for action, and they worked closely with Walsh to push for suffrage. The political culture of social progressivism facilitated cross-class support for working class militancy and inclusiveness across gender, a significant factor for explaining the emergence of a counter-hegemonic bloc.

Social progressivism in Kansas City did have racist tendencies, however. Those motivated by their disgust with the patronage networks and corruption of ward bosses associated Black residents with voter fraud and vice (Grothaus 1970:31-65). Walsh himself participated in widespread racist demagoguery between 1906-08 (Schirmer 2002:68; McKerley 2018:29).¹⁹ However, white clubwomen had their own history of collaboration with Black clubwomen since the 1890s. Moreover, much of our story of interracial solidarity will come from within the African American community's mobilizing capacity, spatial organization of housing and transit, and early experiences with class struggle in the labor movement, rather than the political culture of social progressives. We turn now to exploring the demographics of Kansas City.

¹⁹ Later in 1930, A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters hired Walsh to lead their investigation into the murder of a Black union member in Oklahoma (Coulter 2006:73). It is unclear exactly what Walsh's views toward Black people were at different times.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Workplaces were structured by the wage relation, as well as by the bureaucratic innovations and rationalization in the railroad and meatpacking sectors, which served as the vanguards of large bureaucratic organizations and continuous (dis)assembly lines, respectively (Brody 1964; Perrow 2002). Early endeavors at interracial working class solidarity, social reform, machine politics, and progressivism germanated at the same time, and in relation to each other, in this context. The timing of a racially diverse working class in Kansas City differed greatly from the national picture, which was marked by European ethnic divisions.

The churn of European migration in industrial cities plays a central role in American labor history of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. Ethnic differences mapped onto partisan loyalties and labor market segmentation, which capitalists and politicians both helped to create and exploit. The AFL lobbied for immigration restrictions (particularly on those who did not speak English) and ignored the growing and diverse proletariat. During the interwar period, due to immigration restrictions in 1924 and the Great Migration of Black serfs from the South to the northern proletariat, racial divisions took over as the main social hurdle to solidarity in the national narrative.²⁰

The demographics of Kansas City, however, differed from the national picture (see Table 2.1). Northeastern and Midwestern cities had anywhere between twenty-five percent (Philadelphia and Pittsburgh) and forty percent (New York City) foreign-born

²⁰ Gender of course intersected with ethnic and racial divisions throughout. Additionally, anti-Asian and anti-Indigenous racism colored California labor history from an early date.

white residents by 1910.²¹ From 1870 to 1910, the proportion of foreign-born white residents in the Kansas City area, in contrast, steadily fell from only 23.2 percent to 10.7 percent.

At the same time, the proportion of Black residents remained at least 10 percent. Significantly, Black males exercised suffrage on both sides of the state line, constituting a potentially powerful voting bloc to compete for (although both major parties ran the danger of uniting white voters with their opponents if they were viewed as giving the African American community too much patronage). Black women even exercised the vote in municipal elections in Kansas City, Kansas, starting in 1887, forming about six or seven percent of the total electorate in 1891 (Fink 1983:148).

By the 1890s, Kansas City, Missouri, was among the first three cities where significant numbers of Black voters left the Party of Lincoln (Marable 2015:167; also see Pasley 2018). Democratic ward boss Jim Pendergast had gained wide respect from working class Black residents for posting bonds for Black prisoners (Dorsett 1980:3-21; Grothaus 1970).²² The large presence of Black people at work, on streetcars, in working class neighborhoods, and at the voting booth posed the question of interracial inclusion in working class collective action and politics much earlier than in most other American cities.

²¹ US Census, "Chapter 2: Color or Race, Nativity and Parentage," in *1910 Census: Volume 1. Population, General Report and Analysis*, 177-183.

²² The early inclusion of Black voters in Democratic ward politics contrasted sharply with Chicago, where Irish Democratic party clubs were the driving force behind the 1919 white supremacist violence against the influx of Black migrants, who were still assumed to be Republican voters (Barrett 1987:219-222).

	Total	Native White	Foreign White	Black	Other
1870	35,250	22,496	8,189	4,557	8
1880	61,934	41,703	9,990	10,238	3
1890	175,755	128,861	27,362	19,302	230
1900	224,323	173,340	25,819	25,063	101
1910	336,722	267,044	36,141	33,349	188

Table 2.1. Kansas City Area Population, 1870-1910. US Census.

African American Communities

Kansas City had a consistent proportion of Black residents, who formed a much higher proportion of the population than cities outside of the deep South, where Black residents were disenfranchised (Figure 2.2). Historian Charles Coulter (2006) observed that,

For African Americans living on the Great Plains, Kansas City was a nexus through which information, ideas, and people were moved and sometimes transformed. Kansas City stood at the center of a web of African American communities; its influence was felt throughout northwestern Missouri, eastern Kansas, and as far south as Oklahoma. (p. 8)

Because of the large number of Black residents in Kansas City and St. Louis, “By 1910, nearly 67 percent of Missouri’s African Americans lived in cities, almost three times the national average” (Kremer 2014:113). By the time that the solidarity infrastructure developed, African American workers had access to resources through independent community institutions. How did an independent Black urban community come about so early in Kansas City?

Three streams of Black migrants from Reconstruction to 1890 help to explain the outcome (Martin 1982). First, enslaved people from Virginia, Kentucky, and Tennessee moved to Kansas City soon after the Civil War to get away from their former lives and

partake in a rapidly expanding economy. A significant portion of these migrants were skilled workers in building and manufacturing trades. Secondly, the Missouri plantation economy collapsed after the war, encouraging rural Black Missourians, especially men, to seek wages in cities.

Lastly, thousands of formerly enslaved refugees, called Exodusters, ended up in Kansas City in 1879 and 1880. Yearning to

escape the violence and political repression that the white south inflicted on emancipated blacks after Reconstruction, these southern black emigrants had sold their meager goods for river passage and headed to Kansas where they expected to find free land and just treatment. Instead, many of the Exodusters (perhaps a third of the fifteen thousand to twenty thousand who made the journey) found themselves stranded in Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, when their travel funds ran out. (Schirmer 2002:27)

While tensions ran high and locals turned many Exodusters away, established Black residents joined with white residents in these efforts, complicating the racial dynamics (Coulter 2006:24-25; Greenbaum 1982:23-26). The Reverend B. F. Watson of the Allen AME testified to the US Congress that he originally opposed allowing impoverished Exodusters remain in the area, but had a change of heart when he met them. Mayor George Shelby joined Watson in organizing a charitable response effort (Martin 1982:80, 151-153). Meatpacking baron Philip Armour also contributed resources and low paying jobs to the refugees, providing a basis for subordinated integration (Snell 1999:135-136).

Figure 2.2. Percent Urban Black Population in Select Cities, 1870-1920. Average percent for five most populous cities per region (1900). Kansas City numbers are combined in the following manner: 1870 (KCMO and Wyandotte, KS); 1880 (KCMO and Wyandotte, KS); 1890 (KCMO, KCK, and Argentine, KS); 1900 (KCMO, KCK, and Argentine, KS); 1910 (KCMO, and KCK); 1920 (KCMO and KCK). Largest cities for region region are as follows: North East (New York City, Philadelphia, Boston, Buffalo, and Pittsburgh); Mid West (Chicago, St. Louis, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Detroit); South (Baltimore, New Orleans, Washington, DC, Louisville, and Memphis); West (San Francisco, Denver, Los Angeles, Portland, and Seattle).

In the 1870s, whites and African Americans had co-existed relatively peacefully. Indeed, a British author who travelled America just prior to the Exoduster movement found that white and Black people interacted more equally in Kansas City, Kansas, than anywhere else in the country. The purpose of the journey was to investigate “race relations,” and the author expounded the liberal view that African Americans could quickly become full and equal citizens. However, on the social level, he found himself more offended by Black train porters sleeping on passenger seats and sharing a wash basin than local whites were: “there seems to be no prejudice whatever against personal contact with them” (Campbell 1879:228).

The outcome of the Civil War also positively shaped interactions for a time. “Occasionally when a black person and white person dined together and were denied service, a mere mention of the Civil Rights Act ended the disagreement. Kansas City’s newspapers also made a number of references to racial mixing in the 1870’s, particularly among German-Americans and blacks” (Martin 1982:11). Nonetheless, racial discrimination in the 1880s and 90s increased after the Exoduster’s arrival. Whites’ rising prejudices and anxieties in the 1880s and 90s inspired the creation of separate institutions and a more coherent Black community (pp. 139, 216, 231).

Black workers were relegated to only a few jobs, with women having an easier time at finding steady employment in domestic service. Men worked most often as laborers, food packers, teamsters, barbers, janitors, porters, and in building construction. Women worked most heavily in domestic service, but also in food packing, commercial laundries, and food service when they could. Although many of the older African Americans from other border states had in-demand skills, in the 1880s they “were kept from training younger black workers by the city’s labor unions who aimed to prevent and destroy minority competition in the skilled trades” (Martin 1982:87). Consequently, although we will be discussing later instances of interracial solidarity between white trade unions and Black “unskilled” workers, white workers first prevented African Americans from acquiring the necessary skills and status of trade unionists.

This is not the end of the story, however. Black meatpacking workers did break into skilled jobs in the 1890s, for example. Among all male meatpacking workers, 22.2 percent were African American in 1900. Further, the 1900 census (the first year extensive occupational data for both cities, broken down by gender, race, and nativity, are readily

available) indicates that, when combining both cities, African Americans made up 29.6 percent of masons. It is unclear if this category is capturing hod-carriers and brick layer assistants, or if it is limited to “skilled” masons. It is possible that low-paid Black construction laborers self identified as masons, since low-skill job categories (e.g., hod carrier) were often used to underpay semi-skilled African Americans. Even among the highest paid construction workers (plasterers and plumbers, Sears 1947:51, 74), Black men made up 7.2 percent of workers. A mystery is why this percentage of African American workers in a highly paid job is so much higher than among middling carpenters (1.8 percent), painters (2.5 percent), and iron and steel workers (5.6 percent). It seems likely that middling white workers guarded their racial privileges in the labor market most jealously. Nonetheless, meatpacking and construction businesses represented important employers of Black men. The racism of white workers, unions, and employers kept African Americans completely locked out of good paying railroad and streetcar jobs, however (white railroad workers initiated a hate strike against the hiring of Black workers around 1903, for example, Grothaus 1970:32).

Although the majority of Black employees worked in low paying jobs, and even the businessmen and professionals had very little wealth, African Americans constructed their own independent institutions. Workers saved pennies and school children collected donations for three generations to build churches, schools, hospitals, and other organizations. Black residents had already established their own churches in 1859 on the Kansas side, and African American congregations multiplied rapidly after the Civil War (Greenbaum 1982:27-95). The majority of churches were either the horizontal and lay-driven Baptists, or the more hierarchical and better-resourced African Methodist

Episcopal churches. The largest churches, Second Baptist and Allen Chapel AME, regularly hosted prominent speakers and political debates in their large auditoriums (Coulter 2006:202-205), signalling the presence of communication networks and independent organizational resources by 1910.

Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, African Americans supported their own newspapers, mutual aid groups, civic clubs, political groups, unions, public schools, recreation clubs, and hospitals (Coulter 2006; Greenbaum 1982; Kremer 2014; Martin 1982; Peavler 2005; Roe 2018). While deep fissures existed across class, politics, gender, and religion, these institutions facilitated a source of pride and resistance anytime segregation and racism threatened Black life. And although community leaders often had far more formal education than working class African Americans, few had much wealth (Martin 1913). “Even by 1920, Kansas City did not have a well-defined ‘black aristocracy.’ It had a privileged class, but with just a few exceptions, members of that class did not maintain lives separate from those of the city’s black working class” (Coulter 2006:245). At the height of white supremacist reaction in politics from 1903-1910 in Kansas City and across Missouri, African Americans came together to prevent segregation of public spaces and voter disenfranchisement through machine allies in both parties (Grothaus 1970:31-65; McKerley 2018), further strengthening the kind of indigenous mobilizing capacity that sociologist Aldon Morris (1986) emphasized in his analysis of the Southern Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s.

We will further discuss the spatial organization of Black residential patterns in Chapters 3 and 6. For now, I want to reiterate the presence of independent organizational resources in the Black working class community by 1910. Let me shift gears now from

general descriptions and patterns of economics and demographics to narratives of collective action. These instances of activism among middle class women and unionists fed into the political cultures and movement organizations of the 1910s.

COLLECTIVE ACTION

Woman Movement & Clubwomen

Modern feminism emerged in the 1910s from the contradictions of the nineteenth century “woman movement” (Cott 1987). The woman movement refers to women who entered the public sphere to organize “charitable benevolence, temperance, and social welfare and to instigate struggles for civic rights, social freedoms, higher education, remunerative occupations, and the ballot” (p. 3). The term also highlights the assumptions of homogeneity and universal sisterhood among its participants. The movement sought to build a shared identity based on sameness. Indeed, its participants were overwhelmingly white, Protestant, and bourgeois with respect to the ideology of domesticity (p. 6-7). They justified their involvement in public affairs with the notion that

women were morally superior to men, and that woman’s proper sphere was the home, her noblest vocation, motherhood. Woman Movement activists transformed these assumptions into a justification--in fact a moral imperative--for women to enter politics. If a woman was morally superior, then she could purify the political mess Gilded Age American men had created. (Goldberg 1994:25)

The issue of suffrage would eventually bring in more diverse gender-based activists in the 1910s, for whom the sharp distinction between private and public spheres did not always carry the same salience. This dynamic played out nationally and in Kansas City.

The state of Kansas had a reputation by the late 1880s as the national leader in the suffrage movement. But urban, middle-class, white, and protestant activists in the

Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association composed its leadership. And, when serious campaigning occurred in 1893 and 1894 via a failed bid to pass suffrage through a direct vote, partisan and religious differences among women activists demobilized the movement (Goldberg 1994). Kansas City workers remained unimpressed by the urban suffragists' middle class moralizing and emphasis on prohibition enforcement (Fink 1983:136-137).

Despite these difficulties for the woman movement in the 1890s, women, including Black women, continued to vote in municipal elections. They finally achieved full suffrage in Kansas in 1912, providing direct experience of women's suffrage for Kansas workers, and up-close observation for Missourians. And, because the WCTU helped make urban middle class women feel comfortable supporting suffrage as a respectable cause, their shift toward focusing on vice at the turn of the century facilitated other clubwomen, who were more palatable to the labor movement, to take the lead on suffrage in the 1910s.

Anti-Catholic sentiment within the WCTU limited what kinds of alliances it made. To demonstrate, Clara Hoffman led the Missouri WCTU from Kansas City through the final three decades of the 19th century, leaving her mark on local, state, and national politics. Hoffman led a push for suffrage in Missouri in 1888 and 1889 under the banner, "No Sex in Citizenship." Though the effort failed, the Missouri WCTU continued to agitate for suffrage through the 1890s. They also collaborated with Black churches on a number of issues, and had a Black officer in the local branch around 1896. After hosting a speech by Ida B. Wells in 1895, the club condemned lynchings of Black women, illustrating some interracial tendencies among suffragists in Kansas City,

Missouri. But their hostility to immigrant Catholics limited their influence on the wider working class (Hanzlick 2018:135-136, 177-179).

The historical significance of the WCTU's activities making suffrage activism acceptable for bourgeois white women cannot be overstated. But what kinds of activities did clubwomen organize in the early twentieth century? The white clubwomen phenomenon emerged from well-connected women's aspiration to expand their political influence beyond prohibition. This national clubwomen movement sought to coordinate activities of women's organizations, as well as organize a more diverse array of women for civic improvement by avoiding divisive issues like temperance. In 1896, twenty one clubs established the Kansas City chapter of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, and included 500 members (Hanzlick 2018:141). The Kansas City federation, along with another women's group called the Athenaeum, pressed for child labor and education reforms, opening up school boards to women candidates, and building swimming pools and playgrounds in the late 1890s. Two former school teachers who married into wealth, Mary Harmon Weeks and Phoebe Ess, led these efforts in municipal housekeeping (pp. 173-174). Ess in particular emerged throughout the 1910s as the most influential clubwoman as their collective political confidence grew, and she guided collaboration with the labor movement. These early experiences with collective action shaped the qualities of her leadership and the broader political culture of women's clubs.

We turn now to early processes of class formation in Kansas City that created experiences and traditions of interracial solidarity and independent politics. Labor organizers of a certain generation, like the central labor union's longtime business agent

John T. Smith, participated in these events and remained in leadership positions through the First World War.

Early Class Formation in Politics

The Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor originated in Philadelphia in the late 1860s, and became the first mass-membership national workers' movement in American history in the 1880s (Fink 1983:xii). The Knights declared in their manifesto, that "an inevitable and irresistible conflict between the wage-system of labor and republican system of government" existed (quoted p. 4). They also popularized the solidaristic phrase, "an injury to one is the concern of all." These appeals to solidarity held particular importance in railroad centers because railroad workers, like miners, were open to industrial unionism at that time. At its height, about 10 percent of Knights of Labor were Black, and 10 percent were women.

The Order rooted its political culture in producerism, not modern socialism. "In part [their politics] drew on nostalgia for a preindustrial past, in part on a defense of devalued craft skills, but in part also on a transcendent vision of a cooperative industrial future" (p. 9). Producers included farmers, merchants, and some manufacturers depending on how they treated workers. They defined nonproducers as bankers, speculators, lawyers, liquor dealers, and gamblers. Further, General Master Workman Terence Powderly and other leaders viewed the Knights as a force for order and self-improvement, and felt strikes to be distasteful (p. 13). Nonetheless, militant workers used the organization to organize strikes, lobby governments, and launch third parties. "Wherever the Order achieved political successes, it did so by linking semiskilled and

unskilled industrial workers to its base of skilled workers and leaders” (p. 14; also see Voss 1993). Kansas City was one such place.

Kansas City workers flocked to the Knights of Labor in the 1880s and 90s, and many of the founders of the Kansas City labor movement -- including leaders of the 1910s -- were former members (Sears 1947:33-36). Historian Leon Fink (1983:112-148) uncovered a rare example in American history of class-based electoral politics (as opposed to ethnic party loyalty) in Kansas City, Kansas, created by Knights of Labor organizing. Two Republican administrations (1886-1889) of Mayor Thomas F. Hannan, an Irish Catholic stonemason, attracted the support of workers, whether white or Black; native-born, Irish, or German; Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. The political organizing of the local Knights of Labor represents an important foreshadowing of the solidarity infrastructure of the 1910s. Hannan drew the ire of the business class, which formed a Citizens party to unite anti-Hannan Republicans and Democrats, as well as a chapter of the secretive anti-Knights of Labor vigilante society, the Law and Order League. The organizational strength and popularity of the Knights of Labor transformed local elections into a referendum on the labor question.

Hannan’s first election occurred in April 1886, in the middle of the Knights’ Great Southwest Strike on the infamous Jay Gould’s railroad companies. The first Knights of Labor local assemblies emerged in 1882 and 1883, which included Black barbers, hod carriers, and laborers. The 1886 strike brought membership up to 4,000 in 21 assemblies in the Kansas City area. Hannan’s platform supported the 8-hour day (the central demand of the first workers’ May Day in 1886), increased wages for municipal workers, and “the use of bond issuance and contract-approval authority to exact tribute

from the chief industrial beneficiaries of such decisions” (Fink 1983:124). In two working-class wards, Hannan carried 85 percent of the electorate. The business community immediately fought Hannan’s bond issues in the courts, and Gould’s private detectives fingered the leader of the local Knights, George Hamilton, for a deadly train derailment just a couple weeks after Hannan’s election. Prosecutors placed the Knights of Labor itself on trial, but it ended first in a hung jury, and later exoneration, demonstrating popular support for the Knights.

The second election in 1887 for a two-year term represented a stark choice between the Knights of Labor and business interests. Black voters were not united behind Hannan, who fired African American city employees in order to replace them with Black members of the Knights of Labor. Some endorsed his opponent, a former mayor accused of failing to protect Black women. Regardless, Hannan’s pro worker platform appealed to most Black workers. Hannan scored points by blocking construction of a railroad until the company paid for housing for Black squatters in its path. Hannan also won over reformers impressed with his fiscal conservatism and support for the establishment of city parks, a municipal library, and centralized sewer system.

The independent *Kansas Cyclone*, backed by German Reform Jews, endorsed Hannan and published a leaked private circular from the Law and Order League, summing up how the opposition viewed the diverse political coalition of working class people. The circular

asked for assistance in preventing ‘the scum of the Tin-bucket Brigade from taking possession of our beautiful city’ and driving the ‘cultured portion out.’ Rule by Hannan and the Knights, ‘that unlawful body of reprobates,’ augured ‘no more boulevards or parks, no more beautiful homes... but in their stead the meagre homes of the poverty scums such as is found in Mississippi town in this

city, the abode of the bosom friends and colored cronies of this fellow Hannan and his gang.’ (p. 130)

Part of this Republican “Tin-bucket Brigade” included Irish workers. Hannan appealed to his compatriots by opposing reforms like police reorganization and enforcement of state prohibition laws, framing those issues through the metaphor of Irish Home Rule. He won a second term with 54 percent of the vote.

Hannan had four key political lieutenants: William Fletcher of the Knights of Labor, a corrupt former mayor named T. C. Foster, the Black lawyer and Democratic politician C. H. J. “Alley” Taylor, and the German skilled worker and reformer Louis Weil. The coalition proved a tenuous affair, however, and Hannan lacked the tact and artfulness required to maintain class-based politics when the Knights of Labor collapsed. Hannan’s originally supportive city council increasingly blocked his maneuvers to release poor Black people from jail and to prevent police reform. Party operatives defeated Hannan in the 1889 Republican primary. He launched a comeback in 1891, securing a third term as mayor, but without the diverse workers’ coalition or its platform, signalling the end of inclusive working class formation through electoral politics in Kansas City, Kansas.

Political developments on the Missouri side of the state line also deserve mention. The police killing of a Black resident in 1882 sparked the creation of the Negro Protective League and the Independent Negro Party, in order to signal to Republicans that they could not take Black votes for granted (Martin 1982:217-218). This split even accompanied collaboration with a Knights of Labor third party, the Union Labor Party, in municipal elections in 1883 (Brown and Dorsett 1978:48). While this effort did not prove as successful as the Knights-Republican coalition on the Kansas side, unionists continued

to put up independent candidates in 1887, 1888, and 1904 in Kansas City, Missouri. This political independence fed into the search for allies among clubwomen throughout the 1910s. Class formation in Kansas City also occurred on the picket line.

Early Class Formation in Meatpacking

Union organizing among meatpacking workers in the 1890s created additional space for interracial class solidarity in Kansas City. Across the United States, the transnational “new unionism” movement cropped up in the late 1880s, which attempted to organize all workers into industrial unions, even after the collapse of the Knights of Labor. These new unions opened up membership regardless of skill, held membership fees low, and used their resources for mass mobilization, rather than benefits more typical of a fraternal organization (Archer 2007:31-32). Outside of rural miners’ unions, few new unions survived the early 1890s. Packinghouse unionism briefly embodied a rare urban-based movement that incorporated some new unionism characteristics, at least until 1904. In the world’s second largest meatpacking center, Kansas City workers contributed to the overall trend.

Sociologist Darryn Snell (1999) analyzed factors producing interracial unionism among Kansas City meatpacking workers during our time period. The meatpacking plants in Kansas City were the most technologically advanced in the country, enabling unprecedented capitalist control of the production process and ease of deskilling. After Samuel Gompers helped organize skilled butchers there in 1890, the packers easily broke the Packing-house Men’s Protective Union in 1893 by moving African American men into skilled positions, and recruiting Croatians and Serbians directly from southeastern

Europe. To their credit, native-born white packinghouse workers immediately interpreted this as a lesson in the necessity of class solidarity and inclusion. In 1894, a new, more industrial-based, union was formed, which quickly withered away. But in 1895, the Anchor Federal Labour Union appeared, attracting 1,000 members across race, gender, and skill (about 200 were African Americans). White and Black workers paraded and sang together through the streets on multiple occasions, keeping the best qualities of the Knights of Labor and new unionism movements alive. Despite a history of Armour generosity to poor, working class, and middle class African Americans, these Black workers stuck with the union during a lengthy boycott of Armour, beginning in 1896.

Snell concluded that interracial solidarity among Kansas City packing house workers “reflected the city’s larger social, political and economic structures; structures that allowed whites and Blacks to view one another less as labour-market competitors and more as common labourers struggling with universal problems” (p. 156). In an expression of that cooperation, Kansas City workers helped found the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (AMCBW) in 1897, but only on the condition that it would be open to “every wage earner from the man who takes a bullock on the hoof until it goes into the hands of the consumer” (quoted Snell 1999:145).²³ Members elected George Byer of the Kansas City Sheep Butchers union the first president.

It is tempting to argue that new unionism and interracial class solidarity in Kansas City directly led to the AMCBW’s “department” style of unionism -- a mix between craft and industrial organizational practices. However, the AMCBW grew annoyed with the

²³ The AMCBW would remain the dominant international packinghouse union until the CIO entered the fray in 1937.

lengthy boycott of Armour that drew the whole union into it, and Byer had to resign in 1898 when he was blacklisted from the meatpacking industry. Apparently the Kansas City, Kansas, central labor body also had a reputation among national union leaders of having more loyalty to the local movement than their respective international unions, much to their annoyance. Further, the AMCBW increased its dues in 1899, giving it a more craft union flavor. Department unionism, which organized across skill within various work groups, only fully institutionalized in the 1901 to 1904 organizing cycle through pragmatic avenues. The union resisted separating locals by skill, ethnicity, or race because skill afforded scant leverage, although women members had separate locals, regardless of where they worked in the plant (Brody 1964:22-28, 32-33, 38-42). By this point, Kansas City had little influence in the AMCBW. In any event, packinghouse organizing in Kansas City more or less proceeded along the lines of industrial unionism.

When the disastrous national 1904 meatpacking strike broke out over the summer, management around the country consciously used Black strikebreakers and armed them with revolvers in hopes of inciting racial violence. They were successful in cities like Chicago, where union leadership only further fanned the flames. But in Kansas City, violence on the picket line had no discernible racial patterns. It was white and Black strikers against white and Black strikebreakers (Snell 1999:146-155). Through collective action at the meatpacking plants, white and Black workers acted together as a class from 1895 to 1904. Even if most of these workers moved on to other jobs before the 1910s, labor organizers learned an early lesson about the power of solidarity rather than exclusion.

The instances of interracial alliances in unions, strikes, and electoral activity point toward some class identification across social differences among workers, both at work and in politics prior to the 1910s. Thus, from the growth of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s to a more industrial unionism among meatpackers in the mid 1890s, workers experimented with organizational forms in contentious dialogue with rationalized corporate capital.

We now shift attention to the citywide AFL labor movement in Kansas City. The institutional role of the union local's business agent created a mechanism for rank and file militants to press for sympathy strikes in the 1910s.

POLITICAL CULTURE & LEADERSHIP IN EARLY AFL UNIONISM

The American Federation of Labor (AFL) originated in 1881, and officially launched in 1886 with a campaign for the eight hour day (Archer 2007:14). Samuel Gompers, who presided over the AFL from 1886-1894 and 1896-1924, along with his mentor Adolph Strasser, shaped the AFL's practices and politics. Gompers and Strasser both read Marx and considered themselves socialists in the 1870s, but had very conservative reactions to violent repression of radicals and the American legal system that overturned labor legislation in the 1880s and 90s. They first reorganized the Cigar Makers' Union so that it would have high dues and attract members with individualized material benefits, rather than the intoxication of collective action. Gompers and Strasser believed that radicals could only lead American workers toward getting beaten by the police, and unions to fall apart through internal political arguments (pp. 34, 108-109, 229-230). Through "pure and simple" business unionism, that is, organizing skilled

workers around winning contracts for wage increases, the AFL built the first stable labor movement in America.

In the early 1890s, many American unionists wanted to create a labor political party, advocate for socialism, and shift to industrial unionism, especially in Chicago. Industrial unionism refers to inclusive organizing practices across wage levels within a factory or industry, based on low dues and collective action. In 1893-94, a debate raged in the AFL whether to organize for municipal ownership and nationalization of certain sectors, and for collective ownership of others. Gompers used the undemocratic structure of the AFL to block the insurgency, and the defeats of the Homestead and Pullman strikes in 1892 and 1894 undermined industrial unionism generally (pp. 14-15).

The AFL's craft unionism typically operated as a fraternity of relatively well paid white men, complete with hazing rituals. "Manly bearing, brotherly solidarity, and masculine independence--a refusal to bow to the authority of other men--were integral to the class and racial identity of skilled workingmen of the time" (Faue 2017:17). Such exclusionary republican values and organizing practices meant the AFL tended toward labor aristocracy, rather than inclusive class formation. Even as the AFL officially denied membership to any union that discriminated based on race, in 1895 they let the whites-only International Association of Machinists join if they dropped explicit racial-exclusion language from their constitution.

Returning to Kansas City, building tradesmen, saddle and harness makers, cigar makers, and printers had founded the Kansas City Industrial Council and affiliated with the AFL in 1892 (Sears 1947:34-36). Kansas City unionists also established the Missouri Federation of Labor around the same time, with the aims of publicizing injustices against

labor, supporting boycotts and strikes, lobbying for the eight hour day and equal pay for women, collecting industrial statistics, encouraging the discussion of social science, and helping the labor press (Graham 1934:1-5, 23). The municipal and state level movements that Kansas City workers founded embraced independent political action more so than the national movement (Fink 1973).

The most important institutional role in the Kansas City labor movement in the first two decades of the twentieth century was the local union's business agent. Each union local paid for this full-time employee out of their own wages, creating close connections between the rank and file and the local labor movement. "The business agent function[ed] as a job dispenser, organizer, protector of his trade's jurisdiction, and [was] the local union's chief executive" (Sears 1947:83).²⁴ Business agents had no legal protections for their activities outside of contracts with employers, which could only be protected by union solidarity. Foremen and managers had few compunctions in resorting to violence to keep business agents out of the workplace, and most business agents carried guns for protection (based on Sears 1947 and familiarity with *Labor Herald*).

Thus, business agents provided consistent leadership and knowledge over time, had access to organizational resources, and relied on worker militancy to maintain their positions. They often worked longer hours than those paying their salaries and took on great personal risk to accomplish their tasks, suggesting militant and radical inclinations may have been common motivational factors for seeking office. The political cultures of labor unions and this institutional role were mutually constitutive.

²⁴ Other union officers accomplished important tasks including running meetings, keeping minutes and files, communicating with national leadership, and handling finances. But these were generally volunteer-based positions, and turnover could be quite high with elections occurring twice a year.

John T. Smith, a second generation Irish-American cigar maker, served as the Industrial Council's business agent from 1899 to 1920 (Sears 1947:36, 86). While somewhat removed from the rough and tumble work of the locals' business agents, Smith appears to have been widely respected and trusted by workers and progressives. Thus, Smith acted as an important and trusted link between progressive allies, militant rank and file activists, and the broader labor movement. Business agents ultimately called the general strike in 1918, demonstrating their institutional role linking radical political cultures of rank and file workers with decisions made by the central labor body.

As the national consolidation and corporatization of capital proceeded at the turn of the century through monopolization, workers went on the offensive in Kansas City. Looking back from the 1940s, veteran building tradesmen recalled 1900-1916 as the most intense and "bitter" years in workplace struggles in Kansas City (Sears 1947:85). A series of strikes in the late 1890s and early 1900s created the foundation for industrial relations into the 1910s. Continued attempts at interracial solidarity established experience with employers' strategies to break strikes through inflaming racist resentment. In 1899 the Building Trades Council called a sympathy strike to support a Black workers' strike by the Hod Carriers Union (Schirmer 2002:58-59). Later, a carpenter named William Huber argued in 1905 that building tradesmen should move from sympathetic strikes toward advocating arbitration, indicating sympathy strikes were a common tactic of the period (Sears 1947:40; confirmed by Graham 1934:12). Two major, but unsuccessful, interracial strikes occurred in 1904. In addition to the meatpacking strike mentioned above, hack drivers struck transfer companies, with African Americans in some of the highest union

offices. The white workers publicly protested when employers accepted strike demands while subsequently refusing to rehire Black drivers, but to no avail (Schirmer 2002:59).

While these instances were relatively ephemeral, they are revealing when we consider that the late 1890s saw the AFL leadership shed its overtures to interracial solidarity, allowed whites only unions for the first time, and embraced imperialist “scientific” racism (Bederman 1995:31; Dubofsky 2000:12; Mink 1986:73; Montgomery 1987:199; Rosenberg 1988:12-16, 36, 99-110; Stromquist 2006:50-51; the shift contrasted with previous AFL excitement over the interracial 1892 New Orleans general strike). Still, many of these strikes ultimately failed to achieve their goals. Interracial unionism in the 1910s had precedence in Kansas City, but would have to be organized and articulated anew.

Antagonism between the local labor movement and right wing employers formed in the same period. In the early 1900s, a small group of Socialists had taken control of the Industrial Council, helping to push worker militancy (Sears 1947:80). After union drivers refused to deliver beer to two hotel bars until they recognized their workers’ union (a secondary boycott), a reported 8,000 employers in Kansas City formed the Kansas City Employers’ Association (EA) in the spring of 1903. The EA began their own counter-boycott of closed-shop unionized businesses. The EA quickly secured a federal injunction against the Industrial Council in the dispute, and lobbied the municipal legislative body (the Common Council) to repeal laws requiring union labor on city contracts. The Kansas City EA helped form a National Employers’ Association in Chicago in conjunction with eleven other similar groups later in 1903.²⁵ The attack on unionism in Kansas City

²⁵ *New York Times* May 14, June 27, 1903; *Chicago Daily Tribune* May 23, July 11, Sept. 30, 1903.

inspired a third party union ticket in 1904 (Sears 1947:132). As Rick Fantasia (1988) notes, contentious dialogical relationships in employer and worker interactions are effective catalysts for working class formation.

In examining the period 1870 to 1916, Jeffrey Haydu (2008) found that collective identities among employers had to be organized in America. Businessmen varied by ethnicity, religion, and politics, and their economic interests were competitive in nature. Significantly, different business communities varied in terms of accommodation or absolute opposition to unions. Thus, the culture of business communities matters in this dialogical relationship. E. G. Hornbrooke, one of the original founders of the EA and a master plumber, had a change of heart and worked closely with unions after the 1907 panic, illustrating the necessity for the EA to actively maintain discipline (Sears 1947:159-162).

State repression supplemented employer tactics in firming up class boundaries. A Pinkerton agent briefly served as Chief of Police in 1897, and workers complained bitterly of police repression, particularly in the years 1904 and 1909-1911 (Sears 1947:137-138). Court injunctions against strikes also began in earnest in 1907 (p. 137). The regular presence of sympathy strikes, the antagonistic relationship to the Employers' Association and police, and continuance of independent political activity in the early twentieth century all indicate that a strong citywide labor movement predominated over the segmented trade unionism found in many other cities of the era (Ansell and Burris 1997).

CONCLUSION

Several historical processes contributed to Kansas City's unique history of working class formation and alliances with clubwomen and social progressives in the 1910s. Economic development proceeded within industrial capitalism, and lacked a tradition of small manufacturers and journeymen craftsmen. The large presence of railroads and meatpacking plants lent union organizing a logic of industrial unionism. Further, Black residents, who could vote on both sides of the state line, maintained a high proportion of the population throughout the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The labor movement experienced their own weakness in the face of meatpacking companies, construction contractors, and commercial businesses when they completely excluded Black workers from collective action. Additionally, white and Black workers lived in surprisingly diverse neighborhoods together, and relied on streetcars for transportation, which were not segregated. Black working class and professional people saved pennies and volunteered their time to build their own independent institutions and politics, creating their own fiscal and cultural resources from which they could decide whether or not to collaborate with elements of the labor movement and clubwomen.

The willingness of clubwomen and social progressives to support working class militancy and solidarity originated from different historical sources. Although a cohesive social elite did exist, they were not united politically. Politics remained remarkably fractured throughout the period. As clubwomen's activities became increasingly political in the early twentieth century, the logic of the political environment created pressures to find allies outside of the social elite and political parties. In addition, social progressivism veered left in Kansas City under the leadership of labor lawyer Frank P. Walsh, sustained

through the considerable wealth of manufacturer William Volker, and institutionalized through the municipal Bureau of Public Welfare, which created a base for gadflies interested in structural transformation of the power of private property.

Several distinct political cultures could be identified by 1910, rooted in organizations, publications, public speaking, and collective action. White clubwomen, social progressives, independent electoral organizations, socialists, unionists, and African American men and women could mobilize around issues they cared about, with their own resources. Resources that were forged in failed suffrage campaigns for clubwomen, interactions with repressive police for unionists and revolutionaries, and in defense of Black rights for the African American community. These political cultures and the leadership of key actors interacted within a diffuse political environment in the 1910s to produce the solidarity infrastructure. The next chapter describes its emergence, and Chapter 6 analyzes the mechanisms that brought it about.

CHAPTER 3: SOLIDARITY INFRASTRUCTURE EMERGENCE, 1910-1917

This chapter tracks developments in the labor movement in the 1910s and the emergence of the Kansas City solidarity infrastructure. What kinds of political cultures, instances of collective action, and leadership decisions preceded wartime strikes? How did the labor movement become willing to engage in solidarity across gender and race? How did Black workers come to have an independent posture against employers, as well as within a coalition with the trade union movement, during the war? Why did clubwomen identify with the plight of workers? These were not spontaneous processes.

Through fits and starts, organizational resources and networks interacted with unique political and economic conditions throughout the 1910s, creating space for historically unusual collaborations across gender, class, and race. Labor activists fused the labor movement and its allies behind working class solidarity and militancy. While radical ideas proliferated around America in the early 1900s, the solidarity infrastructure gave shape and organizational form to inclusive and militant ideas, without which a wartime general strike would likely not have been possible. The solidarity infrastructure encompassed a portion of the progressive middle and upper classes, helping to tilt the balance of class forces in Kansas City. This move toward working class counter-hegemony was crucial for inclusivity in the labor movement, as it enabled militancy to extend beyond only those workers with the most leverage over the production process (typically white and male).

The solidarity infrastructure constituted an organizational form animated by solidaristic ideas and practices, which linked movement sectors (labor and social

progressivism) under the banner of working class solidarity. The solidarity infrastructure concept contributes a lens with which to identify dialectic processes between leadership and rank and file through time and space, rather than draw the stark binary between radicals and workers found in both voluntarism (the belief that radicals can impose their will on collective action) and economism (the belief that agitation is a waste of time because collective action arises from economic contradictions).

The Kansas City solidarity infrastructure, with the Kansas City Women's Trade Union League (KCWTUL) at its center, emerged from local political cultures among trade unionists, progressives, and revolutionaries. In particular, trade unionists were widely amenable to working toward women's suffrage and unionizing women workers, rather than excluding them or paying mere lip service to women's rights. The union movement also entertained radical militants' involvement and leadership.

In Chapter 2, I introduced six indicators of solidarity infrastructure development: municipal politics, spatial organization, demographics, political cultures, leadership, and collective action. The following discussions continue to utilize that framework, with a greater emphasis on political cultures and leadership (Chapter 6 will return to contextual factors during the 1910s). In the next section I briefly outline some of the communication networks present for a range of political cultures. The following sections narrate the creation of the local branch of the Women's Trade Union League, a radical led citywide unionization drive, and the advent of an independent Kansas City WTUL that could influence clubwomen to support working class militancy, and the labor movement to be more inclusive.

COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

To argue that political cultures matter to solidarity infrastructure formation, as I do, runs the risk of making idealist arguments about the power of free-floating leftist ideologies, on the one hand, or of implying that localized political cultures were epiphenomenal to the particularities of the economy on the other. The former implies that place does not matter, while the latter implies that ideas ultimately do not matter. A more useful approach is to interrogate how communication networks and organizational networks interacted in Kansas City, what ideas circulated among them, and how ideas molded organizational practices. Rooting political cultures in organizations also roots them in place, and emphasizes the agency of activists to evaluate, create, and apply ideas through struggle. In this section, I outline the presence of newspapers, periodicals, and lectures in Kansas City, before taking a closer look at revolutionary circles, and then Black political culture.

Cheap daily newspapers proliferated in cities across the country around the turn of the century (Lee 1937). Technological advancements, along with the new possibility of high circulations in growing cities due to widespread literacy, explains the trend. Mergers and acquisitions among newspaper companies picked up speed only after the First World War. The *Star* became the dominant daily newspaper in Kansas City (Haskell 2007), achieving circulation numbers far higher than its competitors. It published two, and sometimes three, editions everyday but Sunday (which had one large edition) throughout our time frame. The *Star* gained in popularity by exposing city government graft, advocating development and beautification plans, and for its independent editorial stance. William Rockhill Nelson founded the paper in 1880 and managed it until his death in

1915. A close friend of Theodore Roosevelt, Nelson supported Republicans and Progressives in elections, but had no personal loyalties to local elites. Nelson employed a socialist (Dante Barton) as a political editorialist from about 1903 until 1915. The other two dailies during the 1910s were the *Journal*, a conservative pro-business Republican paper, and the *Post*, a progressive Democratic paper with Denver-based owners.

Small weekly newspapers, newsletters, and other periodicals came and went during the period as well, demonstrating not only widespread literacy, but also an unprecedented ability for regular people to create their own communication infrastructure (for a lengthy list of just Black-owned papers from 1879 on, see Coulter 2006:108). The first labor movement newspaper, *The Midland Mechanic*, began in 1889. The weekly *Labor Herald* came in 1904 and lasted until 1940. Thomas H. West, its longtime editor, guided the paper's politics along the producerist lines of the Knights of Labor movement he participated in (Sears 1947:33). A printing tradesman and friend of Samuel Gompers, West ran a "clean and conservative" paper, preferring to write poems lauding pure and simple trade union principles over militant editorials (West wrote the AFL's official song, a song about Gompers, and a popular pro-war song during World War I). Readers could learn about the basic decisions made at Industrial Council meetings (though not about internal debates), boycotts, AFL union-led strikes and union drives, city council debates affecting unions, and national labor news. Like other AFL organizers in Missouri, West believed the labor movement should be involved in politics and advocate for limited forms of state intervention (pp. 95-101). "West fought for child labor laws, factory inspection laws, and the nine hour day for girls in factories, laundries and stores. The most impressive fight, however, was for [workman's] compensation law" to provide

for injured workers (p. 98). The *Herald* often quoted Abraham Lincoln's labor theory of value, or Henry George's single land tax writings, illustrating the producerist, mutualist, and cooperative values of its editor. Unionists sometimes took out publications from their international unions as well, some of which included more radical ideas than those normally espoused by the AFL leadership. The Tailors, for example, discussed socialism in their publication, *The Tailor*. The Women Trade Union League's monthly magazine, *Life & Labor*, advocated international solidarity and working with Black communities in its pages, which blended industrial feminism with the philanthropic preferences of its financial backers (Kirkby 1992).

Public lectures on political topics saturated civil society in Kansas City, facilitated by regular commuter trains linking Kansas City to hotbeds of radicalism and progressivism, like Chicago and St. Louis. The labor movement brought speakers from around the country to speak at the Labor Temple, and other major speeches were promoted to workers that were held at the Methodist Grand Avenue Temple downtown (completed in 1912). For example, workers were encouraged to attend lectures by public intellectuals, like Count Tolstoy (Leo's son), John Spargo, Scott Nearing, and Clarence Darrow, in the *Labor Herald*. When Darrow was disinvited from speaking in the spring of 1917 for comments against enlisting for the war, the Labor Temple hosted his speech instead which warned against war profiteering. Darrow previously gave a raucous and lengthy speech in December of 1913 at the Labor Temple, where he regaled the audience by framing the American Constitution as outdated, because, "About the period of our own Civil War the captains of industry found they could get a great deal better results out of white men and negroes by a system we know as industrial serfdom." Mother Jones

gave two speeches at the Labor Temple in 1914 alone, and the anarchist Emma Goldman spoke in the city in 1913.²⁶ Kansas City workers regularly heard from some of the best orators of the era who advocated worker solidarity. Male workers then discussed such events at the many saloons and barbershops that littered the racially diverse neighborhoods surrounding the Labor Temple.

Additionally, women's clubs hosted rousing speeches by the muckraker Ida Tarbell, the suffragist Lola Trax, the labor organizer Margaret Hinchey, and more. In March 1918, the Socialist Rose Pastor Stokes gave a speech to the Woman's Dining Club that sparked a controversy which eventually led to Stokes being convicted and imprisoned under the Espionage Act. These examples illustrate the range of progressive and radical ideas that clubwomen were exposed to. Black churches and schools hosted travelling lecturers on a regular basis as well, which inspired political debates regarding partisan loyalties, suffrage, accommodation to segregation, and civil rights.

We can also briefly speculate about other cultural trends based on broader processes around the country. Among waitresses and telephone operators, namely, young women created working class homosocial communities free from male influence in the 1910s in large American cities. Through asserting themselves at work and in their free time, these women became more independent and defiant of social expectations placed on them. They supported each other when husbands left or they had children out of wedlock, and they allowed sex workers to join their waitress unions to protect them from police, even as they fought for respect and family wages (Cobble 1991; Norwood 1990). The eventual leader of the Kansas City Women's Trade Union League, Sarah Green,

²⁶ *LH* Aug. 29, 1913, Dec. 19, 1913, May 8, 1914.

worked as a waitress, and embraced the ethos of women's independence from men, moralizers, and philanthropists. She also worked closely with revolutionary syndicalists in the labor movement.

Left Political Cultures

A vibrant radical left composing multiple tendencies existed in Kansas City that contributed to ideas about solidarity and militancy. One avenue of political education came through the influence of James Eads How, a wealthy St. Louis heir who organized low wage and unemployed itinerant men under the radical mutual aid society, the International Brotherhood Welfare Association. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) also organized locally. In 1911 their free speech campaign came to Kansas City. IWW members, called Wobblies, advocated an egalitarian anarcho-syndicalism, which they hoped to achieve through industrial unionism that would build toward a national general strike. When extra-legal police repression frustrated their efforts, members would flood a city in a free speech battle to fill jails until officials relented and allowed them to recruit on street corners without harassment (Dubofsky 2000). Along with national organizer Walker C. Smith, two locally based Wobblies, Tom Halcro and Max Dezettel (fresh back from violent arrests in Spokane and Boise), led the effort in Kansas City. They recruited James P. Cannon²⁷ to the IWW simultaneously, who was by now a stirring public orator. Cannon discovered a whole new political world in Kansas City outside the reformist tendencies of Socialists:

rubbing shoulders with a range of ultralefts -- anarchists, 'red' impossibilists, militant single-taxers -- all of whom were friendly and attended the same

²⁷ A native of the Kansas City area, Cannon organized one of the first Communist parties in the United States and later organized the Trotskyist movement in America.

meetings and Sunday-night forums as many Wob[blies]s. A small group of impossibilist socialists had a Sunday-afternoon class in Marxism, known as the Socialist Educational Society, where [Cannon] experienced something of an intellectual baptism. (Palmer 2007:55)

The IWW set up near City Market, with English or Italian speaking performers:

Parody and irreverence were the IWW trademarks, song the announcement of their presence. Once the crowd was drawn to the theater, the soapboxer began, loosening up the street gathering with words, gestures, and humor before delivering the message of revolution. Comrades sold literature, enticing people to discussions and future meetings, and passing the hat for the movement. (p. 56)

Through the spring of 1911, Wobblies made political speeches on streetcars, often getting arrested or chased away by the police. The labor movement's anger at police repression at this time was so great, they invited IWW co-founder "Big Bill" Haywood to speak in Kansas City in May of that year, a remarkable fact given the intense and mutual animosity between the IWW and AFL movements (Sears 1947:81). After a cooling off period in the summer, the police began harassing the IWW again in the fall. On October 14, they violently arrested seven Fellow Workers (another IWW nickname), including the legendary Frank Little. Wobblies rode the rails to Kansas City from around the country and quickly filled up the city farm prison. Kansas City officials were justifiably nervous. Recent free speech battles on the West Coast proved costly affairs, and officials there had failed to suppress free speech rights. The violence of the Kansas City police, provoked only by solidaristic political speech, gave some in the middle class pause, precipitating a doctor to write to the *Star*, "These men have been victorious in every place that they have had a free speech fight and the principle is such an inalienable right that they cannot help but be victorious. We must either grant this or quit our boasting of 'Free America.'" By November, police and city officials backed off, saying they did not want to have to feed

the prisoners on the eve of winter, when a lot of welfare resources would be required for residents (Bailey 2016; Dubofsky 2000:98-109).²⁸

The free speech battle caused friction between reformist and left-wing Socialists in Kansas City. One Socialist, Charles F. Steckhahn, quit his leadership position in the local party when it passed a resolution condemning the IWW and apologizing to the chief of police on behalf of the left.²⁹ The IWW failed to impress Earl Browder, however, who feared the IWW tended toward utopianism, nor could it hold on to Dezettel.³⁰ They were attracted to a different form of revolutionary syndicalism.

In late 1912 and 1913, William Z. Foster established the Syndicalist League of North America, visiting the Kansas City Labor Temple in 1913 and impressing Dezettel and Browder with his intimate knowledge of French syndicalism and its influence on French trade unionism. Foster's syndicalism rested on the efforts of a "militant minority" of enlightened revolutionaries who would "bore from within" the trade union movement to turn them less bureaucratic and more militant. Dezettel, Browder, and, for a short time, Cannon, ran a syndicalist newspaper in Kansas City called the *Toiler*. It published screeds against Socialists and eventually the IWW, accusing them of distracting workers with electoral politics and cutting militant workers off from the working class, respectively. The Kansas City branch soon became the strongest league in the country, and gained influence among the Cooks, Barbers, and Office Workers (Barrett 1999:63; Johanningsmeier 1994:60, 71-72). It also appears to have played a role in a building

²⁸ *Industrial Worker* Oct. 19, 26, Nov. 2, 9, 1911.

²⁹ *Industrial Worker* Nov. 9, 1911.

³⁰ Earl Browder grew up on a Kansas farm, and later served as Chairman of the Communist Party USA from 1934-1945. Dezettel, who ran a Marx reading group (Bailey 2016:21), alternated between left tendencies through the 10s, turning patriotic during the First World War (Palmer 2007:53).

trades strike on the construction of the massive new Union Station over the summer of 1913, when workers seriously considered calling a general strike (Sears 1947:37-38).

Notably, the Kansas City Industrial Council exhibited strong support for free speech and protested police harassment of both the IWW and trade union pickets in the early 1910s. In 1912, George Nelson, a Swedish Steamfitter and Grand Marshal of the 1913 Labor Day Parade, even proposed that the IWW be allowed to use the Labor Temple for meetings.³¹ In late 1913 and early 1914, the Barbers went out on strike and the IWW initiated a second free speech battle. A committee appointed by the Industrial Council complained that the Barbers were treated by police and judges “worse than pickpockets and thieves.” They also denounced the unprovoked and violent clubbing of Wobblies: “there exists in Kansas City today a condition of lawlessness which amounts almost to anarchy. That this disregard of law and order is not by the so-called lawless element, but is in our police department and some of our city officials,” was contemptible.³² Kansas City workers gave uproarious ovations to speeches by many radicals during this period, including one by Clarence Darrow attacking “industrial serfdom,” and two by Mother Jones reporting on the violence against striking miners in Calumet, Michigan, and Ludlow, Colorado.³³ Thus, a stew of radical and solidaristic ideas circulated among both organizers and the rank and file, with organizational homes in the Industrial Council, IWW, and Syndicalist League of North America.

Archival sources do not provide a very clear picture of what specific ideas about interracial solidarity circulated in these circles. Many white American radicals had a

³¹ *LH* May 17, 1912.

³² *LH* Jan. 16, 1914.

³³ *LH* Aug. 29, 1913, Dec. 19, 1913, May 8, 1914.

major blindspot when it came to the fundamental role racism has played in the capitalist system. For example, although scholars debate whether the Socialist Eugene Debs evaded anti-racist struggles or had a sophisticated political analysis of white supremacy, there can be no doubt that the party lacked a principled stance against racism and segregation (Jones 2008). But a Black labor organizer, Rucker Smith, indicated that Socialists were generally easier to work with in Kansas City than trade unionists in 1917.³⁴ As a general rule, the IWW did explicitly battle racism within their ranks and fought for a truly egalitarian vision of the working class. That approach paid dividends in Philadelphia, for example, where Black and white longshore workers organized together successfully throughout the 1910s (Cole 2021). It is safe to assume that at least some radicals unequivocally called for interracial solidarity among workers in Kansas City. Either way, Black workers linked up with the solidarity infrastructure in the war years on their own terms, and with their own material and cultural resources.

Black Political Culture

Kansas City developed into a hotbed for the New Negro civil rights movement immediately following the First World War, which built on earlier activism discussed here. Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, for example, an Exoduster promoter and, later, a prominent advocate of the Back to Africa movement, resided locally from 1885 until 1900 (Painter 1992:92-117). One of Kansas City’s most prominent Black intellectuals at that time, James Dallas Bowser, authored a poem called “Take Up the Black Man’s Burden,” in response to Rudyard Kipling, in the *Colored American*, in 1899. The poem

³⁴ *Sun* July 28, Aug. 11, Sept. 1, Sept. 22, Oct. 13, 1917.

advocated race consciousness and uplift, arguing African Americans would flourish given the opportunity: “Take up the Black Man’s burden/ Don’t curse him in advance/ He can not lift a White Man’s load/ Without a White Man’s chance/ Shut out from mill and workshop/ From counting-room and store/ By caste and labor unions/ You close industry’s door” (Coulter 2006:22-23). Additionally, the principal of the distinguished all-Black Lincoln High School from 1890 to 1915, G. N. Grisham, pushed for full liberal arts education for Black students so they could advocate for their communities, to the annoyance of Booker T. Washington (pp. 32-37). Two Kansas side citizens, B. S. Smith and I. F. Bradley, were charter members of Du Bois’s Niagara Movement (Greenbaum 1982:27-95). Thus, several notable leaders openly opposed accommodation to white supremacy throughout the period.

Two Black clubwomen, Josephine Silone Yates and Anna H. Jones, also advocated strongly for Black rights in the late nineteenth century. They founded the Kansas City Colored Women’s League in 1893, with a successful campaign to commute the death sentence of a Black woman in Missouri. They also helped establish the National Association of Colored Women in 1897, with Yates taking the presidency from 1901-04. Jones spoke at the first Pan-African Conference in London in 1900 and organized with the Missouri Association of Colored Women’s Clubs from 1903-06. Both women knew Ida Wells Barnett, as well as Du Bois (Coulter 2006:37-40; Kremer 2014:41-53). These women established an organizational basis for African American women’s collaborations with white clubwomen and the Kansas City Women’s Trade Union League in the 1910s. They also maintained communication networks with the biggest militant race conscious figures of the time. One of the most effective Black woman orators included Ida M.

Bowman Becks, who came to Kansas City in 1908 and spoke passionately for women's suffrage throughout the 1910s, serving as another link to white clubwomen (Coulter 2006:143-145).

In the early twentieth century, *Kansas City Sun* editor Nelson Crews stood out as the best Black male orator. A committed Republican, he could be conservative on some issues, but nonetheless advocated fiercely for African American rights. Some credited Crews with single-handedly galvanizing opposition to a proposed transit segregation bill by giving a speech at the capitol in Jefferson City in 1903 (although the Democratic machine politicians from Kansas City probably would have voted it down either way, Grothaus 1970:33-34). Called "the Moses" of Black Kansas City by his admirers, Crews delivered a major address in February 1919, that sounded an awful lot like Du Bois's famous "Returning Soldiers" editorial in *The Crisis*, published in May later that year, demonstrating Kansas City's position at the forefront of militant Black political culture in the 1910s (Coulter 2006:99-107; 161-164).

Having established the presence of several strains of militant and radical ideas in various political cultures in Kansas City, I will now shift gears to examine the implementation of these ideas in organizational practices and collective action. This chapter builds toward the presence of a militant and independent KCWTUL, under the leadership of ally Peake Faxon and unionist Sarah Lloyd Green, animated by a political culture that valued the self activity of militant women workers.

KCWTUL FORMATION

The Kansas City Women's Trade Union League (KCWTUL) originated at the Missouri Federation of Labor's 1910 Convention, where an increase in women delegates created excitement around unionizing women workers. One of those delegates included Louisa Mittelstadt, a Catholic Kansas City beer bottler born to a German father, who already had a working relationship with John T. Smith, the business agent of the Kansas City Industrial Council and secretary of the Missouri Federation of Labor. Smith, like Samuel Gompers, was a Cigar Maker, and served as the lead paid organizer for Kansas City labor from 1899 to 1920 (Sears 1947:36, 86). Unlike Gompers, however, Smith was a strong supporter of unionizing women, and got his hands dirty with lobbying for state protections of workers, including women (Fink 1973). Smith and Mittelstadt convinced the city's central labor body to establish a WTUL branch. This made for an unusual start for a WTUL branch, as most branches originated with settlement house workers, and male unionists were typically hostile or negligent to organizing women.

The creation of the KCWTUL by the male dominated labor movement, with the help of middle and upper class reformers, indicates an environment primed for cross class collaboration *on behalf* of women workers. WTUL branches were explicitly structured as alliances between working class women and elite clubwomen, with workers having more formal organizational power. However, most white women workers only did wage labor for a few years before marriage, making the prospects of such a cross class coalition transforming into a militant workers' movement extremely unlikely. This statement is confirmed by the experiences of branches in Chicago, Boston, New York City, and

elsewhere (Deutsch 2000:196-228; Dye 1980; Hoy 2018; Hyman 1985; Kirkby 1992; Norwood 1990:141-147).

Middle class reformers and settlement house workers established the Women's Trade Union League in 1903 in Boston. They created it to organize women workers into American Federation of Labor (AFL) affiliated unions as a direct way to address urban poverty, women's lack of political and domestic power, and anxieties over the integration of immigrants into "American" society and morality. The national WTUL struggled for its first few years and never gained the trust and cooperation of the AFL it desired. However, under the direction of Margaret Dreier Robins (president, 1907-1922), a wealthy woman committed to philanthropy and the Social Gospel, the WTUL became a strong force in the 1910s (Payne 1988). The most militant events that the WTUL helped to organize were the 1910-11 garment strike in Chicago, the 1909-13 garment strikes in New York, and the 1912-13 garment and telephone operators strikes in Boston. In these three cities, from which almost all analyses of the WTUL have been based, the WTUL brought together money from upper class allies, professional skills of middle class allies, and the membership and leadership of trade union women (Kirkby 1992). The WTUL's constitution expressly differentiated between workers (union members) and allies (middle and upper class supporters), requiring a majority of its executive boards to be made up of workers, though in practice wealthy allies usually dominated branch activities.

The same fate appeared inevitable for the Kansas City branch in its early years. The KCWTUL held a public meeting with 500 attendees in January 1911, to get women workers involved. Its first president was an ally, with a Garment Worker as treasurer. The executive board included three male unionists, four women allies, and two women

unionists.³⁵ Mittelstadt, the KCWTUL secretary, was an “extremely diffident” (Jacoby 1983:235) woman who would later trade organizing work for marriage and motherhood during the tumultuous Great War period. While she was key for establishing the branch and shuttling it through the first few years, she did not possess the leadership skills to turn the KCWTUL into the independent force for working women’s self activity it later became.

From the start, Kansas City union leaders supported the mission of the KCWTUL. For example, *Labor Herald* editor Thomas H. West wrote in 1911,

What excuse have the union men to give for their wives, sisters or daughters who are not members of the Women’s Trade Union League? Who more than the women of union families should be interested in the organization of the crafts employing women? Do they not fully realize that unorganized female work is one of the strongest competitors their husbands, fathers and brothers must meet?³⁶

The KCWTUL collaborated with several active members of the Industrial Council (the citywide coordinating body of the labor movement), including Charles Sumner, a printer. In the summer of 1911, Sumner proposed that the Industrial Council raise the per capita yearly tax on all union members one penny, and give the proceeds to the KCWTUL for organizing work. In a matter of weeks, thirty-five locals had cast near unanimous votes in favor of the idea, and, just like that, KCWTUL became the only WTUL branch to be funded by male unionists rather than upper class women allies.³⁷ When Mittelstadt was asked at a WTUL conference how she achieved this situation, she was at a loss for words, indicating male support was part of the labor movement culture. Her only explanation was, “The relationship existing between the Women’s Trade Union

³⁵ *Life & Labor* 1(4):124-125.

³⁶ *LH* May 5, 1911.

³⁷ *LH* July 28, 1911, Sept. 1, 1911.

League and the Industrial Council of this city is especially cordial, and this branch of the League has received a great deal of assistance and encouragement from the central body.”³⁸

Unionists even ponied up money to send Mittelstadt to Chicago as the WTUL’s first student in their Training School for Women Organizers in 1914.³⁹ In addition to Sumner, William H. Maxwell, a Stonecutter and the longtime Industrial Council treasurer, bolstered KCWTUL organizing efforts, along with his wife Eva.

Ford Allen, of the Typographical union, assisted visits to women workers to interest them in unionism. Elmer O. Baker, a Canadian Tailor, did similar work, along with a Carpenter named Robert Anawalt. His wife Mary served as KCWTUL president during 1912, before her unexpected death in November.⁴⁰ These links indicate a much tighter integration between the KCWTUL and the labor movement than WTUL branches elsewhere, which were typically funded and dominated by middle class social workers and upper class philanthropists. In addition to funding organizing efforts for women workers, the Kansas City Industrial Council endorsed suffrage for Missouri in 1912 (Kansas passed full suffrage later that year), stating:

Whereas, the good women of the state of Missouri are asking the privilege of equal suffrage with the men in this state, and this Industrial Council recognizes the justice, and has full confidence in the wisdom and intuition with which they will use the privilege, if granted them; now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Industrial Council of Kansas City, Missouri, that we do on this Mother’s Day hereby endorse the campaign the women are making for the right to vote in the state of Missouri, and elsewhere, and we do hereby most heartily call upon the members of organized labor, and all good men, everywhere, to aid the women in achieving the privilege of the ballot, which is so justly theirs.⁴¹

³⁸ LOC NWTUL Reel 20, f126-136, KCWTUL 1910-1911 Report by Mittelstadt.

³⁹ *LH* Oct. 3, 1913; *L&L* 4(6):164-167.

⁴⁰ *LH* May 19, 24, Sept. 1, Oct. 13, Nov. 17, Dec. 1, 1911; March 1, May 24, 1912; Jan. 30, 1914.

⁴¹ *LH* May 17, 1912.

Despite support from union allies, the KCWTUL struggled to attract working class women members. Throughout 1911, the KCWTUL and Industrial Council attempted to form a union of commercial laundry employees. Although they found the working conditions desperate, employees' fear of being fired hampered their efforts. The prominent Black medical doctor, T. C. Unthank, assisted the KCWTUL with trying to interest Black women workers. Dr. Unthank was the primary foil of racist electioneering between 1905 and 1908, but the KCWTUL remained very grateful for his assistance. Yet, efforts apparently fizzled out after October. The KCWTUL only had 58 women union members among its ranks during the 1911 WTUL convention.⁴²

Despite a favorable climate among male unionists, when WTUL president Margaret Dreier Robins visited the city for a Child Welfare Exhibit in November 1911, the KCWTUL was in such poor shape she had little confidence in its prospects. One ally was "belittling the trade union girls," including calling Mittelstadt "only a brewery girl." Robins dispatched WTUL organizer Leonora O'Reilly to Kansas City in February 1912, to see if any hope could be found for KCWTUL's future. O'Reilly was discouraged by the "rather conservative" organization she found. An ally who thought the branch should just be another middle class women's club had forced its first president, an advocate of unionization, to quit.

Thus, working class and progressive political cultures facilitated the creation of the KCWTUL and collaboration with clubwomen, but the KCWTUL could not yet transcend its origins to help forge a solidarity infrastructure without better allies or

⁴² *LH* March 31, May 19, July 28, Sept. 1, Oct. 13, 1911. LOC NWTUL Reel 20, f126-136, KCWTUL 1910-1911 Report by Mittelstadt.

effective working class leaders. Such collaborations, in other words, did not make for a meso-level emergent structure. The labor movement allowed the KCWTUL to have a free office at the Labor Temple, but they struggled to maintain vitality themselves, and “slander and gossip” about the league had begun spreading among them.⁴³

The WTUL sent Agnes Johnson, a Chicago unionist, to Kansas City for eight weeks beginning just before O'Reilly departed from her first visit. They organized a mass meeting on February 23, 1912, at the Labor Temple to attract working women for a platform of, “An eight-hour day, a living wage, [and] to protect the home”, where fifty workers signed on. They printed pamphlets to promote the branch’s “fire, health, label, education, recreation, legislative, organization, [and] suffrage” committees. O'Reilly found strong support in labor attorney Frank P. Walsh, who headlined the speakers at the mass meeting, and the socialist *Star* editor, Dante Barton. The WTUL sent another organizer to Kansas City in May to help organize their office books, and their monthly magazine’s editor in August. Even after women office workers organized a union in July, by the end of 1912, the branch only had 65 union members, and its activities were mostly limited to investigating violations of a Missouri nine hour law for women workers. KCWTUL president Mary Anawalt’s unexpected death in November contributed to the sense of malaise in the branch.⁴⁴ Worse, O'Reilly wrote in her notes, “As yet I have found one real live Union girl -- one other who may be live in her own Union but is absolutely without go or initiative. Hopeless task this.” In its early years, KCWTUL

⁴³ LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 12, Feb. 1912, O'Reilly notes to herself, Hotel Kupper stationary; “Minutes of Meeting of National Executive Board, April 17-19, 1912.” Reel 6, Robins to O'Reilly, Jan. 17, Feb. 3, 1912; O'Reilly to National WTUL, undated, Hotel Kupper stationary; Agnes Johnson to O'Reilly, April 7, 1912.

⁴⁴ *LH* Nov. 29, 1912.

failed to attract a large base of working class members, and many of its allies openly looked down on working women.⁴⁵

In June 1913, the KCWTUL held another mass meeting for women workers with Leonora O'Reilly and Walsh headlining. It did not seem to do any good -- women workers in Kansas City did not respond to agitation, whether due to complacency or fear of their boss. The KCWTUL continued its efforts in collaborating with clubwomen on campaigns to get the city to build a Women's Farm for incarcerated women, and with a union label league. They tried to organize telephone and laundry workers over the summer with herculean effort, but few lasting results. Mittelstadt spent days copying thousands of names and addresses by hand out of directories to send 9,000 mailings to women workers. The KCWTUL proposed an anti-vice resolution to the Industrial Council, which failed to clear a majority vote, showing unionists had limits to their collaboration with anti-vice clubwomen and women workers.⁴⁶ Despite the favorable political culture of the labor movement, the KCWTUL could not mobilize working women in its early years.

By 1916, that situation had changed. A relatively radical ally and militant unionist transformed the KCWTUL into an independent bridging organization that transformed collaborations between the labor movement and clubwomen into an organizational network articulating support for the self activity of low-wage workers. In the meantime, the labor movement went through a radical period.

⁴⁵ LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 12, Feb. 1912, O'Reilly notes to herself, Hotel Kupper stationary; "Mass Meeting!"; "Women's Trade Union League Kansas City, MO" pamphlet; "Kansas City Women's Trade Union League Report 1911-1912". *Life & Labor* 2(5):154-155; 2(10):292-293.

⁴⁶ LH March 28, May 23, June 20, June 27, Oct. 3, Nov. 28, 1913. LOC NWTUL reel 21, 1915 Convention.

LABOR FORWARD MOVEMENT

The most important instance of collective action prior to the First World War for understanding the development of the solidarity infrastructure was a Labor Forward Movement (LFM) unionization campaign from February to May, 1914. Several veterans from the Kansas City LFM retained officer positions at the Labor Temple in 1917, and the campaign brought Sarah Green's leadership skills into the labor movement.

What is a labor forward movement? Across the US, religious advocates of working people organized local unionization pushes among low wage workers.

Historians Fones-Wolf and Fones-Wolf (1983) summarized the strategy:

Beginning in 1912 scores of city central labor unions, with AFL backing, initiated trade union 'revivals' as part of a campaign known as the Labor Forward movement. In these revivals the local craft-union leadership adapted the methods of evangelism and the ideals of the Social Gospel to revitalize and blend with trade-union traditions. (p. 153)

The AFL struggled to increase membership in 1912, weathering assaults from its right by the capitalist National Association of Manufacturers, and from its left by the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). From the AFL's perspective, however, they hoped to use religion to reinvigorate trade unionism among craft workers, not rebrand themselves as the house of the industrial proletariat.

Many craft unionists believed that the appeal of the Socialists and the IWW among both immigrant and native workers originated in the emotional methods and idealistic goals these groups offered. To counter, many began to urge unionists to reach into their own traditions for principles that workers might use in their struggle for a voice in running industry. (p. 157)

But radicals ran the LFM in Kansas City instead of Social Gospel reformers, and it turned out to be one of the most successful campaigns anywhere in the country (p. 176).

In late 1913 and early 1914, the second IWW free speech battle raged, Barbers and Motion Picture Operators maintained militant pickets, and the KCWTUL held a mass meeting at the Labor Temple to increase membership, featuring Caroline Lowe, who coordinated the Socialist Party's political education of women out of Chicago (Buhle 1981:152-60). With an organizational base among Cooks, Barbers, and Office Workers unions, the Kansas City Syndicalist League proposed and passed a Labor Forward Movement resolution in the Industrial Council on February 8 through the Stenographers' (Browder's union). Within several days, the LFM held a meeting of 180 unionists from 40 locals, and established a large organization with AFL money to support it. They elected Max Dezettel president of the entire operation, and he was one of two paid organizers (in addition to business agent John T. Smith). Steckhahn became recording secretary and on the press committee. Herman Winters, a militant Baker just elected president of the Industrial Council, was tapped as treasurer. Eva Maxwell, an active member of the KCWTUL and bookkeeper at the Labor Temple, was on the executive board. Another KCWTUL member, Elizabeth Lowe, was tapped for the financial committee (unknown if she was related to Caroline Lowe).

Two Black organizers, E. Jetts and R. Jordan, were brought on to agitate among Black workers (indirect evidence suggests they interested Black plasterers in unionizing). Thus, the organizers of this coalition of white radicals, unionists, and women went out of their way to appeal to African American workers by drafting Black organizers. There is no evidence that much came of it, but it demonstrates that the hope of interracial solidarity attempted on the picket lines from the 1890s to 1904 remained alive. The Syndicalist League activists were not as egalitarian in their view of workers' ability to

organize themselves as the IWW (by adopting a strict vanguard/masses binary), but they did see society in strictly class terms, meaning these radicals likely framed African Americans as fellow workers. Finally, the trustees of the LFM were Earl Browder, William Maxwell, and a waitress named Sarah Green.⁴⁷

Green first came into contact with the KCWTUL when the group began an unsuccessful push to unionize women telephone operators in the spring and summer of 1913, because Green's sister was an operator. Through the LFM, Green founded a Waitresses' union and soon established herself as the most capable and fierce unionists in the city.⁴⁸

Incredibly, organizers and volunteers canvassed working class neighborhoods in all 16 wards, printed handbills, bought billboards, and put advertisements in the motion picture houses. By March, 85 locals had signed on to the LFM, which was considered so successful that it was extended a few extra weeks into May. In addition to Waitresses, Retail Clerks and Laundry Workers organized. Teamsters added large numbers of lumber handlers to their ranks. All 400 employees of Kansas City Nut and Bolt in the Sheffield industrial district were organized after a three day walkout.⁴⁹

The Kansas City Syndicalist League's *Toiler* newsletter, edited by Dezettel, detailed the LFM's efforts. Dezettel was supported at the publication by Browder and Otto E. Cook (of the Cook's union), who had recently been arrested at a moving picture

⁴⁷ LH Feb. 20, 1914.

⁴⁸ For more about Sarah Lloyd Green (nee Prytherch) see *New York Times* Dec. 28, 1919; *Star* June 27, 1929; *Life & Labor Bulletin* 7(9):3.

⁴⁹ LH Feb. 13, Feb. 20, March 13, March 20, Apr. 10, May 15, 1914.

picket.⁵⁰ Steckhahn wrote the most detailed report, and he relayed the efforts of the Kansas City “rebels”:

Never before in the history of Kansas City has organization been the topic of so much conversation and interested so many wage workers as now, and it is a great satisfaction for the rebels and every true unionist and promoter of the movement to see the new spirit in the labor movement of Kansas City.⁵¹

The LFM built a big tent of support for worker militancy, inclusive of women and Black workers.

Organizing work continued after the close of the LFM, when the movement set its sights on the meatpacking industry and streetcar workers, with Dezettel and Steckhahn assistance. But both sectors would have to wait until 1917 to successfully unionize. The streetcar company’s franchise renewal came up for a popular vote in the summer of 1914, giving organizers some leverage as the company sought out labor’s endorsement.⁵² The Industrial Council refused to endorse the franchise in the referendum without union recognition, but the company still won the franchise while scuttling the unionization effort. Workers complained of long hours, low pay, and, most of all, oppressive foremen and company spies (“spotters”). While the organizing efforts in 1914 made significant inroads, the willingness of the company to spend whatever money necessary to intimidate and replace workers who complained, overwhelmed the efforts.⁵³ Still, as hired guns fired on miners and their families in Ludlow, Colorado, the solidarity infrastructure in Kansas City began taking shape, with collaboration between radicals, male craft unionists, progressives, and low wage workers across gender and race divisions.

⁵⁰ *LH* Nov. 14, 1913.

⁵¹ *Toiler* Apr/May, 1914.

⁵² *LH* Jan. 16, June 12, June 26, 1914.

⁵³ *Toiler* July 1914.

The KCWTUL aided in another labor controversy over the summer of 1914. Multiple milling operations locked out their workers when they asked for a reduction of hours from 12 hours a day to 8 hours.⁵⁴ The lockout outraged the Syndicalist League, as one of the mills was managed by the son of nationally renowned Socialist, Christian Balzac Hoffman (then running for US Senate for the state of Kansas), who was also a major investor. The *Toiler* claimed that the son, also a Socialist, promised to break the unionization effort.⁵⁵ Thus, unionists and revolutionaries challenged reformist socialism in Kansas City by drawing a line in the sand around supporting strikes. It was a line KCWTUL allies came to embrace as well.

The Kansas City IC demonstrated intense commitment to class solidarity amidst the LFM. In the spring of 1914, as tensions mounted in Europe, the Industrial Council minced no words in their condemnation of a possible war. The Kansas City central labor body declared itself,

opposed to all wars, except in cases where it will be necessary for us as workers to defend our own class, as at present our brothers are doing in the Colorado mining camps, and expressing sympathy with the working class of Mexico, which is putting up such a splendid fight for liberty under General Villa against the Rockefeller and English oil syndicates supported by Huerta and American capitalists.⁵⁶

Later, in 1916, when pro “preparedness” sentiments and parades gathered momentum among American unionists, the Kansas City Industrial Council reaffirmed that it remained “unalterably opposed” to militarism, which they believed brought America closer to joining the war (Fink 1973:61; Foner 1987:74; McKillen 2013:104-105).

⁵⁴ *L&L* 4(9):287-288.

⁵⁵ *Toiler* Aug. 1914.

⁵⁶ *LH* May 15, 1914.

The momentum of the growing and radicalizing labor movement throughout 1913 and 1914 ended with the painful economic downturn in 1915. On one hand, these activities made the movement more resilient. Kansas City's share of unionists in Missouri remained a constant 14.4 percent from 1910 to the beginning of 1913 (Table 3.1). Organizers successfully increased local membership by over twenty-five percent in 1913 and 1914, bringing Kansas City's statewide share up to 16.2 percent. Although local membership flatlined throughout 1915 and 1916, numbers dropped elsewhere in the state, meaning Kansas City's statewide share rose again to 17.2 percent at the beginning of 1917.

On the other hand, the labor movement had to shift to a defensive posture. Between 1915 and 1917, labor organizers and the KCWTUL warded off an attempt in the city council to outlaw picketing, pressured the state legislature to ban prison labor and further regulate women's working conditions, and advocated for unemployed people. These efforts are discussed in more detail in the next section.

	KC Unionists	% of MOFL*	KC Women Unionists	% of KC Labor	% of MOFL Women
1900	4,688	10.74	--	--	--
1901	6,188	11.80	53	0.86	3.85
1902	9,261	--	--	--	--
1903	12,883	13.13	266	2.06	7.84
1904	9,432	11.50	217	2.30	9.03
1905	8,294	10.80	181	2.18	7.30
1906	9,381	11.54	95	1.01	4.49
1907	10,125	13.17	261	2.58	11.25
1908	9,846	13.09	296	3.01	13.71
1909	10,040	13.41	210	2.09	7.32
1910	11,188	14.45	210	1.88	7.06
1911	11,501	14.41	175	1.52	6.76
1912	--	--	--	--	--
1913	11,501	14.40	175	1.52	6.63
1914	14,425	15.77	401	2.78	10.21
1915	18,497	16.23	656	3.55	11.34
1916	18,488	16.74	551	2.98	10.53
1917	18,722	17.24	563	3.01	10.27
1919**	27,608	17.22	1,051	3.81	13.14

Table 3.1 Kansas City, Missouri, AFL Union Membership, 1900-1919. Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Missouri Red Book* 1902:145-48; 1904:298-301; 1906:500-01; 1908:779-80; 1910:247, 316; 1912:xv, 84; 1913:609; 1917:112; 1920:905.

* Missouri Federation of Labor.

** Until 1919, numbers were recorded on January 1. In 1919, numbers came from September 1.

KCWTUL LEADERSHIP & BRIDGING WORK

How were solidaristic political cultures institutionalized in organizational patterns between the Labor Forward Movement and the United States' entry in the First World War? How did workers considered less skilled than white men achieve organizational independence? In this section, I explain how the KCWTUL came to support militant women workers' self-activity, in contrast to other WTUL branches. In short, an ally named Peake Faxon steered the KCWTUL in this direction, acting under the influence of a left-leaning progressive friendship network. She eventually helped Sarah Green become president, and defended her from allies who thought she was too militant. Green brought in her experiences as a waitress and the influence of syndicalists with whom she worked closely in the Labor Forward Movement. The correspondence of New York-based WTUL organizer Leonora O'Reilly with Faxon and other KCWTUL allies provides much of the data for this story about the leadership and the bridging work accomplished by Faxon and Green.

Regarding the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-60s, sociologist Aldon Morris (1986; 2000) pointed out that the Resource Mobilization Theory, Political Process Model, and Piven and Cloward's theory of mass defiance each failed to account for indigenous resources, culture, and leadership in Southern Black communities. Morris demonstrated that the agency of leaders who bridged multiple networks and lifted the pre-existing frames of their constituencies tended to have a lot of success in choosing appropriate tactics and building a strong movement. This section looks at the leadership and agency of Sarah Green and Peake Faxon within the KCWTUL in making the solidarity infrastructure.

Silke Roth (2003) highlighted the importance of independent bridging organizations in forging coalitions that bring together conflicting identities: “a bridging organization attempts to synthesize the elements and goals of two movements, to establish itself as a link between movements, a task that can be difficult (and necessary) when relations between the two movements are strained” (p. 9). Although the Kansas City labor movement had already collaborated with clubwomen and supported organizing women workers before Green took over, under her leadership the KCWTUL provided an independent and militant voice to elicit firmer support for worker militancy from clubwomen, and more radical solidarity from the labor movement. The KCWTUL pushed the labor movement to be more inclusive, and pushed clubwomen to be more supportive of strike activities.

To fully explain this story, we must return to 1912 when Leonora O’Reilly first visited Kansas City, and discuss the resulting political transformation of a key KCWTUL ally, Peake Faxon. O’Reilly made for a charismatic speaker and elicited fawning devotion from those drawn to her ideas. O’Reilly was a veteran of the Knights of Labor and a tenacious counterweight for worker self activity against philanthropic minded allies in the New York branch (Bularzik 1983; Mattina 1994; Tiece 2003).

Peake Faxon was the daughter of Wilson Askew and niece of Frank Askew, who ran Askew Saddlery, a major local business dating to 1866. Her husband, Henry, was the son of Frank A. Faxon, and the Vice-President of his father’s successful Faxon & Gallagher Drug company. Frank Faxon and Frank Askew were major supporters and reformers of the public education system, and are mentioned as prominent members of Kansas City’s “social establishment” during the 1890’s in Coleman’s (2006) extensive

study of Kansas City's upper crust of the social elite (p. 27). The union of Peake and Henry Faxon emerged from two elite capitalist families. The Faxons vacationed each summer in Estes Park, Colorado, and sent at least one of their daughters to a preparatory boarding school near Boston (Dana Hall, associated with Wellesley), exhibiting continued elite status. Henry Faxon, a prominent local Republican, led the arbitration efforts of the Chamber of Commerce for multiple wartime strikes, indicating he was respected in the business community. Their friendship with O'Reilly, Frank Walsh, and Dante Barton facilitated an identity crisis for the Faxons from 1912 until at least 1918, when they came to embrace the historical agency of working women and flirted with leftist politics more generally.

Peake Faxon's interactions with O'Reilly in February 1912, constituted a major turning point in her life. Faxon, her husband Henry, Dante Barton, and WTUL organizer Johnson worked extensive hours together to organize meetings around the city and spoke on the league's behalf at local civic organizations. Soon after O'Reilly left Kansas City, Faxon volunteered to attend a Southern Child and Women Labor conference in Tennessee as a delegate of the KCWTUL with her own money, which she wrote "was selfish in a way for I really am awfully anxious to learn for the first time in twelve years." Johnson wrote to O'Reilly that Faxon "wants to learn oh so badly. She has lost a good many personal friends through her activities in our movement. But to think of dying and not knowing who your real friends were wouldn't that of [sic] been awful she said. That seemed to have opened her eyes I guess."⁵⁷ O'Reilly's visit, then, sparked a new interest

⁵⁷ LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 6, Agnes Johnson to O'Reilly, March 9, April 7, 1912; Ruth Kennedy Barton to O'Reilly, March 10, 1912; Peake Faxon to O'Reilly, March, 1912.

and nascent commitment to the working class that greatly impacted Faxon's social network. She lost old ties unsupportive of an activist identity.

In January of 1913, Peake Faxon decided to further her education in the women's labor movement by joining O'Reilly in New York to experience a militant women's strike first hand. Up to 40,000 girl and women garment workers walked out, and O'Reilly organized their pickets and negotiations. The strike lasted for weeks, made the national news, and offended many progressives due to the mass arrests and mistreatment of the strikers. In letters from the Faxons to O'Reilly, they used martial language to describe the strike activities, indicating an ideological acceptance of strikes as class struggle, rather than unfortunate instances of misunderstanding (a common progressive frame). While on picket duty in early February, police violently arrested Peake Faxon and she spent time in jail with the destitute strikers. Henry Faxon wrote to O'Reilly that he assumed she would be arrested while in New York, "and I didn't care -- but when I read of her being kicked and not turning to her friend [O'Reilly] and husband for probation -- I [illegible] felt grieved... She says she is no better than those poor souls [strikers] who are being ruffed [sic] up."⁵⁸ The combination of ideas that centered the historical agency of working women with her experiences on the picket line led Peake to identify with the young and poor strikers to such a degree that she refused to use her money and connections to bail herself out of jail.

Upon returning to Kansas City, while still recovering from the kicks of policemen, she gave public speeches on the New York strike:

⁵⁸ *New York Times* Jan 18, Jan 24, Jan 31, Feb. 2, 1913. LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 6, O'Reilly to Henry Faxon, Jan. 22, 1913; Henry Faxon to O'Reilly, Jan 29, Feb. 10, 1913; Peake Faxon to O'Reilly, Feb. 1913. The pickets were referred to as "the battlefield," and the strikers an "army."

To me it seems that such industrial crimes as have aroused the public of New York to sympathize with the working girls are going to be settled by those children screaming out their pain and anger at injustice. They are going to be settled by them and by such as they, rather than by 'commissioners' and 'investigators' who sit in long sessions and accomplish nothing.⁵⁹

Centering the self activity of the working class was unusual for WTUL allies. The Faxons decided to take out subscriptions with a socialist newspaper and magazine (*The Call* and *The Masses*), which Peake said they read "between breaths!!", indicating socialist ideas were still perhaps a bit radical for them, if also persuasive. Faxon acknowledged that her involvement with the KCWTUL "has led us into strange paths. I quoted you [O'Reilly], and am now said to be a 'dangerous woman' by some church folks."⁶⁰

The Faxons' ideological lurch to the left would continue to be a topic of correspondence throughout 1913. They attended a dinner party at the Bartons's house that included outspoken women, socialists, and other radicals who were "IWWs at heart." Faxon came back from New York frustrated with the lack of militancy of the working women in Kansas City, saying

I watched over 300 come out of a factory here and was fully discouraged -- white faces, furs, feathers, high heels (jelly fish) -- so different from your material... If we had one industry where they were all Germans, or all Jews etc, but our girls are mixtures in themselves and 'believe me' the American mixture seems a wasteful non-resisting dose! (I know I need correction on this).

Even this quote shows that as she became more radical than many in the working class, she was aware of and valued O'Reilly's commitment to workers' potential for self activity, which was not yet on display. However, she referenced feeling like "an outcast"

⁵⁹ *Star* Feb. 13, 1913.

⁶⁰ LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 6, Peake Faxon to O'Reilly, February, March, 1913.

in both labor circles and among the social elite who “have long since put me in the dog pound.”⁶¹

By late 1914, this ideological commitment apparently took a toll on the Faxons, as letters indicate Henry’s twenty school-aged girl employees (“working long hours [with] poor pay”) weighed heavily on Peake’s mind. They contemplated giving up owning a business and moving away from Kansas City, but Faxon pressed on as a major force in the KCWTUL, helping to defeat a proposed city ordinance to ban picketing during a waitress’ strike, and securing the release of Mittelstadt and strikers from jail (with the help of Walsh).⁶²

In 1914, the KCWTUL began courting the Council of Women’s Clubs to educate and agitate among them regarding industrial conditions for women workers. There was resistance to the effort, but Faxon’s resources as an elite ally came in handy, and she was able to push through the reading of the report in front of 300 clubwomen.⁶³ This brief event at the height of pre-war radicalism illustrates the importance of Faxon’s ideological commitment, paired with her cultural resources that she used to put actual working conditions of workers in front of clubwomen. Thus, the first step toward working class counter-hegemony, was grounded in concern for working women.

The primary vehicle through which the solidarity infrastructure took flight was an increasingly active and independent KCWTUL. It was not only that the KCWTUL achieved more stable and firm footing in this period. The Kansas City branch came to be guided by relatively radical allies who valued working class militancy and leadership,

⁶¹ LOC O’Reilly Papers: Reel 6, Peake Faxon to O’Reilly, March, April, May, 1913.

⁶² LOC O’Reilly Papers: Reel 6, Peake Faxon to O’Reilly, March, April, May, 1913. Reel 7, Peake Faxon to O’Reilly Dec 28, 1914; Henry Faxon to O’Reilly, July 7, 1915.

⁶³ LOC NWTUL Reel 21, 1915 Convention.

who found what they were looking for in Sarah Green. It was the activities of KCWTUL leaders in a period of low involvement by women workers that forged an arrangement of linkages and relationships that could be identified as a meso-level emergent structure.

The political culture of Faxon's friendship network proved to be an important factor in transforming the KCWTUL into an *independent* vehicle from the male-dominated labor movement and clubwomen in this period. The KCWTUL benefited from funding from the male trade unions of Kansas City. However, O'Brien wrote in the summer of 1915, "They have held that big stick over us ever since we were organized -- every time we side step they threaten to withdraw etc." According to O'Brien, the local labor movement was run by "a bunch of crooks", who "fought every thing worth while for many years -- if you doubt my word ask Mr. Barton."⁶⁴

An illuminating controversy developed over the summer of 1915. The anarchist Alexander Berkman organized the Caplan-Schmidt Defense League for legal aid for alleged accessories to the 1910 *LA Times* bombing. Berkman visited Kansas City to establish a branch, but he only invited radicals to a meeting in Kansas City, not the Industrial Council. The Industrial Council took offense and refused to collaborate, putting the KCWTUL in a difficult position. Mittelstadt remained wholly opposed to offending the Industrial Council by working with the Defense League, but O'Brien and Elizabeth Lowe (KCWTUL president at the time) wanted to charge ahead anyway. O'Brien wrote,

Louisa [Mittelstadt] has quit us cold on the Defense League work because she is AFRAID she will get in bad with the bunch at Labor temple who have fought her and fooled her at every turn in the game... Louisa is scared of every thing- she is getting herself all worn out- afraid she will peeve the AF of L. For my part I'd just as soon go to it with AF of L as any other organization that tries to be too cute.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 7, O'Brien, A. (1915, June 19, Oct 15). *Life & Labor* 5(8), 132-133.

⁶⁵ LOC O'Reilly Papers: O'Brien letter, July 27, 1915.

That KCWTUL allies were willing to upset their labor movement allies to collaborate with one of the most infamous anarchists in US history, demonstrates that the allies' radicalism surpassed the Industrial Council's.

The most significant direct result of the allies' political culture that stressed the self activity of militant workers came in the election of Sarah Green as president of the KCWTUL in 1916. After receiving WTUL organizing training through 1914, Mittelstadt still did not have the self confidence and assertiveness to forcefully lead the KCWTUL. She said in 1915,

I think that is one of the things the Kansas City Industrial Council needs--one big man. We are hoping he will come some time. They are good, but it seems as though when anything big is up or when some one should take a stand we haven't the man to do it. They will tell us to do it, but, after all, we are only women and after we get up, no matter how good we speak, it doesn't carry much weight with the men.⁶⁶

In contrast, Green was a fearless, tireless, and militant organizer essential to the development of the solidarity infrastructure and KCWTUL's organizing successes during the Great War. She focused energies in 1916 on unionizing school teachers, which facilitated bridge building work with local clubwomen, some of whom were former teachers themselves.

Green's open support and organizing of wartime militancy would almost certainly have run afoul of allies in other WTUL branches. In fact, in a January 1918, letter, Faxon recounted how Margaret Dreier Robins accused the KCWTUL of being "run by unreliable people", and attempted to exert her influence to unseat a supporter of Green from the county Council of Defense in favor of a local wealthy friend of Robins named Mrs.

⁶⁶ LOC NWTUL Reel 21, 1915 Convention.

Ward.⁶⁷ Mrs. Addison, Green's supporter, would shortly thereafter help throw the weight of the Council of Defense behind the commercial laundry strike that led to the general strike.

Even Mrs. Maxwell, a committed member and supporter of the KCWTUL along with her spouse and union activist William Maxwell, were considered by the Faxons to be counterproductive for working women. In 1914 and 1915, the Maxwells decided they wanted to start their own commercial laundry business. The Faxons, and even the mild mannered Mittelstadt, were outraged at the conditions at the laundry. Peake wrote to O'Reilly, Mittelstadt "is going after the Maxwells! The Maxwells are trying to run a curious [best guess] laundry for the poor working girl!!! Long hours, etc!! Louise [sic] is slowly eatin' em up."⁶⁸ The Faxons, capitalists themselves, were outraged at the working conditions in a shop owned by trade union activists.

Thus, although many radicals were present in the labor movement, the KCWTUL's focus on organizing worker leaders throughout the 1910s continuously came under threat by philanthropically minded allies and conservative male unionists. Relatively radical allies were needed to keep organizational practices focused on working women's potential for leadership and class struggle, and to support Sarah Green as president. Their resources as elite women also made bridging work with clubwomen possible.

As previously mentioned, most branches of the WTUL were not as militant as the one in Kansas City, nor did they emphasize the importance of working class women's

⁶⁷ LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 7, Peake Faxon, January, 1918. WHS Gompers Papers: Reel 93, frame 317, Gompers to Green, March 15, 1918. *New York Times* Dec. 28, 1919, "Conservatism of St. Louis, Kansas City, and Omaha."

⁶⁸ LOC O'Reilly reel 7, Peake letter, Dec. 1914; also Peake letter July 18, 1915.

self-activity to the same degree, particularly after about 1913 (Deutsch 2000:196-228; Dye 1980; Hoy 2018; Hyman 1985; Kirkby 1992; Norwood 1990:141-147). The Kansas City branch continued to be much more active in unionizing and strike activities than any other branch during the First World War, demonstrating the significance of Green and Faxon's leadership leading up to 1917. The New York branch moved away from unionizing women after 1913 (Dye 1980:3-4), the Boston branch focused on Americanization efforts during the war (Deutsch 2000:226-228), and the Chicago branch focused on helping the federal government expand the Department of Labor, and therefore had few organizers (Hoy 2018). The Los Angeles branch disbanded in 1918 with very little success in organizing working women (Laughlin 2000:70-71).

The leadership of Faxon and Green, rooted as they were in the political cultures of social progressivism, socialism, waitresses, and syndicalism, turned the KCWTUL into a force for working class militancy and solidarity; a force that could be legible to clubwomen and workers. By stitching the labor movement and clubwomen movement closer together, the KCWTUL sat at the center of a meso-level emergent structure that supported working class solidarity -- the solidarity infrastructure.

CONCLUSION

By 1917, a counter-hegemonic bloc existed in Kansas City. Encompassing white clubwomen, the trade union movement, women workers, social progressives, and revolutionary activists, the solidarity infrastructure also had some ties to the African American community. Green and Faxon bridged many of these networks with a similar vision of working class unity and militancy. The process by which the solidarity

infrastructure coalesced took several years, but its articulation of support for working class formation is crucial for explaining the sequence of events in 1917 and 1918 that included the general strike.

The political culture of social progressivism crept left through the influences of Leonora O'Reilly, Frank Walsh, the Bureau of Public Welfare, and the many public lectures by gadflies and socialists hosted by women's clubs and other progressive groups. Revolutionary political cultures germinated through the IWW and Syndicalist League's publications and streetcorner speeches. Their calls for working class unity against bosses influenced the trade union movement to a greater degree than in most American cities of the time. Independent Black institutions had developed under threats of white supremacy in the early 1900s, and they thrived in the 1910s after the immediate political threats abated.

Additional analysis in Chapter 6 will explore why a solidarity infrastructure developed in Kansas City in this particular time. More will be said then regarding municipal politics, social organization, and demographics. For now, I note that municipal politics remained diffuse, and opened up to Black and clubwomen interests in the 1910s. And although residential segregation had begun in Kansas City by the 1910s, the process did not fully reach working class neighborhoods until the 1920s. We return now to the role that the solidarity infrastructure played in a series of walkouts and strikes during the summer and autumn of 1917.

CHAPTER 4: “STUNG BY THE STRIKE WASP,” AUGUST 1917, TO JANUARY 1918

This chapter traces the path that wartime militancy took in Kansas City and its connections to the solidarity infrastructure, which produced a general strike at such an unlikely time. Collective action is a muscle, and workers had to exercise it successfully in order to make the general strike leap. A series of walkouts for union recognition in August and September of 1917 set off a sequence of events leading to the general strike showdown between the Employers’ Association and the labor movement. The success of high profile walkouts came in part due to the presence of the solidarity infrastructure. These successes built momentum and confidence on the part of workers, and fear and desperation on the part of the Employers’ Association.

The strike wave in 1917 both revealed and strengthened the solidarity infrastructure. Through its articulation of support for working class militancy and solidarity in the heat of collective action, the solidarity infrastructure deepened bonds between the Kansas City Women’s Trade Union League, clubwomen, and trade union movement. Further, the solidarity infrastructure expanded through collaboration with a Black working class organization. After the strike wave, the KCWTUL initiated the unionization of Black domestic workers, illustrating that elements of the solidarity infrastructure articulated an interracial definition of class.

This chapter examines the ways the dynamics of the solidarity infrastructure molded several episodes of wartime militancy. First, we look at the significance of the solidarity infrastructure articulating cross-class support of labor struggles through the support of the streetcar strike by clubwomen. Next, the meatpacking strike illustrates the

continued elaboration of the solidarity infrastructure through the incorporation of an independent organization of Black workers in the course of collective action. Thirdly, a failed railroad strike reveals the limited reach of the Kansas City solidarity infrastructure in a double sense. Then, a series of walkouts demonstrates how a counter-hegemonic bloc creates a sense of inclusive working class identity and sense of efficacy. Fifth, a desperate public relations strategy by the Employers' Association discloses the threat posed by the solidarity infrastructure to anti-union forces. (Their newspaper ads provided the quote in the title for this chapter.) Lastly, the origins of a Black domestic workers' union in the KCWTUL is an example of the types of new social action made possible by the solidarity infrastructure.

STREETCAR STRIKE

The first major strike of the war period injected the labor movement with a sense of efficacy through a rather typical transit strike of the era. Transit strikes rarely succeeded, however, thanks to the services of private strikebreaking businesses. Due in part to the solidarity infrastructure, Kansas City streetcar workers triumphed against all odds.

The Kansas City Railways Co. fired twenty five motormen, carmen, and power plant employees on August 1, 1917, the same day nine of them had met with organizers in the Carpenters union to strategize unionization of streetcar workers. Private detectives likely tipped off the company, which had an exclusive transit franchise for both Kansas Cities.⁶⁹ When E. F. Michael threatened a strike as he was handed a pink slip,

⁶⁹ *Labor Herald* Aug. 17; and July 13 for reference to the company's spy system.

management told him he would convince fewer than fifty out of 2,600 men. In exactly one week, Michael organized a complete shutdown of trolley service. After community members “deported” hundreds of “finks” brought in by the strikebreaking company Bergoff Brothers and Waddell, the new union won a complete victory after the one-week strike.

Beginning in 1907, the Waddell and Mahon, and Bergoff Brothers, strikebreaking companies dominated their industry. The two businesses merged in 1914 to form Bergoff Brothers and Waddell, and continued to reign supreme until 1922 when transit strikes sloped off and the automobile became more affordable (Norwood 2002:51-70). Among their many accomplishments included breaking transit strikes in Philadelphia (1909 and 1910), Chicago (1915), and New York (1916), as well as the Calumet, Michigan, copper strike (1913). Pearl Bergoff, head of Bergoff Bros. and Waddell,

boasted of keeping a card index hidden in a safe deposit vault; it contained the names of 400,000 men he could call on for strikebreaking, classified according to skills and aptitudes. The firm also maintained an armory in New York with 1,100 rifles, and barracks where armed guards drilled. (p. 66)

Pearl Bergoff and James Waddell both cut their teeth under James Farley, a pioneer of the strikebreaking business. Farley broke dozens of transit strikes using any means necessary, including in Richmond (1903), Chicago (1903), New York (1905), and San Francisco (1907).

The success of the Kansas City 1917 streetcar strike likely represents the *only* failure to break a transit strike for Farley, Waddell, or Bergoff (Norwood 2002:69, which mistakenly dates the Kansas City strike in 1918). A number of factors had to come together to bring about this unlikely outcome, including the support of working class

community members, clubwomen, the Department of Labor, and the neutrality of city officials.

The strike began August 8th, after a mass meeting at the Labor Temple. It took several hours of publicly shaming workers at car barns to completely tie up service by 4:00pm. The strikers signed union cards with the Amalgamated Association of Streetcar and Electric Railroad Employees (AASERE), and AASERE's organizer, Magnus Sinclair, directed the strike strategy. Sinclair implored to the strikers, "No Violence! Not going to club anybody into submission."⁷⁰ Workers complained of long days, split shifts, low pay, and tyrannical management. Their only strike demands, however, were the reinstatement of the workers fired on August 1st, and for the company to enter negotiations with the union over wages and working conditions.

Hundreds of strikers and their family members swarmed three streetcar barns throughout the first morning and afternoon, convincing remaining workers to quit and walk to the Labor Temple to sign union cards. One motorman who showed up to work on the Kansas side received a tongue lashing from his wife before abandoning his post. With the exception of a few bricks through trolley windows, the police department complimented the union for running a relatively peaceful strike, since transit strikes were violent affairs in the early 20th century. Police arrested two workers who were loyal to the company the first day -- one who used "strong language" and another who assaulted a Black newsboy that called him a "scab."⁷¹ Teamsters cajoled stubborn crews to quit by blocking tracks around the city.

⁷⁰ *Journal* Aug 8; *Post* Aug 8.

⁷¹ *Post* Aug 8; *Journal* Aug 9.

After shutting down service the first day through high participation, AASERE could focus on public displays of solidarity and community support. Two thousand strikers paraded the second day through a racially diverse working class neighborhood toward downtown, and past the KC Railways offices.⁷² The company offered to continue to pay idled employees who refused to sign the strike pledge, yet the strike roll continued to grow.

From the beginning of the strike, the wives and children of strikers actively participated in pickets. Most working class migrants to Kansas City were American born from rural areas who had been displaced by the expansion of competitive markets for land and agricultural commodities (Thelen 1991). Fully half of streetcar workers came straight from farming (according to a company survey in August 1918, Dodd 2002:99).

Newspapers reported that citizens took the inconvenience in stride. Many working and middle class people lived within walking distance from downtown. Wealthier residents pushed city boundaries south, but most owned automobiles by 1917. Large open air passenger trucks called jitneys offered rides around town. To show community support, the Kansas City Allied Printing Trades passed out thousands of buttons reading, "I will not ride on a street car with non-union crews." Working women (likely through the KCWTUL) organized neighborhood walking groups to walk to and from work, while singing songs of solidarity. Downtown garment workers hung signs of support in the windows of their place of employment across from a car barn. A restaurateur negatively affected by the strike supported the workers, and some grocers extended lines of credit to strikers. Even a member of management, the supervisor of a streetcar division, signed the

⁷² *Journal and Post* Aug 9.

strike pledge. Strikers paraded with signs linking their struggle to the Great War; one read, "Make the Met. [transit service] Safe for Democracy." Significantly, the police department informed the company it would protect people and property, but would not ride the streetcars or otherwise help break the strike.⁷³ In short, Kansas Citians liked the people who kept them safe and moving throughout the city on a daily basis, and wanted them to have more control over their working conditions.

AASERE locals in other cities tipped off organizers on day two that strikebreakers were gathering all over the East. The central labor body's business agent John T. Smith called on Mayor Edwards about these "finks," but the city, a part owner of KC Railways Co., had been left in the dark by the company regarding their strategy to break the union drive.⁷⁴

Transit strikebreakers were feared around the country in the 1910s. The *Labor Herald* wrote, "To turn such a pack of ravening wolves loose on a peaceful community means anarchy, loot, murder -- and worse for the women and children."⁷⁵ KC Railways Co. finally admitted to bringing strikebreakers from outside the city at noon on the third day of the strike, to the outrage of city officials and many citizens. AASERE officials claimed 600 had already arrived in Kansas City from New York City. Company representatives warned the strikers they would use 2,100 strikebreakers to begin service again on August 13th. Strikers responded by threatening to shut down city electricity, pull 6,000 building trades workers in sympathy, and meet any violence from strikebreakers in kind.⁷⁶ A showdown loomed.

⁷³ *Post* Aug 9-10.

⁷⁴ *Journal* and *Post* Aug 9.

⁷⁵ *Labor Herald* Aug. 17.

⁷⁶ *Post* Aug 10-11.

Enter the labor movement's influential allies, for whom the solidarity infrastructure articulated political interest in labor strength. On Saturday, August 11th, the Women's Committee on the Settlement of the Kansas City Street Car Strike Without Violence sent a desperate telegram to the Department of Labor requesting federal mediation. Declaring the endorsement of the strikers and their wives for their statement, the women said,

We have a peaceful strike here involving three thousand streetcar employees. As you know we are on the state line and all of these lines are engaged in interstate commerce. The strike has been peaceful until this morning when a collision occurred between the Waddell strike breakers, a body of armed thugs (not the car men), and our best citizens in connection with the strike. Will you send the United States mediators here at once? There is no more important situation [than] this in the country.⁷⁷

The signatories -- Mrs. E. R. (Mary) Weeks, Mrs. George W. (Carolyn) Fuller, Mrs. Henry N. (Phoebe) Ess, Miss Birdine Follette Bright, and Miss Alice Mary Kimball -- succeeded in getting federal mediator Fred L. Feick sent to adjust the situation, but only after an intense weekend of citizens fighting "finks" in the streets. Weeks, Fuller, and Ess, all former teachers, were three of the most influential clubwomen in the city. Kimball was a reporter at the *Star*, and later became a suffrage activist on the East coast. Weeks served on the Jackson County Council of Defense, and later organized the campaign to register the women of Kansas City to volunteer their time for supporting the war (Hanzlick 2018:186).

The clubwomen's involvement and support for the striking workers supplied the labor movement with worthiness, an important element in social movements (Tilly and Wood 2009). Worthiness served to legitimize the conflict to a wider set of actors, and

⁷⁷ NA 280 33 621 Telegram from "Investigating Committee" to William B. Wilson, Aug 11.

clubwomen helped frame the struggle to a wider audience, even as the strike turned violent. Clubwomen also created political opportunities by encouraging municipal neutrality, relatively friendly newspaper coverage, and federal intervention in favor of unionization. The solidarity infrastructure mobilized political clout to legitimize the strike and shape the Department of Labor's understanding of the situation. Additionally, as soon as the strike began, Sarah Green of the KCWTUL, "attended every meeting, and worked as much as 17 and 20 hours a day co-operating with the officers of the International, and all other organizers in Kansas City, in perfecting the organization of the Street Car Men."⁷⁸

Citizens physically confronted the strikebreakers throughout the weekend, beginning when a mob cut trolleys, transporting strikebreakers between carbarns, from their electricity wires. Strikebreakers assaulted two strikers with blackjacks (clubs) provided by Bergoff Bros. and Waddell when they attempted to board a streetcar to convince them to leave Kansas City. The crowd of 300 men, women, and children had rocks and bricks stockpiled, and immediately let them loose. Over the next several hours, groups of thousands of citizens split off and reformed to chase different groups of replacement workers. A "women's brigade" posted outside one barn with enough bricks to prevent streetcar operation, for example. AASERE members tried to prevent the worst of the violence, rescuing a company spotter (spy) from a 500-person lynch mob.⁷⁹

By Saturday afternoon, the strikebreakers were split between those who had surrendered (and were locked inside the Labor Temple), and several hundred who had barricaded themselves inside KC Railways Co. carbarns. As the crowd outside one

⁷⁸ LOC Cornelia Bryce Pinchot Papers, I/9 KCWTUL 1917-19 report.

⁷⁹ *Star*, *Post* Aug 11; *Journal* Aug 12.

carbarn holding 400 to 500 “finks” grew from hundreds to somewhere between ten and twenty thousand, the threat of mass violence grew. The crowd set a streetcar outside the barn on fire, with 100 foot high flames. They chanted, “Burn out the finks!”, and toyed with sending the flaming trolley inside. The police chief, Thomas P. Flahive, eventually secured safe passage for the strikebreakers to Union Station, where they were loaded onto railroad cars. A large parade of union supporters followed their march, cheered on by local residents. Two thousand strike sympathizers headed for the downtown Hotel Baltimore intending to drag out Leo Bergoff (Pearl’s brother) and James Waddell, who had already fled. Over the course of events, there were several serious injuries, but no fatalities.

A crowd remained at Union Station through Sunday morning. They drove the strikebreakers back onto the rail cars whenever they tried to sneak out to get food. Finally in the afternoon, a train took them outside of city limits as their cars were pelted with rocks. When the engineer told them to exit the train by the Little Blue River in Blue Township (still in Jackson County), the 700 strikebreakers refused, hoping the conductor would take them to St. Louis. They jumped off the train, however, when it began backing up toward Kansas City. The hungry and bruised men raided local farms for food, and reportedly refused a Bergoff Bros. and Waddell invitation to sneak back into the city that night. Some of the men were involved in organized crime under Eddie “The Runt” Costello in New York. Costello vowed to “get” Leo Bergoff when he returned to New York in his anger at the treatment they received in Kansas City. As the KCWTUL remembered it,

One of the grandest sights that ever paraded the streets of Kansas City, was when organized labor, together with the chief of police marching at the head, and

policemen along the sides and at the rear, escorted 700 strikebreakers, that had been imported by the Waddell Strike Breaking Agency of New York, to the [sic] Union Station, placed them on trains and shipped them outside of Kansas City.⁸⁰

Police chief Flahive revealed the openness of the local political system to the labor movement when he said, "This is the most wonderful event in the history of the world. Capitalists have brought strikebreakers to town, and the citizens, not the strikers, have run them out."⁸¹

While Kansas City, Missouri, officials attempted to stay neutral in the strike, Kansas City, Kansas, officials hoped to restart service on terms favorable to the strikers, and directed their police force to keep strikebreakers out of their city. Along with the Kansas City, Kansas, Chamber of Commerce, they even mulled over asking Kansas Governor Arthur Capper to declare martial law in order to seize the streetcars in order to operate them under favorable conditions. Additionally, dozens of Missouri-side police officers announced they would refuse to protect strikebreakers from violence in an act of solidarity. By Tuesday, however, the company had a federal injunction against not only strikers interfering with streetcar service, but also against a government takeover of transit service.⁸² With an injunction in place, the defeat of the strike appeared assured.

The strikers' commitment would not give way so easily in the face of judicial actions, however. Rumors spread that KC Railways Co. had given Bergoff Bros and Waddell a new budget of \$1,000,000 to break the strike. In response, 300 strikers took an oath to prevent the operation of streetcars with their lives. Another rumor circulated on Sunday and Monday that outraged the public. KC Railways Co. operated under the

⁸⁰ LOC Pinchot KCWTUL 1917-19 report.

⁸¹ *Journal* Aug 12.

⁸² *Post* Aug 11, 13, 14.

temporary direction of Clyde Taylor since its president, Col. Philip J. Kealy, had been called to service. As it so happened, Col. Kealy commanded the local Missouri National Guard regiment, newly reorganized with businessmen when the state's existing guard shipped off to Europe. City officials and newspapers accused the company of bringing in strikebreakers to create a situation so violent that the mayor would be forced to request the National Guard, which Kealy could use to personally break the strike.

Under these desperate conditions, cross class allies once again sprung into action when clubwomen sent another telegram to the Department of Labor, affirming their support for the strike after the events of the weekend, and calling it "a protest against intolerable conditions." Before mediator Feick arrived, they wrote,

May we respectfully suggest that Mr. Kealy during this critical time be requested by the proper authorities to refrain from taking part in the controversy or resign as Colonel of the Third Regiment. His position is absolutely incompatible with the continuance of a peaceful situation in Kansas City and conservation of the homes and lives of countless thousands of innocent people... The mere suggestion of the interference of federal troops in this situation would mean to the people of Kansas City that Philip J. Kealy, president of the Kansas City Railways Company, responsible for the present conditions, was placed in charge to oppress his workers.⁸³

There is no evidence that the Department of Labor attempted to intervene in the operation of the Missouri National Guard, but the telegram illustrates the steadfast support of clubwomen, even after the strike became violent. Phoebe Ess, one of the committee women, addressed the strikers on Tuesday morning, declaring, "Thousands of good citizens are behind you. We want you to win." The *Labor Herald* added, "And this was

⁸³ NA 280 33 621 Telegram from Woman's Committee on Peaceful Settlement to William B. Wilson Aug 13.

the sentiment of the entire community.”⁸⁴ Such community support and legitimation from elite clubwomen enabled a bold sense of efficacy among militant workers.

When Feick arrived on Tuesday, he immediately met with company officials, Sinclair of the AASERE, local labor representatives, and city officials. He organized a committee of forty businessmen to facilitate discussions. One of the businessmen included Henry Faxon, the husband of KCWTUL ally Peake Faxon, a respected Republican, and a friend of labor lawyer Frank P. Walsh. Through a marathon meeting from Wednesday afternoon until 4:00am Thursday morning, Feick and the businessmen secured an agreement to end the strike in a complete and total success for the strikers. Without Feick’s intervention, the company almost certainly could have broken the strike. However, Feick wrote that Taylor, acting president of the streetcar company,

informed me that the Company desired to do what was right in the matter, and if it was the wish of the Government, and if the men accepted it, he would not stand in the way, but would sign the agreement in good faith. With this understanding, I immediately went into conference with the U.S. judges and asked them to defer and set aside the injunction pending my endeavor to adjust the differences. This they agreed to do.⁸⁵

Given the public displays of support from working class Kansas Citians and clubwomen, it is possible the company feared a costly boycott even if they broke the strike. The *Labor Herald* stated, “The sympathy of the people was behind the strikers like a solid wall. With strong public opinion to back the men it is thought that the Met. in the future will not try to evade any of the provisions of the new agreement.”⁸⁶ At a Labor Temple mass meeting on the morning of August 16th, over 2,000 strikers unanimously voted to end the strike after a patriotic speech from Feick. The strike won complete victory and 98 percent

⁸⁴ *Post* Aug 14; *Labor Herald* Aug 17.

⁸⁵ NA 280 33 621 Feick’s Final Report for the Department of Labor, Nov 28.

⁸⁶ *Labor Herald* Aug. 17.

of the employees became members of the AASERE #764. They achieved an average of \$100 per year raise with their first contract in October.⁸⁷

Two moments stand out as crucial for the unlikely success of the strike: the deportation of the strikebreakers and the company's decision to yield to a federal mediator. First, the complete shutdown of trolley service required worker solidarity, community support in preventing strikebreakers from operating streetcars, and municipal neutrality. Worker solidarity can be traced to widespread dissatisfaction with the company and the strategic work done by the AASERE and local #764 to expand the strike rolls and coordinate pickets and meetings. Community support stemmed from fear of strikebreakers and the geographical proximity of working class housing, car barns, the Labor Temple, and other community institutions like saloons. The KCWTUL contributed by encouraging boycotts among women workers.

Municipal neutrality is best understood within the political opportunity lens of a fractured elite (Tarrow 1996). Republican Mayor Edwards's administration did not have the support of either Democratic machine, nor did he have the Republican machine's support. His approach to building his base involved appearing independent and somewhat progressive in his decision making. In practice, this meant he could not have sparked the ire of clubwomen by helping the streetcar company break the strike, especially after it hired Bergoff Bros and Waddell Co, nor could he call up the National Guard given Col. Kealy's position of authority. In Chapter 6 I will show how the political opportunity structure facilitated the emergence of the solidarity infrastructure. At this juncture, we

⁸⁷ NA 280 33 621 Feick's Final Report for the Department of Labor, Nov 28.

witness that the continued fractured nature of political power made the solidarity infrastructure more potent in wartime strikes.

Second, the company's decision to give in to the strikers' demands came about from pressure to swiftly end the controversy by federal mediators and local elites who were outraged over the attempt to use professional strikebreakers. While counterfactuals are impossible to prove, given the lack of successful transit strikes elsewhere it is reasonable to come to the conclusion that the Railways Co. could have eventually broken the strike with enough time and resources, even without a compliant mayor or police force. In fact, the streetcar company already had an injunction from a federal judge in hand when mediator Feick arrived. Department of Labor mediators could not force companies to enter negotiations to end strikes, nor force them to recognize unions. Their power lay exclusively in bringing the symbolic weight of the wartime government against a company. Thus, the combined symbolic weight of a federal mediator, clubwomen, and working class community support for the strikers apparently tipped the calculations of the Railways Co. toward surrender. Support articulated through the solidarity infrastructure also sparked the fire of rank and file confidence that spread to the packinghouses.

MEATPACKING STRIKE

The world's second largest meatpacking center in Kansas City, Kansas, which employed 14,000 people, ground to a halt September 12th and 13th, 1917, in another high profile strike that contributed to the momentum for militancy, as well as solidarity. About 200 Black and white women and 150 men initiated the action when they walked out of the Cudahy (pronounced coo-da-hay) canning department on September 4th, in solidarity

with a coworker that management fired for requesting an eight hour day and better pay to keep pace with wartime inflation.⁸⁸ Several thousand strikers later elected a Black laborer onto the three-person strike committee to represent workers' grievances across the Cudahy, Armour, Wilson, Morris, Swift, and Thomas Ruddy packing houses. While the KCWTUL played a central role in this strike, there is limited evidence of clubwomen involvement. Yet the solidarity infrastructure did expand through an alliance with a class and race conscious African American labor organization.

Kansas City's meatpacking workforce drew mostly from rural native born whites, Black people from the South or Kansas City, and Croatian immigrants, but also included an array of other European ethnics. During the local industry's heyday from the 1890s into the 1950s, "the diverse working class in the Kansas City stockyards altered the history of labor activism in the Midwest. Stockyards labor in the city often found common cause, providing a rare glimpse of racial cooperation in an increasingly segregated working America" (Herron 2018:121). Management did their best to divide workers in the early 1900s based on supposed essential differences:

Germans and Swedes were considered 'superior,' and of the more recent immigrants, 'the Russians are regarded as much more efficient than the Poles, and the Greeks are considered more efficient than the Italians, but not as good as the Croatians, Slovaks, and Lithuanians.' Most employers approved of the Japanese 'on account of their quickness and quietness while at work,' and everyone agreed that the Greeks and the ever-troublesome Italians were 'unsatisfactory.' (p. 126)

Management appealed to the Black residents of Kansas City by offering some of the only consistent employment opportunities outside of portering, as well as financial aid and recreational opportunities. However, only six percent of skilled workers and supervisors were African American, well below their overall proportion of the workforce, and fear of

⁸⁸ *Journal* Sept 4, 6; NA 280 33 673 Patrick F. Gill's final report, Dec. 10, 1917.

losing their jobs pervaded the ranks. As the poet Melvin Tolson later recalled of his employment in the Kansas City packinghouses around this time, “We worked under miserable conditions. Men stood in water all day. They were always scared of losing their jobs. Most of them bowed under debts” (quoted in Coulter 2006:63; also see p. 64).

While each group experienced exploitation on the job, overcoming management imposed segmentation, and discriminatory attitudes among workers, could not have come automatically.

A local labor organization called the National Council of Colored Workers (NCCW) aided in strike efforts. A Black barber named Rucker C. Smith founded the group after racist violence in East St. Louis killed scores of Black migrant workers that July. Smith hoped to turn it into a Black equivalent of the AFL on the national level, although it appears to have only been active locally and until the spring of 1918. Smith had better previous experiences with local Socialists than with labor organizers, but the meatpacking strike provided the first major opportunity to expand his nascent organization. Because of outrage over East St. Louis, Smith received support from some leaders in the African American community, including Nelson Crews (editor of the *Sun*). The NCCW’s first public meeting occurred September 2, just two days before the Cudahy walkout. Smith advocated independent organization for Black workers -- independent from white workers as well as comfortable Black preachers and professionals who, according to Smith, did not understand the struggles of Black workers. Smith urged Black workers to report discrimination by white workers and unions to the NCCW, but to join and remain on strike whenever they occurred.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ *Sun* July 28, Aug. 11, Sept. 1, Sept. 22, Oct. 13.

Thus, the NCCW provided an independent organizational basis for African Americans to link up with the solidarity infrastructure. With NCCW assistance, Black packinghouse workers could participate in the strike on a more equal footing and speak for themselves. In other words, the self activity and independent organizational basis of African American workers must be emphasized in our analysis of solidarity. Collaboration with the incipient NCCW demonstrates that a solidarity infrastructure is always a work in progress and can incorporate new organizations through collective action. The interracial organizational coalition with the KCWTUL and AMCBW no doubt contributed to class solidarity in Kansas City.

What were the origins of the meatpacking walkout? An unknown number of workers met throughout July and August to discuss unionization. Management caught wind, and foremen intimidated workers who attended the meetings and cut back their hours.⁹⁰ In April, Sarah Green and Louisa Mittelstadt of the KCWTUL had spent their early mornings outside the gates of Cudahy and Swift handing out cards encouraging workers to organize with the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America (AMCBW) and to fight for the eight hour day. The KCWTUL later claimed to have had no direct link to the walkout of women canners in September. Thus, it is difficult to know exactly how spontaneous or premeditated the Cudahy walkout was.⁹¹

On the whole, a national packinghouse strike wave throughout September can be characterized as relatively spontaneous since walkouts elsewhere also originated with low-wage workers ignored by the AMCBW (Brody 1964:75-76).⁹² What were some of

⁹⁰ NA 280 33 673 Patrick F. Gill's final report, Dec. 10, 1917.

⁹¹ *Labor Herald* Apr. 10; LOC Pinchot KCWTUL 1917-19 Report.

⁹² William Z. Foster organized an industrial-oriented unionization drive through the AMCBW in Chicago beginning September 9, five days after the Cudahy walkout.

the local inspirations for the walkout? In addition to the streetcar strike, workers in the box manufacturing industry, which sat near its biggest customer, the meatpackers, had engaged in a bitter strike since late June. Like the meatpacking strike, the 840-person strike on Forrester-Nace Box Co. began when a worker was fired for asking for a raise. D. Bruce Forrester, manager of Forrester-Nace, also served as the intransigent president of the Employers' Association. Forrester imported hundreds of Black workers from the South to break the strike, and by late September, his only white employees were supervisors. A federal mediator quoted the attitude of Forrester-Nace as such, "if the Government would arrest Sam Gompers and his ilk, and treat them as they do Germans, there would be no strikes."⁹³

When Forrester-Nace brought in Black workers from Wilson, Arkansas, just days after the horrific racist violence in East St. Louis, strikers convinced some of them, who did not know about the strike, to quit. By the time the meatpacking strike began, there were still over 700 committed strikers represented in the massive 1917 Labor Day parade. Parades of Black and white striking railroad workers later in September, discussed in the next section, made a point to stop off at Forrester-Nace to menace replacement workers, illustrating the symbolic weight this early wartime strike carried with workers more generally.⁹⁴ The success and community support for the streetcar strike also contributed to a growing sense of mass defiance.

⁹³ NA 280 33 684 Crawford Final Report to the Department of Labor, Oct. 3, 1917.

⁹⁴ *Labor Herald* July 14, Sept. 6, Sept. 13; *Post* Sept 11, Sept 22. NA 280 33 684 Sept 16 telegram to DOL from J. G. Newton.

Once the initial packinghouse walkout occurred, it took the Cudahy canning workers two days to cajole the other 2,000 or so employees of that plant to join them.

Cudahy had immediately sent two managers to parlay with the original strikers:

they had been directed by the General Office to advise these men and women that an order had been in the office for two or three days, to increase the wages of these workers 2 ½ cents an hour, but had been overlooked until called to their attention by the strike.⁹⁵

The workers took offense to this perceived lie, and countered with a demand for a five cent raise and an eight hour day. Daily parades throughout Armourdale and mass outdoor meetings at Shawnee Park likely drew large crowds of idle teens and other poor and working class people from the neighborhood (see Figure 2.1). The close proximity of the packinghouses along the Kansas River ensured that all 14,000 meatpacking workers heard the strikers' pleas to join them on a daily basis (for more on the Armourdale neighborhood, see Elmer 1919). Federal mediator Patrick F. Gill summarized the strikers' complaints as such:

1st: On account of the high cost of living, it was impossible for the employees to maintain their standard of living without an advance of their wages. 2nd: In the packing industry, owing to the uncertain amount of cattle, sheep or hogs that are received on any one day, it is a hard matter to regulate any set hours that shall constitute a day's work... 3rd: Those being the conditions, the various companies have made it a rule, that is maintained, to guarantee a minimum wage of forty hours per week. This rule has caused some dissatisfaction as in most cases the employees must report for work at 7 A.M. and if there is no work at their regular employment they must (to obtain their guarantee of forty hours) do whatever work is asked of them by their foremen... 4th: That the work is not agreeable or lucrative is evidenced by the fact that the turnover is [high].⁹⁶

White butchers and their helpers (often African Americans who were paid half as much) also complained of production speedups to keep pace with wartime demands.

⁹⁵ LOC Pinchot KCWTUL 1917-19 report.

⁹⁶ NA 280 33 673 Gill's Final Report to the Department of Labor, Dec. 10, 1917.

Furthermore, strikers were well aware of increased wartime profits, which more than doubled for the major packers (Herron 2018:en 46). One declared, “The packers are making millions in war profits. Make them pay us enough to live on.” Another said, “Mr. Armour does not let the war prevent him from getting a good profit for the meat he sells to the government, and there is no reason why we should let it deprive us of the wages and working conditions to which we are entitled.”⁹⁷ “Unskilled” laborers, disproportionately Black men, averaged about \$14.00 per week, while white and Black women in the canning departments averaged \$9.00 per week.⁹⁸ These wages could not keep pace with runaway inflation of consumer goods prices.

What role did the solidarity infrastructure play? The KCWTUL led the strike alongside the AMCBW and facilitated the inclusion of Black strikers, following national WTUL patterns of liberal attitudes toward African Americans (Kirkby 1987). The KCWTUL, NCCW, and AMCBW worked together to organize strikers into 40 committees, 12 of which were made up exclusively of women to generate their own demands. Archives do not reveal the racial makeup of the women’s committees, but one newspaper noted that about half of the women paraders were Black.⁹⁹ With KCWTUL support, women made for conspicuous members of the strike parades. One newspaper said a young woman “made a stirring appeal to the 2,000 [Cudahy] strikers not to return to work until their demands had been met.” Further, “Men and women take an equal active part in this new union.” When the meat packers offered to meet worker

⁹⁷ *Star* Sept. 7, Sept. 12.

⁹⁸ NA 280 33 673 Gill’s Final Report to the Department of Labor, Dec. 10, 1917.

⁹⁹ *Journal* Sept 6.

representatives without Sarah Green, the strikers unanimously refused, illustrating the value that workers placed on the KCWTUL's involvement.¹⁰⁰

When the Cudahy walkout transformed into a general packinghouse strike, participants elected G. W. Reed, a Black laborer at Wilson, as vice president of the strike committee. Reed, a Spanish American War veteran and preacher, had earlier given a speech at Shawnee Park stating, "All we ask is that when you divide up the pie, do not forget your colored brother."¹⁰¹ James Barrett's (1987) invaluable analysis of stockyards unionism in Chicago from 1917-21 makes it clear Kansas City was not the only packinghouse center where African Americans took active part in an AMCBW unionization drive (pp. 191-231). In Chicago, "Union, company, and government observers all agreed that race relations in the packing plants themselves were generally good during and immediately after the First World War" (p. 223). The AMCBW's unionization push attracted many Black butchers and laborers in 1917. Additionally, Black people and white women participated in a 1917 strike in Omaha (Pratt 1996:240). Thus, the Kansas City strike's inclusion of Black workers was not entirely unusual.

However, while interracial developments in American packinghouses were complex and shifted rapidly from year to year, it is clear Black butchers --who had worked in the packing centers for some time before World War I -- had the most loyalty to the AMCBW in Chicago through 1918 (Barrett 1987:204, 208). The fact that Reed worked as a laborer, and not a butcher (or butcher's "helper"), drives the significance of his election. It is unclear from documentary evidence whether the AMCBW retained Black workers' loyalty beyond 1917 in Kansas City, but the evidence of greater

¹⁰⁰ *Post* Sept. 7-9.

¹⁰¹ *Journal* Sept. 8. *Post* Sept. 12.

interracial inclusiveness here than elsewhere stands.¹⁰² For Reed's part, he went on a speaking tour of the Midwest after the war advocating working class collective action, and helped organize a 1921-22 packinghouse strike (Coulter 2006:68), illustrating that the meatpacking strike solidified a class identity for its most high-profile Black participant.

Strikers included a demand, perhaps advocated by Reed, that common laborers be able to raise complaints to hiring agents if they did not receive full time work. The strikers also demanded an across-the-board wage increase, rather than differentiate across job categories.¹⁰³ Although this demand left the racist and sexist labor market segmentation intact, it did not prioritize white butchers' sense of artisanal manhood to the extent that laborers' concerns were ignored.

The NCCW had to not only help Black strikers fight for inclusion in the strike demands, but also parry the advice of some African American community leaders. J. Silas Harris, a prominent educator, pleaded with Black workers to return to their jobs.¹⁰⁴ The *Sun* also printed an anti-strike editorial by a jewelry business owner. Joseph A. Wilson claimed the meatpacking strike was "wholly unwarranted and it was largely the ignorant foreign employees [common spelling of the period] with a small vicious native element that went out." Wilson asserted that the original walkout constituted a racist act:

the trouble started because a large number of Negro women and girls were recently employed there and the foreign white girls objected to working at the same bench with them and complained because the Negro girls on account of their strength worked faster than the white girls and made more money. The

¹⁰² Although the AMCBW won the eight hour day through federal arbitration in March 1918, Melvin Tolson noted that the packinghouses simply sped production up to make up for the ninth and tenth hours lost, undermining AMCBW's appeal as an efficacious organization (Coulter 2006:63). Nationally, membership dropped sharply throughout 1919-20 (Brody 1964:84, 95).

¹⁰³ NA 280 33 673 Gill report.

¹⁰⁴ *Post* Sept. 13

foreign girls struck, the men went out with them and it is the common opinion that one of the objects of the strikers demand that their union be recognized was their hope to oust the Negroes from the good jobs.¹⁰⁵

I have not come across any other instances of this claim or supporting evidence. Smith's response communicated his own worry about racist strikers when he demanded that the AMCBW remember that most Black workers struck, and that the NCCW "demand of the A.F. of L. a square deal for our Colored Workers. We shall resent any system of weeding out, or any attempt to intimidate Colored workers after the strike is over." Nonetheless, he went on to address Black workers: "To our Colored brother, we advise you to not be a scab, remember you belong to the working class, and if the unions offer to be fair with you, join hands with them in the struggle, capital against labor."¹⁰⁶ The NCCW provided Black workers with the organizational basis for linking up with the solidarity infrastructure while simultaneously fighting against power asymmetries within the labor movement coalition.

In the meatpacking strike, union organizers took the lead in communicating with Department of Labor mediators. Timothy A. McCreash, organizer for the AMCBW, requested federal mediation on September 9th. The Department of Labor first attempted to assign Fred Feick, who had settled the streetcar strike, but he was unable to come due to a foot injury. In an instance of historical contingency, Patrick Gill received the assignment instead. Gill pushed much harder on the issue of union recognition than local anti-union forces believed Feick would have. Notably, a telegram from three individuals on September 8th, including Alice Mary Kimball (a member of the streetcar strike Woman's Committee) specifically requested Gill by name (this is the only documentary

¹⁰⁵ *Sun* Sept. 22.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

clue of clubwomen involvement). The Department of Labor later received two angry telegrams from the Kansas City, Kansas, Chamber of Commerce and US Senator William H. Thompson (KS) requesting Gill be removed and Feick sent instead. The Chamber wrote that the meatpackers refused to negotiate with the AMCBW,

and the situation is critical as the fair name of our city stands to be blackened. We would respectfully request that the Dept. of Labor immediately send here some mediator the type of Frederick Feick who handled the local street car strike and has just settled the packing strike in Omaha with no union recognition. This appeal is made in behalf of our community at a time when we believe public safety is in peril. The Chamber of Commerce holds no brief for the plant managers of the strikers but wants a peaceful city.¹⁰⁷

Gill did not mention this controversy in his report on the strike to the Department of Labor, and even claimed he had nearly ended the Cudahy strike before it spread to Wilson on September 10th. Local newspaper articles, however, reported workers began walking out there by the 6th and organizers had already threatened a general meatpacking strike on the 8th.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the trickle of walkouts turned into a flood on September 11th, and all the packing houses shuttered by the 12th. The only workers left on their jobs were refrigerator employees to prevent meat spoilage.

The only major riot of the strike occurred outside the Armour gates on the evening of the 12th, when a company watchman apparently shot a striker. Within two hours, a crowd of 10,000 people arrived, and the picketers alleged that people inside the Armour plant threw bricks into the crowd, seriously injuring at least three people.¹⁰⁹ Department of Labor officials attributed the otherwise peaceful nature of the strike to the work of Kansas City, Kansas, Mayor Harry Mendenhall and police chief W. W. Gordon,

¹⁰⁷ NA 280 33 673 telegram.

¹⁰⁸ *Star* Sept. 6.

¹⁰⁹ *Journal* Sept. 12; *Star* Sept. 13.

as well as McCreash of the AMCBW and AFL organizer Stanley Cupinski. Prior to Gill's arrival, Mendenhall and Gordon carried messages between the strikers and the companies, and spoke regularly at the mass meetings. Remarkably, Gordon helped strikers dispel rumors spread by the Chamber of Commerce, demonstrating the Kansas side political system was not just open to the labor movement, but also lent auxiliary support. Notably, Mendenhall gained office in early 1917 with union endorsement.¹¹⁰

According to mediator Gill,

In this strike there were no armed guards or strike breakers. Too much can not be said in praise of Chief Gordon and the Police Department of Kansas City, Kansas, for the way they handled the situation. There were 14,000 men and women out on strike together with 2,000 men and women from the Soap Works out on strike. The Chief and his men were fair at all times. That his fairness was appreciated by all is shown by the fact there was not a dollar's worth of property disturbed, and only a few men arrested charged with intoxication [sic].¹¹¹

McCreash and Cupinski worked overtime to keep the strike orderly, with Cupinski having to disperse a few hundred agitated Slavic strikers after the strike settlement, because they did not speak English and did not understand why people were returning to their jobs.¹¹²

The strikers won most of their demands and signed the same deal with each meatpacker separately on September 13th. Although Green of the KCWTUL served as a negotiator, there is no evidence of NCCW direct involvement in the negotiations. The packers only agreed to half the wage increase requested, refused to sign off on overtime pay, and did not formally recognize AMCBW representation of their employees. They were forced, however, to agree to meet with employee grievance committees and reform

¹¹⁰ *Star* Feb. 3, Apr. 3, Sept. 12.

¹¹¹ NA 280 33 673 Gill report.

¹¹² *Star* Sept 14.

the hiring system. It stands out as the most successful meatpacking organizing effort in Kansas City when compared to other moments in 1896-98, 1904, and 1921-22. Without the pressures brought by Kansas City, Kansas, officials and the pro-union Gill, as well as solidarity across race, ethnicity, gender, and pay scale among the strikers, failure was likely.

Despite scant evidence of clubwomen involvement, a speculative word on the role of the KCWTUL, which had the full confidence of clubwomen and the labor movement, in the strike's success is in order. Without Sarah Green's contributions, McCreash and Cupinski may not have had the guts to carry this wartime strike to its conclusion. Soon after the strike, Cupinski requested a US Attorney investigate meatpacking workers, claiming foreign radicals and the IWW were trying to stir up trouble, saying "we don't desire reputable union men to be connected in any way with their agitation."¹¹³ Green, on the other hand, refused to entertain any such rhetoric about workers. Armour printed a full page ad in September 12 newspapers making several claims about the strike, including, "The truth of the matter is that the present situation has been the result of a small minority of malcontents -- I.W.W. and Anti-War Agitators." Sarah Green immediately called their bluff, demanding the owner J. Ogden Armour fulfill his patriotic duty and provide the government with evidence of IWW interference.¹¹⁴

Assessing McCreash's orientation is more challenging. President Wilson assigned Chicago Judge Samuel Alschuler to look into national meatpacking working conditions in December 1917. Frank Walsh represented packinghouse workers across the country, and McCreash testified on behalf of Kansas City workers. McCreash, "took particular

¹¹³ *Star* Sept. 20.

¹¹⁴ *Post* Sept. 13.

pains to protect the interests of white males,” but, “[i]nstead of demanding work rules or arbitration decisions that reduced the number of black or female workers, McCreash asked Alschuler to erase the wage differential that made those workers more attractive to employers by establishing equal wages for men and women of both races” (Schirmer 2002:61). McCreash’s experience of the power that gender and race solidarity brought to striking workers in September no doubt influenced his decision to request equal pay, but it is hard to gauge how he would have organized the strike without KCWTUL or NCCW involvement. An experienced AMCBW organizer, McCreash later spent sixty days in a Colorado jail after refusing to recognize a court injunction against a strike, indicating a high degree of commitment and militancy within the AMCBW (Lackland 1922). To speculate, he likely shared Green’s militancy, and the involvement of the KCWTUL and NCCW in the strike facilitated his commitment to equal pay rather than outright exclusion. Several other smaller strikes broke out throughout the late summer and autumn of 1917, illustrating the growing wartime militancy and confidence of Kansas City workers.

OTHER SEPTEMBER STRIKES

After the transit and meatpacking strikes, a fever for union recognition spread through diverse workers in walkouts across dozens of workplaces. The degree to which these actions succeeded in their goals or exhibited solidarity varied greatly. Nonetheless, a brief summary of these strikes illustrates the sense of efficacy that saturated the working class due to the previous strikes that both revealed and strengthened a counter-hegemonic bloc: the solidarity infrastructure. At the same time, an organizing drive for

low wage freight handlers and clerks employed by railroad companies illustrates the limited reach of the solidarity infrastructure.

*Railroad Freight Handlers*¹¹⁵

Labor organizer Dan T. Richmond attempted to establish a Brotherhood of Railway Clerks and Freight Handlers in September. There were four established railroad Brotherhoods that organized skilled workers around the country, and they were not affiliated with the AFL. The notoriously exclusionary Brotherhoods worked diligently to maintain craft divisions and keep women and people of color out of their occupations (Arnesen 1994).

For example, the KCWTUL previously helped organize white women coach cleaners over the summer, whom the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen grudgingly accepted in the fall of 1917 by revising their constitution to allow “white female workers.” But the Brotherhood “created a similar [racist] feeling” among their new white sisters, who already felt themselves above wearing overalls, which they associated with Black women workers. Nevertheless, the KCWTUL also helped organize the Black women coach cleaners into an AFL federal union.¹¹⁶ Although it was the preference of Green and the KCWTUL to organize white and Black women together, as in the packinghouses, these white women could not be convinced of solidarity, particularly when their union explicitly endorsed racism.

¹¹⁵ The railroads owned large warehouses in the West Bottoms for freight, while other business and consumer services were located at Union Station (see Figure 2.1).

¹¹⁶ LOC Pinchot KCWTUL 1917-19 Report.

Richmond scheduled a mass meeting at the Labor Temple for the clerks and handlers, which included a significant number of Black men, on the night of September the 4th. Richmond encouraged the workers to “Wake up! Every branch of the Railroad Service is thoroughly organized but you. You have seen what organization did for the Big Four Brotherhood and the Street Car Men of Kansas City.” Several of the major railroads, particularly the Missouri Pacific, fired workers interested in the new union. The MKT line fired its entire staff of clerks and handlers on September 8th.¹¹⁷ That same day, the mail and baggage workers at Union Station walked out on the Kansas City Terminal Co. Clerks, freight handlers, and Teamsters also walked out on Wells Fargo Express and Adams Express at Union Station.¹¹⁸ Local management organized through a terminal employment association, presided over by Horace Havelock “Captain” Anderson, the infamous secretary of the Kansas City Employers’ Association.

Over the course of several days, firings, lockouts, and walkouts spread across twelve railroad lines, Kansas City Terminal, and Wells Fargo Express, Adams Express, and American Express throughout the West Bottoms and Union Station. On September 16th, 350 Switchmen on the Frisco railroad joined the strike in sympathy, completely shutting down the Terminal yards the next day. The Terminal president, W. M. Corbett, telegraphed the Council of National Defense in Washington, DC, and the Brotherhood’s Richmond wired the Department of Labor asking for mediation (Patrick Gill was assigned on the 18th). Corbett pointed out that Frisco handled large volumes of government business, and wrote, “Switchmen have presented no grievance; sympathetic strike. Railroads officials had received no grievance from the freight handlers or clerical

¹¹⁷ NA 280 33 690 handbill. NA 280 33 690 Gill final report to Department of Labor, Jan. 10, 1918.

¹¹⁸ *Labor Herald* Sept. 13; *Star* Sept. 8.

forces. They are leaving the service due to the efforts of outsiders who came to Kansas City some time ago to organize all labor and clerical forces.”¹¹⁹

Railroad strikers paraded in the West Bottoms, by Union Station, and toward the Labor Temple on the 10th, 11th, and 12th. The parades included women workers in other industries discussed below. Of the 1,200 marchers in one parade, 300 were Black men walking with fellow white freight handlers. By the time the railroads came to a standstill on September 16th, about 1,200 to 1,800 workers participated in the strike on the freight houses, along with 200 to 300 clerks. An additional 200 to 400 Teamsters and 350 switchmen were out in sympathy.¹²⁰

The Brotherhood of Trainmen, however, quickly undermined solidarity among the different segments of workers before meaningful gains could be achieved. On the 18th, the Brotherhood ordered their switchmen to return to work. Of the 350 switchmen, thirty-seven were not union members and decided to remain on strike. Calling themselves “No Bills”, they refused to return to work until the clerks and handlers finished the strike. The Brotherhood of Trainmen helped the railroads replace the No Bills. With the switchmen back on the job and use of “scab” workers to replace the handlers and clerks, the leverage available to the newly formed Brotherhood of Railway Clerks and Freight Handlers disappeared. At a September 22 Labor Temple meeting, 500 of the original strikers agreed to return to work without any employer concessions. The Teamsters, who had risked their employment with other Kansas City businesses by joining the sympathy

¹¹⁹ NA 280 33 690 Sept 16 telegram.

¹²⁰ *Post* Sept. 11. NA 280 33 690 Gill final report to Department of Labor, Jan. 10, 1918.

strike, quickly returned to work. The thirty-seven No Bills and hundreds of clerks and handlers who refused to end their strike (mostly at Santa Fe) were left without jobs.¹²¹

Part of the story of the strike's collapse included anti-Mexican racism on behalf of the Kansas City labor movement. The strike caught the attention of the US Postal Service, then under the direction of the most reactionary member of the Wilson Administration, Albert Burleson. The Post Office ordered their own unionized mail clerks to do the work of the striking baggage handlers for the privately owned Kansas City Terminal, angering unionists. Many were doubly outraged, however, when railroads hired Mexican replacement workers. The Brotherhoods' paper, *Railway Mail*, wrote a barbed front page screed on the conflict: "On the order of the Division Superintendent and local Chief Clerks, the railway mail clerks of Kansas City are working with Mexicans and other 'finks'... all classes of mail are being delayed and missent by trying to use the Mexicans as loaders and truckmen."¹²² It is not surprising to find racist subtext in the Brotherhoods' paper, but the Kansas City labor movement's *Labor Herald*, which normally used race-neutral language, went further in its rhetoric. Seen as outsiders to a greater degree than African Americans, the *Labor Herald* attacked the 300 Mexican replacement workers with the slur "greasers":

the Kansas City Terminal Company had brought three coach loads of greasers to the Union Station to take these men's places. It is generally understood that the Santa Fe Railroad Company owns a big slice of stock in the Terminal Company and they have probably recruited these Mexicans along the line, for this company employs greasers exclusively as trackworkers over its entire system, and herds them together like sheep in shacks on the right-of-way of the road.¹²³

¹²¹ NA 280 33 673 Gill report. NA 280 33 690 Gill report.

¹²² NA 280 33 690 *Railway Mail* 31(9).

¹²³ *Labor Herald* Sept. 14.

Because of the timing, it is possible the Teamsters or Switchmen initiated their sympathy strikes in opposition to the Mexican replacement workers on racist grounds.¹²⁴

The freight handlers' failed attempt to achieve union recognition raises difficult questions regarding the solidarity infrastructure. On one hand it illustrates that the railroad Brotherhoods remained outside the meso-level emergent structure that encompassed the AFL-affiliated labor movement. They remained firmly committed to their sectional interests, both in terms of their trades and in racist exclusionary practices. Yet the uncharacteristic willingness of the *Labor Herald* to use dehumanizing language when referring to Mexicans also hints that the solidarity infrastructure's articulation of working class solidarity could extend across race and gender, but not nationality. I include the freight handlers' strike here to highlight the messiness and limitations of the solidarity infrastructure process in Kansas City.

Soap Manufacturers

A host of walkouts in September and October illustrated that the solidarity infrastructure articulated class identity for rank and file workers witnessing the streetcar and packinghouse strikes. Over a thousand soap manufacturing workers, mostly women, took the meatpacking strike as an opportunity to shut down two major soap facilities with KCWTUL support. The Peet Brothers and Proctor & Gamble soap plants took byproducts from the meatpackers to churn soap out for national and global markets. Women workers walked out of Peet Brothers on September 8th and out of Proctor & Gamble on the 11th. Building tradesmen supported the Proctor & Gamble strikers by

¹²⁴ *Star* Sept. 15, *Labor Herald* Sept. 21.

refusing to work on construction of a new building.¹²⁵ But the managers of the soap facilities proved to be more stubborn than the meatpackers, as these strikes did not fully resolve until mid October.

It is not clear from documentary evidence if the strikers had discussed unionization prior to the meatpacking strike. A common complaint of the women workers, however, included extremely low pay coupled with a bonus system that only benefited whoever the foremen favored. By early October, the soap plants reopened with a fraction of its normal workforce -- likely using both discouraged strikers and “scabs.” The strikers, led by Green and the KCWTUL, continued to hold regular mass meetings and pickets around the clock. According to Gill,

Both of these strikes could be very easily settled as the strikers have waived [sic] all demands except the right to be members of the Soap Workers Union, as well as the elimination of the Bonus system to a straight wage. Unfortunately, Mr. Skillman, Kansas City manager of Proctor and Gamble, and Mr. Dalton of Peet Brothers, have taken the position that they will not deal with any committee, but will only deal with their employees individually [i.e., without union involvement].¹²⁶

The soap strike turned desperate in October. Management accused three strikers of attacking a foreman on the night of the 2nd. The Kansas City, Kansas, police department expanded the number of officers protecting “scabs” from eggs and bricks. They arrested Louis Derr, a worker at nearby Sinclair Oil, for slashing the tires on Mr. Dalton’s car. When Sarah Green showed up to Derr’s court hearing as a witness on his behalf, police arrested her on accusations that she attempted to incite a riot by shouting

¹²⁵ *Star* Sept. 12.

¹²⁶ NA 280 33 673 Gill report Oct. 2.

“scab” at soap workers. The charges against Green were quickly dropped, but the soap plants secured an injunction against the strikers on October 10th.¹²⁷

Management broke the strike, but federal mediation continued to advocate for its participants. Peet Brothers settled on October the 11th, and Proctor & Gamble on the 18th. Mayor Mendenhall and Chief Gordon helped convince Peet Brothers to take back the strikers and not discriminate against union members.¹²⁸ Mediator Feick also aided in the effort from Cincinnati, where he convinced

Mr. Proctor to consent to not to discriminate against the employees of the Proctor and Gamble Soap Company for being members of Organized Labor. That Company held out as long as possible and the only reason that they ever consented to make an agreement, was because of the fact that they have a new building in the course of construction, on which is employed about four hundred mechanics, all member of the various organizations. These men all refused to work and had the building tied up, and had made the statement to me time and time again that the building would be never finished until the Soapmakers declared the strike off, or the Proctor and Gamble people recognized the right of its employees to organize.¹²⁹

This instance of a building tradesmen sympathy strike with women workers encapsulated a commitment to working class formation in Kansas City over their own sectional interests or policies of their international unions. It demonstrates that the emergent solidarity infrastructure created new possibilities for solidaristic collective action.

With only verbal agreements to increase wages 50 cents per day and abolish the bonus system to end the strike, the KCWTUL immediately received several complaints that the soap manufacturers reneged on their promises.¹³⁰ The employers

organized different clubs among the employees, and organized motion picture theatres and parties and dances of all descriptions, and managed to hold [union members] away on the night that the Local of the Soap Workers was to hold its

¹²⁷ *Star* Oct. 3-4, Oct. 10; *Post* Oct. 4-5.

¹²⁸ *Post* Oct. 12.

¹²⁹ NA 280 33 673 Gill to Kerwin Oct. 19.

¹³⁰ *Labor Herald* Oct. 19.

meeting. And because of this, the Soap Workers' Local decreased in membership.¹³¹

Without a victory, the soap employees could not maintain collective action in opposition to their employers. Despite the aid from the KCWTUL and Department of Labor mediation, management of the soap factories outlasted the strikers' ability to halt and slow down production.

Nonetheless, the soap walkout occurred for reasons beyond wartime inflation and the opportunity created by the meatpacking strike's effects on the supply of raw material. These low-wage women witnessed the community and elite clubwomen support for worker militancy in the streetcar strike, as well as a process of working class formation in the packinghouses inclusive of white and Black women. The solidarity infrastructure created new conditions for which a diverse industrial workforce could imagine themselves joining the labor movement and having access to strategic and political support in order to be successful. Without the presence of the solidarity infrastructure, these women's grievances may not have translated into a willingness to take risks involved in collective action.

Other Strikes

Hundreds of women workers who made candy and biscuits also caught the "strike fever" in September. The Loose-Wiles and Bliss Syrup operations, under the same ownership, made candy and biscuit products in the West Bottoms. On September 12, 300 women walked out of the candy plant, more walked out of the biscuit plant, and over twenty from the syrup facility. The strikers were not organized, but they immediately

¹³¹ LOC Pinchot KCWTUL 1917-19 report.

joined the large parades of railroad strikers in the West Bottoms. The strikers met at the Labor Temple on the 15th and signed up with the Bakers and Confectionery Workers Industrial Union. Loose-Wiles bakers joined the strike on the 17th, shuttering the plants. Someone from the Labor Temple requested mediation services from the Department of Labor on the 17th, which assigned Mark L. Crawford to the job. A strike committee drafted nine demands on the 18th on behalf of 200 “girls” and 60 men, though more may have joined later. The women strikers gave up by the end of the month without winning any concessions.¹³²

Workers also walked out at the Stockyards, Kansas City Wholesale, Bemis Bag, Kansas City Macaroni, American Can, Gille Can, Boss Manufacturing, Kansas City Waste Paper, Kansas City Light and Power, Janssen-Ostertag Can Manufacturing, and Chace Bag, and taxicab drivers went on a short strike. The *Labor Herald* reported hundreds of workers streaming into the Labor Temple on a daily basis to sign union cards throughout September, with new locals including the Window Washers, Barber Shop Porters, Bag Workers, Furniture Packers and Handlers, Water Works Employees, and Sewer Workers. With KCWTUL support, retail clerks in the shopping district downtown attempted to form a Retail Clerks’ Protective Association. Several dairies closed for a few days during a strike of union milk delivery drivers that apparently turned into an industry-wide lockout. Instances of new walkouts came to a close in the last week of September, but new unions continued to form through the rest of 1917.¹³³

¹³² *Labor Herald* Sept. 21; *Post* Sept. 12, Sept. 17; *Star* Sept. 16-17. NA 280 33 694 Crawford report Sept. 18.

¹³³ *Star* and *Post* Sept 12-15; *Star* Sept. 22; *Labor Herald* Oct. 5, Oct. 19.

The actions of workers, union organizers, and other components of the solidarity infrastructure, produced a collective efficacy within the labor movement that led into the 1918 general strike. The necessity of the already existing solidarity infrastructure prior to the war is illuminated by the role the KCWTUL and clubwomen played in these successes. The strikes widened the circle of solidarity within the labor movement, and raised the stakes of each successive strike regarding the balance of power between the Employers' Association and Labor Temple. A counter-hegemonic bloc went into motion, as the solidarity infrastructure lent resources and legitimacy to direct action. The EA responded with a counteroffensive in the newspapers, helping to sharpen class lines and undermine their own legitimacy, thereby strengthening cross class ties within the solidarity infrastructure.

ANTI UNION AD BLITZ

Three days after the meatpacking strike settled, and on the same day the Switchmen shut down railroad activity in sympathy with freight handlers and yard clerks, Kansas Citians woke up to a full page message in the newspapers from a "Business Men's Association of Kansas City." From September 16th through October 5th, the Employers' Association, calling itself the Business Men's Association, placed seventeen messages in the daily newspapers, six of which were full page.¹³⁴ The ads rhetorically

¹³⁴ By the time the world war broke out, D. Bruce Forrester, the manager of the above mentioned Forrester-Nace Box Company, presided over the Employers' Association (Citizens Historical Association 1939:147-148). The EA's secretary, Horace Havelock "Captain" Anderson, managed the Kansas City Transfer Company. Anderson, who viewed access to cheap compliant workers as his right, liked telling the story of growing up in Richmond during the Civil War, and being forced to work the fields at the age of eight after his family's enslaved workers deserted the plantation (Kansas City Press Club 1912:237; Whitney 1908:395-399). Anderson aggressively attacked not only unions, but business owners willing to sign union contracts.

placed all of the blame for industrial unrest upon unnamed outside agitators, and explicitly called the strikers “dupes,” whose participation in the unrest tragically meant loss of income for their families. The ads used the fact that the strikers’ main demand was for union recognition, in order to claim that wages and working conditions remained satisfactory for the vast number of workers. The business men even attempted to symbolically link the deportation of streetcar “finks,” which the business men implied they were in favor of, with the alleged labor agitators who were supposedly just as foreign to Kansas City as those “finks.” Instead, because the ads failed to successfully tie patriotism with anti-unionism in the face of a strong solidarity infrastructure, they helped solidify what Dixon and colleagues (2013) call the “symbolic target vulnerability” of Employers’ Association members. The advertisement blitz provides a useful opportunity for analyzing the counter-framing work capitalists engaged in to attempt to win back public support.

The outrageous accusations and demeaning rhetoric, however, did not work on clubwomen. Clubwomen later wrote to the Department of Labor, “Organized labor charged, apparently not without foundation in fact, that newspapers were disciplined by intimations of withdrawal of advertising, and that business men who refused to subscribe to the enterprise were threatened and intimidated.”¹³⁵ Elaborating on this exasperation, mediator Crawford wrote,

The numerous strikes that existed in Kansas City when I was there I attribute largely to the uncalled for, scurrillous [sic], and injudicious page advertising that daily occurred in all the papers by an organization that called itself ‘Business men and Manufacturers Association.’ In that particular locality I believe this organization done more [sic] to disturb labor conditions than all the I.W.W.’s and German Money combined.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ NA 280 33 993 Industrial Relation’s Women’s Committee to DoL March 13, 1918.

¹³⁶ NA 280 33 694 Crawford to DOL Oct. 18.

The Employers' Association attempted to maintain social control over workers when they confidently and repeatedly stated the claim that workers had been bullied into striking by unnamed outsiders, "There is ample evidence that an organized force of professional agitators, numbering more than one hundred and twenty-five, has taken up quarters in Kansas City for the express purpose of promoting discord between employers and employees in practically all industrial lines in which labor, skilled or unskilled, is employed." The motive behind the strikes included

an attempt to take advantage of abnormal wartime conditions to embarrass and harass Kansas City manufacturers and business institutions, to further the selfish interests of an unpatriotic and non-productive group of habitual trouble makers. This attempt is being projected under the guise of a campaign to make Kansas City a 'closed shop' city -- a community in which no man, no matter how efficient or capable, could obtain employment unless he be a union member.¹³⁷

According to the Employers' Association, it was the "professional agitators" who spread propaganda,

That the employer, the man who makes it possible for hundreds of other men to feed their children, must forever remain the natural enemy of his employees. This false doctrine, as preached by professional distributors, is responsible for more hatred, cruelty and violence than any propaganda preached in this country.¹³⁸

Employers also, however, represented their workers as "dupes," and working conditions as ideal. One ad asserted that the soap strikers were an example

of how workers are made the dupes of outside conspirators. Hundreds of employees, men, women and girls, formerly working contentedly at these two plants, now are idle. These men, women and girls were not highly skilled workers, and there was no union of soapmakers... The hundreds of workers were persuaded and coerced into quitting their jobs--for what? To supply the force behind a demand for union 'recognition,' necessary to make these factories 'closed shops!'¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Sept. 16 newspapers (*Star, Post, Journal*).

¹³⁸ Oct. 3 newspapers.

¹³⁹ Sept. 27 newspapers.

Referencing strikers more generally, “That they were the dupes of unscrupulous trouble-makers who are drawing pay for promoting industrial unrest during a National crisis has been forcibly brought home to hundreds of those who found themselves called upon to endure protracted idleness.” The ads demanded that strikers ask themselves why they walked out, and to answer “I have been a catspaw for the enemies of the business that gave me my living. This has cost me a good job and it has cost my employer a lot of money -- what has it cost the paid strike promoter?”¹⁴⁰

The business men framed the labor movement’s unionization drive and walkout wave as a battle for Kansas City:

We are going to drive these enemies of honest labor and industry out of Kansas City -- or be compelled to close the very shops, factories and stores which furnish the contented livelihood of thousands of our citizens and co-workers! Kansas City, This Is YOUR Fight! Your Whole Industrial Future and Public Welfare Are at Stake!¹⁴¹

The employers further claimed that they had no problem with workers joining unions:

This association has no quarrel with union labor or union men; many of its members employ union labor exclusively or in part. They believe, too, that there are instances in Kansas City where labor may be underpaid and working conditions intolerable. In such instances their sympathy and support is with the workers.¹⁴²

The implication, however, was that workers should be able to join any organization they wanted to, as long as it did not interfere with an employer’s dictatorial control of the workplace. The ads also operated with the assumption that only “skilled” workers had a reason to become unionized, in an appeal to the most divisive elements of trade unionism.

¹⁴⁰ Oct. 4-5 newspapers.

¹⁴¹ Oct. 1 newspapers.

¹⁴² Sept. 21 newspapers.

Wartime rhetoric of loyalty and sacrifice for democracy unsurprisingly made its way into the ads. Most dramatically, one ad featured a cartoon of the German Kaiser smiling while reading a newspaper that read, “Strike agitation would tie up industries in Kansas City, In the Heart of the U.S.! War preparations hindered.” This image contrasted with a cartoon of a manly and patriotic worker shaking hands with a soldier. A full page cartoon of a rotund “labor agitator,” complete with coat tails, top hat, and cigar, shows the labor organizer adding to the Declaration of Independence’s claims to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, “Provided they belong to the Union!”, implying that union recognition constituted a defilement of the American Revolution.¹⁴³

Finally, the employers’ messages in the newspapers positioned business men as noble figures fighting on behalf of the community against a closed shop situation, which they warned could lead to a general strike: “‘Closed shop’ conditions in a city produce the sympathetic strike, because union leaders completely tie up a city through calling out the combined strength of their unions and use their power to enforce extravagant demands of individuals unions.” Using the logic of “right to work” laws, they wrote, “We intend to fight to the last ditch all attempts to make Kansas City a place which denies any honest man the right of Life, Liberty and the pursuit of happiness -- which are inalienable under our flag!” In short, businessmen were the only thing standing between Kansas City and “the Strike Wasp” that “labor agitators” had imported from elsewhere.¹⁴⁴

The ads provide our analysis with a kind of structure test. They had no ill effects on the solidarity infrastructure, and, if anything, their dubious claims undermined their own argument that the sympathy strike tactic was anti-American. The public relations

¹⁴³ Sept. 23, Sept. 26, Sept. 28 newspapers.

¹⁴⁴ Sept. 24-25, Oct. 2 newspapers.

blitz can also be seen as an auxiliary outcome to solidarity infrastructure formation. Had the EA not been worried about their hegemonic dominance over the levers of municipal power and various elite social forces, they may not have felt the need to begin an expensive public relations campaign. Low wage workers could have otherwise been replaced with desperate people, and pickets dispersed with violence.

The historically frigid temperatures of the 1917-18 winter cooled class struggle off for a few months, but not the KCWTUL's organizing work. Green looked to expand the working class to include Black domestic workers.

DOMESTIC WORKERS UNION

As the solidarity infrastructure articulated inclusive class identity through organizational links and successful strikes, the KCWTUL, as a bridging organization, made a more conscious effort to bring African Americans into the labor movement fold. The KCWTUL initiated a campaign to organize Black domestic workers in November of 1917. After a slow start attempting to interest African American domestic workers directly, Sarah Green spent her Sundays through December speaking at Black churches to seek help. Under the leadership of Josephine Abernathy, 135 to 200 Black domestic workers received an AFL federal union charter under the name Day Workers' Industrial Union. Abernathy was an active Black clubwoman and co-owner of a catchall business that did real estate, flowers, fruits, and insurance, and served as a "laundry and employment agency."¹⁴⁵ Without the pre existing indigenous mobilizing capacity (Morris 1986) of the Black community, Green's organizing attempts would have gone nowhere.

¹⁴⁵ *Labor Herald* Dec. 7. It is not clear exactly when she offered which services, see *Sun* Feb. 15, 1919.

The union swiftly won increased wages from \$1.50 per day to \$2.00 and a reduction from a nine hour to eight hour day. The KCWTUL helped win another 50 cent increase in wages in February 1919. The union held weekly meetings at the Labor Temple, a central location in the Black community. The union put a call for members in the *Sun*, writing, “Do not be afraid of losing your work, as no one is doing day work but the Colored women, and this is your opportunity to ask for what we want and receive it as well, as the high cost of living makes it necessary.”¹⁴⁶ Given the backing of the KCWTUL and long term relationships between white and Black clubwomen, Black domestic workers could take a chance with open collective action because an infrastructure of support came together that reduced the risks of participation.

There remains little historical information about the Day Workers’ Industrial Union, but this brief example exhibits the generative possibilities of the solidarity infrastructure. The potency and solidity of the counter-hegemonic bloc created new possibilities for pulling additional groups into its gravitational pull. The KCWTUL decided it made sense to organize a group of Black women scattered about the city in atomized workplaces into the labor movement in this context. The fact that they were successful in achieving real benefits in a difficult organizing context provides a dramatic illustration of the labor movement’s momentum going into 1918.

CONCLUSION

By January 1918, Kansas City’s anti-union forces felt embattled on all sides. The mayor, clubwomen, and the Department of Labor all seemed to back the swelling labor

¹⁴⁶ *Sun* Dec. 22. LOC Pinchot KCWTUL 1917-19 report.

movement that resisted being divided by wage level, gender, or race. The Employers' Association therefore decided to commit a \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 war chest to destroy the next strike for union recognition in order to stem the tide.¹⁴⁷

Several factors came together to make this moment possible. Some were familiar to other cities around the U.S., like inflation, war rhetoric, federal mediation, and working class community support. The fractured political environment in Kansas City happened to overlap with the first year of US involvement in the Great War, providing a political opportunity for the labor movement to be aggressive in its unionization push. None of the political boss organizations were in power, and Mayor Edwards had to cobble together as big of a constituency as he could. In practice, this meant that Edwards, a Republican business owner, had to do his best to avoid the anger of the labor movement and its middle class supporters. Some of his actions did draw the ire of labor -- the closure of the Factory Inspection office of the Board of Public Welfare in the spring of 1917 and his veto of an anti-"fink" ordinance, for example.¹⁴⁸ But his unwillingness to directly intervene in strikes on employers' behalf kept the possibility of success alive in each walkout.

The above narrative also begins to establish the importance of a solidarity infrastructure to our story. On one hand, federal mediators played a crucial role in jumpstarting momentum and confidence within the working class. But on the other hand, mediators were available everywhere in the country, so they cannot alone explain unique features of the Kansas City case. What mobilized federal mediation, and helped shape the framing of strike actions for both mediators and municipal officials, were actors in the

¹⁴⁷ NA 280 33 993 Gill report Apr. 5, 1918.

¹⁴⁸ *Labor Herald* June 15, 1917, Jan. 4, 1918; *Star* May 26, 1917.

solidarity infrastructure. Clubwomen continued to lend their symbolic weight to the worthiness of workers' causes, even after the violent episode with streetcar strikebreakers. If anything, the actions of employers to import strikebreakers, spread lies and rumors about strikes, and publish over-the-top anti union and condescending rhetoric in the newspapers strengthened the relationships between the labor movement and clubwomen within the solidarity infrastructure going into 1918. Support from clubwomen also strengthened and clarified the political opportunity that relatively friendly municipal administrations afforded strikes by leaving the police and national guard mostly out of the conflicts.

Clubwomen's political interests had already been articulated through the solidarity infrastructure in terms of support for workers' rights over unchecked property rights. Their immediate support for the streetcar strike helped to tip the balance in that conflict and provided a sense of collective efficacy among rank and file workers. The bridging efforts of the KCWTUL and independent organizational resources of the NCCW deepened and revealed a solidarity infrastructure that could help workers take control of their daily lives. Having a counter-hegemonic bloc gain confidence in the streets and newspapers of Kansas City posed a threat that the Employers' Association had to respond to. Yet the strength of the solidarity infrastructure withstood their attacks, creating a highly polarized balance of class forces by the end of 1917.

Figure 4.1. Pictures of People and Events. See Bibliography for location of sources. Printed under fair use.

Upper left: Sarah Green, waitress and president of the Kansas City Women's Trade Union League (*Life & Labor* Nov. 1916, 170). **Upper right:** Sarah Green (*Life & Labor* June 1921, 162). **Bottom left:** Rucker C. Smith, barber and founder of the National Council of Colored Workers (*Sun* Oct. 13, 1917). **Bottom right:** William C. Hueston, lawyer and Black GOP candidate for 8th Ward in the April 1918 elections.

Upper left: “Captain” Anderson, secretary of the Employers’ Association (Kansas City Press Club 1912:237). **Upper right:** Col. Philip J. Kealy, president of the Kansas City Railways Co. (Tracy 1925:130). **Bottom left:** KCMO Mayor George Edwards (1916-18) (Kansas City Press Club 1912:148). **Bottom right:** Lacue H. Fisher, president of the Kansas City Laundry Services Co. (Tracy 1925:92).

FIRST TROUBLE IN CAR STRIKE

The start of the riot between sympathizers with the striking carmen and the strikebreakers this morning at Ninth street and Brighton avenue. The car is filled with the strikebreakers, who were being transported to car barns in other parts of the city. The picture showing the threatening attitude of sympathizers which preceded the riot was snapped by Ralph Baird, staff photographer of The Post.

Community members yell at strikebreakers trapped inside a trolley during the August 1917 streetcar strike (*Post* Aug. 11, 1917).

WHERE THE RIOTING OCCURRED

Scene of the clash this morning at Tenth street and Woodland avenue between sympathizers with striking carmen and strikebreakers. The picture shows the empty car from which the strikebreakers were driven by the sympathizers. Photograph by Ralph Baird, staff photographer of The Post.

Community members mill about after forcing strikebreakers to flee a trolley (*Post* Aug. 11, 1917).

STRIKERS HEAR OUTLINE OF PEACE PLAN

Scene at the Labor temple this morning when the striking street car men took up the proposal to compromise. The above picture, snapped by Ralph Baird, Post staff photographer, was taken while Mayor Edwards was speaking in favor of the proposal. The crowd can be seen strikers' wives who have taken an active part in the walkout and the deliberations since that time.

A rare photograph from inside the Labor Temple: streetcar workers learn they have won union recognition from the Kansas City Railways Co. after a week on strike (*Post* Aug. 16, 1917).

10,000 PEOPLE MARCH IN K. C. LABOR DAY PARADE

Looking along Grand avenue from Twelfth street while the Labor day parade was counter marching. The picture gives an idea of the crowds that thronged the line of march.

Following the streetcar strike, the labor movement hosted a massive Labor Day parade, and thousands of supporters lined the streets to watch. The meatpacking walkout began the following day (*Post* Sept. 3, 1917).

PACKING HOUSE STRIKE SPREADS

Above—Two views of the striking employees of the Cudahy Packing plant marching to Shawnee park, Kansas City, Kas., yesterday afternoon to lay plans for the strike. Below—Some of the girls who participated in the strike. The one waving her hand in the center picture made a reference against to the 2,000 strikers not to return to work until their demands had been met.

The women and men employees of the Cudahy meatpacking company march to Shawnee Park to figure out how to organize the 14,000 person packinghouse industry (Post Sept. 7, 1917).

FREIGHT HANDLERS MARCH TO LABOR TEMPLE

Hundreds of white and Black freight handlers march together past unattended freight stacked on wagons (Post Sept. 10, 1917).

PRECEPT=AND=PERFORMANCE

"THERE is already in the land of ours an ominous shadow of unrest and confusion, expressed either under the sacred name of organized labor, impels our preparations at home and abroad for the defense of our country."

"We express our unswerving and hearty approval of the best stand taken in this crisis of our Nation by the American Federation of Labor; the recognized and unimpeachable representative of organized labor in this country, and renew our expressions of the wisdom and sagacity of our president, National Congress, and other national officers."

—Massachusetts Federation of Labor, in communication at Jefferson City, Sept. 10, 1917.

"Having that Organized Labor must not take advantage of the present crisis to abuse its power as awarded by President Congress of the American Federation of Labor today at a meeting of Federal Congressmen."

—Hon. H. H. Wilson, labor leader and Secretary of Labor at President Wilson's Cabinet.

"This is no time to take advantage of emergency to force recognition of the union. It is the height of delicacy to force us to bring about a recognition of our industry in order to force the establishment of standards that they (the labor union) have not been able to force during normal conditions."

—Hon. H. H. Wilson, labor leader and Secretary of Labor at President Wilson's Cabinet.

GOOD NEWS for the KAISER!

"HITLER! thought men and women workers who have been on strike in Kansas City at various times in the last few weeks, particularly all were believed to be offering sentiments with their best intentions because of the strike, demand for recognition of the union. Several hundred men are not demanding that recognition. Among the strikers that have been affected by other localities are:

Packing House Employees:
Butchers,
Meat Cutters,
Cocker Packers,
Stock, Yards, Carpenters, Horsemen and
Farmers,
Freight Handlers and Railroad Yard Clerks,
Warehousemen,
Teamsters and Truck Drivers,
Firemen and Steamfitters on Sinclair Oil
Company Plant,
Gas Makers,
Iron Makers,
Candy Makers,
Dry Employees.

In a number of the above cases the "union" which at first might have been an employer who made a union of employees. The union is a recognition of the union, but not a recognition of the union. That is how outside workers are influenced by the union, and government leaders.

The Business Men's Association of Kansas City

An Employers' Association cartoon depicts a happy German Kaiser reading about the September 1917 strike wave in Kansas City (Star Sept. 26, 1917).

Women ironing shirt fronts around the turn of the century.

Women ironing sheets at the turn of the century.

Rare photographs of Kansas City commercial laundry workers in action (MVR Walker Towel & Uniform Service, Vertical File).

THE KANSAS CITY STAR, THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 1918

HOW LONG SHALL KANSAS CITY CONTINUE TO BE A VICTIM OF Ruin, Riot and Vandalism?

The answer rests with the decent citizens of this community.

It is up to you. Your city is being disgraced and discredited. How long do YOU intend to sit supinely down and permit outrage after outrage to disturb the peace of the town and threaten the safety of your home?

Look the issue squarely in the face. Shall unscrupulous Unionism dominate YOUR city and scatter death and destruction when and where it pleases?

Decent citizens, it is time to stir yourself!

Ruthless violence and unleashed lawlessness distinguished the first day of Organized Labor's supreme attempt to discipline Kansas City.

Peaceful citizens were mobbed and shot down.

Exuberant rioters, welcoming the opportunity to destroy, systematically visited the laundries of the city, smashed the windows, wrecked the interiors, set fire to the motor trucks and generally created damage which will amount to thousands of dollars.

Linen, owned by individuals, against whom the strikers had no possible grievance, was either dragged into the streets and destroyed, or was joyfully confiscated by delighted mob members.

Workers in industries were threatened, intimidated and attacked merely because they realized the injustice of the strike, and that patriotic theories were more to them.

Unnecessary assaults were reported everywhere, and always the attacks were distinguished by the insane cowardice of rioters. Even heads and shoulders, filled with vitriol, were attacked.

Thus then has Organized Labor laid its cards upon the table. Thus it is showing You that its will must be obeyed.

Force, bloodshed and vandalism! Obviously these are the weapons intended to force every employer of labor in Kansas City to unionize or quit.

The causes of this strike are as unjust as its results may be disastrous. All Kansas City is familiar with the Laundry walk-out and the subsequent murder and property destruction. And because the employers—victims of the outrage—refuse to treat with the destroyers, all Kansas City must be subject to greater RUIN and RIOT.

Fair minded men have judged the laundry case on its merits. If former servants burned down their homes, would they re-employ them? Or what would be the worth of a contract with perpetrators of such deeds.

The association has no quarrel with labor. It knows full well that but a small per cent of the workers of this city are affiliated with violent Unionism and that the great majority whether Union or Non-Union, are no more in sympathy with this outrage than the great mass of citizens outside of labor circles.

Truly this agitation is more than a mere civic calamity; it is a disgrace so great that it will be a blot on Kansas City's life name for years to come and unfavorable comment will be provoked from coast to coast.

Think of it! The Nation at war and an entire city tied up and subject to mob violence simply because a few labor leaders—scarcely a score of men—have decided to call a general strike.

Shall it be said that Kansas City is aiding and abetting the terrible menacing war enemy, who, in this very hour, is at the zenith of his greatest effort?

Shall this community be conspicuous as a hotbed for every propagandist shall the town be disgraced and discredited? What perhaps is the most critical period in the history of the world?

Loyal, peace-loving, law-abiding citizens, whether they be union or non-union, must and will answer ringingly:

No! A thousand times, No!

THE EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION

Upper left: a full page ad taken out by the Employers' Association after the first day of the general strike (*Star* March 28, 1918). **Upper right:** these two drawings depict property destruction from the first day of the general strike (*Star* March 28, 1918). **Bottom:** the 7th Regiment of the Missouri National Guard mobilizes during the general strike (*Post* March 29, 1918).

ROCKS ARE HURLED THROUGH WINDOWS BY MOB VISITING VARIOUS LAUNDRIES

Throwing rocks and brickbats through windows of laundries was a favorite diversion of persons who marched from one laundry to another yesterday afternoon. The above shows mob members hurling missiles in front of the Munger laundry, 1333 East Twelfth street.

Participants in the first day of the general strike destroyed property at nine laundries within the vicinity of the Labor Temple (*Post* March 28, 1918).

CHAPTER 5: GENERAL STRIKE, FEBRUARY TO APRIL 1918

The events of the summer and autumn of 1917 resulted in a growing militant labor movement, and in the Employers' Association increasing desperation to stem the tide. The cross class alliances of the solidarity infrastructure not only survived these events, but were strengthened by them. The Kansas City Women's Trade Union League's position as an indispensable component of organized labor solidified. The labor movement, in short, had come to depend on the KCWTUL and clubwomen for the invaluable services they provided to class formation. Further, the KCWTUL established working relationships with African American workers and their community allies. The formation and development of the solidarity infrastructure guided the energies of the labor movement toward gender and race solidarity among workers, and cross class support for militancy by clubwomen. The historical novelty of what happened in Kansas City is that white women workers and Black workers were not simply subordinated in an alliance with white men unionists or wealthy women. The clubwomen and trade unionists acted in solidarity with the self activity of the racially diverse laundry women. This chapter examines this process whereby the solidarity infrastructure enabled a wartime general strike. I also analyze the general strike tactical choice.

The Kansas City general strike of March 27 to April 2, 1918, presents an historical puzzle as the only major general strike to occur during war mobilization in US history. Worker upheavals proliferated in the US and other metropolitan countries *after* both world wars (Silver 2003:125-129), including eight post-war general strikes in America: Seattle in 1919, and several in 1946 -- Stamford and Hartford, CT, Houston,

TX, Rochester, NY, Lancaster, PA, Camden, NJ, and Oakland, CA (Johnson 2008:5).

Yet strike activity did pick up during the Great War, as consumer goods inflation ran out of control, employers were seen as profiteering on the war effort, and the Wilson Administration appeared to support unionization (Foner 1987:150-153).

Walkouts for union recognition at individual places of employment is one thing; breaking contracts to participate in a general sympathy strike is quite another. Samuel Gompers used his power in the AFL, and as a member of the Council of National Defense, to keep wartime militancy to a minimum -- that is, as a last resort for union recognition only. In April 1918, he wrote to union leaders across the country, "No strike ought to be inaugurated that cannot be justified to the men facing momentary death. A strike during the war is not justified unless principles are involved equally fundamental as those for which fellow citizens have offered their lives--their all" (quoted in Foner 1987:168). Wildcat strikes were anathema to the principles of trade unionism, especially under wartime conditions. Why did the vast majority of AFL locals in Kansas City participate in a wartime general strike?

Perhaps more befuddling is that some Kansas City workers seemed eager to use the general strike tactic months, and even years prior to the commercial laundry strike that catalyzed it. But the only general strikes to occur prior to the First World War took place in St. Louis in 1877, New Orleans in 1892, and Philadelphia in 1910 (Johnsons 2008:5). In other words, the general strike was not a well worn tactic of the American labor movement going into World War I. Furthermore, the highly publicized Philadelphia general strike did not achieve any of its goals (Wolfinger 2016:75-88). Why were the Kansas City rank and file bent on using the general strike tactic during the 1910s, when

they had few successful American examples to point to, and union internationals suppressed wartime strike actions?

The cross class support for the commercial laundry strike on the part of clubwomen is an additional historical problem in need of explanation. There is no shortage of warnings about the dangers and difficulties inherent to working class organizations working with middle and upper class groups (Brecher & Costello 1990; Dixon, Danaher, & Kail 2013; Gill 2009; Lichterman 1995; Moody 1990; Rose 2000; Simmons 1990). Additionally, a common theme in the historical literature on the WTUL includes the influence allies exerted to tamp down militancy, or at least redirect energies elsewhere (Deutsch 2000:199-202, 226-228; Dye 1980:3-4, 118; Flanagan 1990:1050; Hewitt 1985; Jacoby 1975; Kenneally 1973; Kirkby 1992; cf Hoy 2012; Norwood 1990:146; Norwood 2009). Indeed, Wisconsin School and New Left historians developed the concept ‘corporate liberalism’ in polemics against cross class tripartite alliances of labor, capital, and “the public” during the Progressive Era (Kolko 1963; Sklar 1988; Weinstein 1968). Why did cross class alliances not produce a languid labor movement in Kansas City?

In the following sections, I analyze the solidarity infrastructure in relation to the commercial laundry strike that preceded the general strike. Next, we look at the origins of the general strike tactical choice, and how the general strike unfolded. Finally, a failed third party bid that emerged from the solidarity infrastructure provides a chance to think about political implications of the Kansas City solidarity infrastructure.

BEGINNING OF THE LAUNDRY STRIKE

The general strike came about in sympathy with commercial laundry workers, who went on strike in February 1918. Across the city, there were roughly three hundred white male delivery drivers, and 1,500-2,000 white and Black women workers inside the plants. The laundry owners had plenty of resources to break the strike with replacement workers and private guards because of the financial support of the Employers' Association. The solidarity infrastructure concept helps us understand how political pressure mobilized to extend and intensify the conflict given the lack of leverage these workers had over the work process. Clubwomen held public hearings and investigations, while a militant rank and file placed a sympathy strike on the agenda within three weeks.

On September 7, 1917, nine of the largest commercial laundries had consolidated under the Kansas City Laundry Service Co.¹⁴⁹ Lacue H. Fisher presided over the conglomerate, which had assets of \$2.75 million. Fisher had been a director at William T. Kemper's Commerce Trust Bank since 1910, and was well integrated into the business community through Republican politics, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Masons, the Knife and Fork Club, and the Mission Hills Country Club (Tracy 1925:93; AHS 1930:59). Frank W. Porter served as secretary, and would later be the lead spokesperson and negotiator for all of Kansas City's commercial laundries during the unionization campaign, through the Laundry Owners' Association (LOA).

Around the same time, laundry drivers began organizing a union. By September 12th one newspaper reported that 90 percent of the drivers had signed up. The conglomeration enabled laundry workers to make demands on one major outfit in order

¹⁴⁹ *Poor's Government and Municipal Supplement* 1918:838.

to establish prevailing wages and conditions. The *Labor Herald* noted the union's strength on November 2nd, and the drivers asked for a general wage increase in a December 17th letter.¹⁵⁰ They complained of not receiving an increase in hourly wages for fifteen years. The drivers received a commission which, the laundry owners pointed out, increased whenever prices increased for customers. However, the drivers also had to pay their own helpers. The laundry owners replied to the union on January 11, 1918, letting them know they would not increase wages. Their unctuous letter read,

So let us all get together with our respective employers and employees and work harmoniously for our country and for ourselves, disregarding any counsel or advice which would tend to break up the happy and friendly business relations which have always existed between the laundry owners and their employees in this city.¹⁵¹

At this point, the women workers who worked inside the laundries were not organized. During the Labor Forward Movement, the KCWTUL organized laundry workers in 1914, but these efforts had evaporated by 1917. A few of the laundry owners successfully defeated a proposed eight hour day for women laundry workers at the Missouri Capitol in Jefferson City in early 1917, with the KCWTUL lobbying in favor.¹⁵² The laundries allegedly continued to violate the 1912 nine hour law in another instance of obstinacy among local employers that offended progressives and clubwomen. Thus, protective legislation established expectations among workers and clubwomen for working conditions. When those were not met, it helped spark worker militancy and support through the solidarity infrastructure.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ *Journal* Sept. 12, 1917; *Labor Herald* Feb. 15, 1918.

¹⁵¹ NA 280 33/993 LOA to Nolan, Jan. 11, 1918.

¹⁵² *Star* Feb. 8, March 9, 1917.

¹⁵³ This is a different sequence than exists in the literature on the Women's Trade Union League, which often narrates protective legislation as an alternative to organizing (Deutsch 2000:192-93; Dye 1980:3-4; Kirkby 1987, 1992).

On February 14, a handful of drivers at Gillpatrick Laundry walked off the job.¹⁵⁴ The drivers' union voted to make it an official industry wide strike the next day, and by the 16th, women "inside" workers began walking out. That same day, police arrested three Black women and one white woman together on the picket line. Elsewhere, strikers were roughed up when they tried to enter a laundry to call out the women inside, and they tossed laundry into the street from a delivery wagon. On Monday the 18th, "Crowds of men, women and girls, both negroes and white, were loaded into trucks [at the Labor Temple] and went from laundry to laundry in an attempt to get those who had remained to join them."¹⁵⁵

For the next three weeks, strikers continued to be arrested on the picket line and violently attacked delivery wagons throughout residential areas, yet clubwomen remained steadfast supporters of the women strikers. The newspapers detailed instances of women strikers waiting for delivery wagons to arrive at a home, then assaulting the private guard with bricks and horse whips. There were at least two instances of strikers destroying delivery wagons by sending them down steep hills or off of bluffs.¹⁵⁶ Pent up anger at their working conditions found release in street battles with guards.

Some of the most dangerous and lowest paying jobs in the city could be found inside the laundries. In 1914, a Bureau of Public Welfare investigation found that half of the workers received less than \$7 per week, with some receiving \$4, some of the lowest wages in the city. It was not unusual for management to force workers to toil for 12 or 16 hour shifts prior to a Missouri 9-hour law passed in 1912, and management continued to

¹⁵⁴ *Labor Herald*, Feb 22.

¹⁵⁵ *Post*, Feb 16; *Star*, Feb 17, 18; *Journal*, Feb 18.

¹⁵⁶ *Star* Feb. 18, 24, 26-27; *Post* Feb. 16, 20, 27; *Journal* Feb. 28.

flaunt the law through the war period. In contrast to the youthfulness of most women-dominated workplaces, 34 percent of laundry workers were over 30, and close to half were married, widowed, separated, or divorced. These numbers likely reflected the presence of Black women in many of the lower paid positions, most of whom never had the option of quitting wage work after marriage. For them, working at a commercial laundry meant escaping domestic work -- a demeaning and abusive job that paid no better, and where long hours fluctuated from day to day.¹⁵⁷

The women stood for hours at a time, completing repetitive motions in dangerous environments. They breathed in carbon monoxide gas and handled bleaching chemicals, for example. “Fortunate” white workers could be in rooms with temperatures around 95 degrees, while low wage workers on steam powered mangle machines dealt with temperatures over 120 degrees. Some laundries lacked break rooms or private bathrooms. Fainting was a constant occurrence, and the women also suffered from stomach ulcers, joint swelling, anemia, loss of feeling in fingers, kidney disease, and skin and respiratory problems. One industrial inspector became bed ridden for a week after spending a brief time observing commercial laundries. Racialized segmentation of the work process enabled management to ignore safety concerns. At one laundry,

The manager had tried to have white mangle hands, but the white girls were unable to stand it and he had to replace them with colored after two months. One of these colored girls told the investigator that she couldn’t stand it in ‘hot weather,’ and another inquired: ‘Why don’t you ladies come on a warm day; this here’s cool.’¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Black domestics averaged about \$3.77/week over a year, including idle weeks, in 1912, Martin 1913:56.

¹⁵⁸ The 1914 report can be found at SHSMO, Annual Report of the Board of Public Welfare, 1912-1916:172-174, 206-209, 212-215).

The women on the Jackson County Council of National Defense (JCCND) immediately took it upon themselves to investigate the working conditions for women workers once the 1918 strike began, and found conditions and wages had not changed since 1914. Mrs. G. W. Addison, a supporter of Sarah Green in the KCWTUL,¹⁵⁹ led the JCCND women. Strikers hosted a Sunday public meeting at the Labor Temple so that the JCCND, clergy, Red Cross, and Consumers League could learn about working conditions and strike demands. The JCCND formally interviewed strikers the next day at the Labor Temple.¹⁶⁰ Most were making \$6-7 per week, with some making \$5. On March 2, a group of JCCND clubwomen, preachers, and aldermen from the Upper House of the municipal legislative body, the Common Council, visited several laundries to inspect conditions. "Laws for the protection of women and children were broken in many laundries. The committee visited the principal laundries and found that the complaints of unbearable conditions were, for the most part, justified."¹⁶¹ In the context of war mobilization, elected officials and leading citizens viewed labor law violations outrageous because they interfered with rationalized industrial relations.

But the working conditions were also intrinsically shocking to the investigators.

In the Fern laundry, for example, one of the largest laundries in Kansas City, horses were stabled in the basement, and the stench of the stable, mingled with steam, escaping gas, and bad air, permeated the half-lighted workrooms. Floors were wet, filth was everywhere, toilets were in a wretched condition. There were no restrooms and girl employes were eating lunch in the vile and badly-ventilated workrooms. The building is a firetrap, and was condemned several years ago by city health authorities. No improvements have since been made. Probably no workers in the country labor under more unfavorable conditions than employes of this laundry. While there are four or five excellent laundries in the city, the larger number are dark, unsanitary, and unfit surroundings for women workers.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ LOC O'Reilly Papers: Reel 7, Peake Faxon, January, 1918.

¹⁶⁰ *Journal*, *Post* Feb 17; *Star* Feb. 17-18.

¹⁶¹ NA 280 33/993, March 13 Report.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

During the Progressive Era, a society without basic sanitation was considered by middle and upper class reformers to be in serious danger of collapse (Hoy 1995:80-86). They continued:

In one laundry old women and young girls were required to work upon the second floor, over the barn or stable where the horses and other live stock of the laundry were housed and stabled, so that the ill and nauseous stench, smell, vapors and odors were carried upward from the unclean stable floor and the offal and manure piles by the action of the warm atmosphere and steam of the laundry, in and through the rooms in which the workers were required to labor, thereby rendering the same not only dangerous to the physical well being of the employes, but to patrons of the laundry who had sent clothing and other apparel to said place for the purpose of being laundered.¹⁶³

Kansas Citians found out that the laundry workers' working conditions were also the conditions of their own sanitation.

All 300 of the drivers joined the strike within a few days, and estimates of the number of women participants ran from 800 to 1,800.¹⁶⁴ The strikers successfully shut down the majority of laundries from about February 19th until the first week of March. The solidarity displayed during this period was impressive, given that on the 19th the LOA increased women's wages to a minimum of \$9 a week, and the EA succeeded in having the police commissioners give badges to 125 private guards. The EA paid guards \$5 per day, and they soon numbered 300.¹⁶⁵

The presence of armed guards, many of whom were recruited from private detective agencies, introduced violence to the strike, according to clubwomen. But from mid February to mid March, about 50 people were arrested in pickets at laundries and for

¹⁶³ NA 280 33/993, Upper House Common Council Committee Report.

¹⁶⁴ The low number comes from mediator Steward, NA 280 33 993 Steward to Kerwin March 16; the high number from the KCWTUL, LOC Pinchot I 9, KCWTUL 1917-19 Report.

¹⁶⁵ NA 280 33 993 Steward to Kerwin March 16.

assaulting drivers and guards in residential areas.¹⁶⁶ The clubwomen on the JCCND wrote,

The special police have been the cause of continuous violence and bitter feeling. They are largely of the professional strikebreaker type, and have been recruited extensively from private detective agencies. Several are known to have police records. Their behavior is such as to provoke violence and to add immeasurably to unrest. Girl strikers have been beaten, waylaid on dark streets and assaulted, and otherwise brutally treated. A member of this committee stopped a strikebreaking policeman who was firing shots directly into a crowd containing girls and women.¹⁶⁷

Thus, the clubwomen placed the entirety of responsibility for strike violence on the private guards, and even intervened at least once on a picket line. They went on,

One girl laundry worker has an arm broken in two places, another has a broken wrist, and a striking driver is in the hospital with a gunshot wound. The needless cruelty shown to women strikers and the insulting language used by the police to women pickets has enraged the workers throughout the city. This afternoon a special policeman was shot and killed by strike sympathisers. Until the strikebreaking police appeared, the workers were peaceful, and kindly, orderly spirit pervaded the striking body. The character of the special police is so notorious that a municipal judge discharged all strikers brought to his court, declaring that the special officers were provocateurs, and that their appointment was illegal.¹⁶⁸

The solidarity infrastructure articulated such intense identification with these commercial laundry employees, that the clubwomen proclaimed,

Resolved, that we call upon clubs and civic organizations to pass resolutions and to appoint committees to demand arbitration and mediation of the laundry strike; and that we call upon every citizen, as a public duty, to do his utmost to create public opinion in favor of a settlement by mediation.¹⁶⁹

And, according to the KCWTUL, women's clubs heeded the call: "All the women's civic organizations in Kansas City were behind this organization. The club women of Kansas

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ NA March 13 Report JCCND.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

City fought the Business Men's Association and the Employers' Association a battle of wits against capital."¹⁷⁰

Clubwomen support had tangible effects. For the laundry strike to have lasted long enough for the general strike to come to fruition, political pressure on city officials and laundry owners was needed because the LOA and EA had plenty of resources for replacement workers and private guards. At the same time, strikers responded to the violence of the guards in kind, and organized violent ambushes of laundry deliveries in residential areas in the desperate hope of maintaining effective pickets. The laundry workers needed influential allies, but the violence of the strike threatened to turn away soft support. Fortunately for them, the solidarity infrastructure articulated solid support for working class militancy by influential clubwomen. These clubwomen publicly assigned responsibility for the violence solely at the feet of management and the private guards, either in a strategic move in support of the strike, or because they themselves could not perceive the agency of working class women choosing to violently assault private guards. They also walked picket lines and experienced guards from the perspective of the strikers, an experience that required no small amount of courage and commitment by these otherwise comfortable women.

The solidarity infrastructure even facilitated the support of Samuel Gompers for Sarah Green in the days before the general strike. George Creel, who headed the wartime propaganda arm of the Wilson Administration (Committee on Public Information, through which Creel controlled the pro-war American Alliance for Labor and Democracy), had earlier had a muckraking journalism career in Kansas City (Foner

¹⁷⁰ LOC Pinchot I/9 KCWTUL 1917-1919 Report.

1987:115-22). Despite Creel's central role in maintaining domestic support for war mobilization, Creel wrote to Gompers on March 14 in support of Green against an unspecified effort to discredit her organizing work in the laundries. Gompers and Creel both wrote to members of the Committee on Women in Industry of the Jackson County Council of Defense in support of their work with the laundry strike. While documentary evidence does not shed light on the full campaign to gain the support of Creel and Gompers, it is evident Creel maintained communication with Katherine Walsh (Frank Walsh's spouse).¹⁷¹ Gompers likely did not know how strongly Green pushed for the general strike, but she and her clubwomen allies could bolster their legitimacy under conservative labor principles with letters from Creel and Gompers.

GENERAL STRIKE TACTIC

Twelve union business agents met on March 4 to develop recommendations to the labor movement for how to effectively support laundry strikers and defeat the EA, and they immediately recommended a general strike.¹⁷² At a mass meeting of business agents on March 14, the resolution to approve the "general cessation of work" was approved by a vote of 476-16. Business agents heckled voices of caution off the rostrum for over four hours before the vote was held, though the rank and file "wanted to call this general strike immediately."¹⁷³ For example, an organizer for the Barbers' international tried to prevent his members from voting for the general strike. However, his members told him that it was the local movement, not the international, that "they got their support and they were

¹⁷¹ WHS Gompers Papers, Reel 93, f252, 283, 294 317.

¹⁷² *Star* March 5.

¹⁷³ *Star, Journal* March 15; LOC Pinchot I 9, KCWTUL 1917-19 Report; NA 280 33/993, Steward letter to Kerwin, March 16).

going to stick with them.”¹⁷⁴ How do we explain the general strike tactical choice? Here, we return to the discussion of the Syndicalist League of North America from Chapter 3 to examine transnational diffusion of the general strike tactic.

Sociological explanations of tactical choice tend to emphasize cultural continuity across movements. Tilly’s (1979) concept of a repertoire of collective action stresses that movement actors typically choose tactics from forms of action that have already been developed and tested. Many scholars agree with this approach by arguing true tactical innovation is incredibly rare, as most tactics which appear new are actually tactical recombinations or rest firmly in some tradition of resistance (Morris 1993; Tarrow 1993; Taylor and Van Dyke 2004; Galli 2016, Wang, and Soule 2016; Doherty and Hayes 2018).¹⁷⁵ Where did the idea of a general strike in Kansas City come from?

Actors in the labor movement wanted to use the general strike tactic at least twice before 1918. After the Missouri governor-controlled police commission fired forty-three police officers for refusing to protect professional strikebreakers in the 1917 streetcar strike, militant unionists and organizers floated the idea of a general strike when the governor refused to reinstate the officers (Fink 1973:67). This was not the first instance of Kansas City unionists seriously considering a general strike. In fact, the labor movement authorized a general strike for July 4, 1913, but called it off at the last minute during a lockout of building tradesmen working on the construction of Union Station

¹⁷⁴ *Journeyman Barber* 14:161.

¹⁷⁵ On the other hand, McAdam’s (1983) approach to highlighting tactical innovation when institutional authorities neutralize successful tactics has produced many insights from the political process perspective. For example, tactical innovation is more likely under conditions of political defeats (McCammon 2003), state repression (Shriver and Adams 2010; Galli 2016), and political uncertainty (Adams and Shriver 2016). Further, tactical innovation and diffusion positively correlate with networks and coalitions between different types of organizations (McCammon 2003, Taylor & Van Dyke 2004, Wood 2004, Meyer & Staggenborg 2007, Wang & Soule 2012). Our focus here, however, is not on tactical innovation.

(Sears 1947:37-38).¹⁷⁶ What started as a jurisdictional dispute between craft unions turned into a showdown with construction employers. The revolutionary syndicalist Dezettel (see Chapter 3), along with Industrial Workers of the World members, agitated among the 6,000 locked out workers (Palmer 2007:75).¹⁷⁷

These two near general strikes suggest that the general strike tactic as used in 1918 was not simply a logical response to the Employer Association's (EA) attack on union rights in late 1917 and 1918, but a cultural weapon the militant rank and file were willing, even itching, to implement. In Chapter 3, I discussed the influence that a revolutionary syndicalist political culture had on the Kansas City labor movement prior to the First World War. I argue here that the tactical choice of a general strike in Kansas City represents the influence of a transnational repertoire of collective action. The transnational frame enables us to specify how tactics used elsewhere (in this case, France) influenced tactical preferences of actors in Kansas City, and how they were interpreted and modified to meet local conditions.

A particular brand of syndicalism, as elucidated by William Z. Foster, had an outsized influence on the Kansas City labor movement. Foster established the Syndicalist League of North America as a loose collection of a few branches around the country. The Kansas City branch became the most successful branch in the country, due to the efforts of former Wobbly Max Dezettel, and the former Socialist Earl Browder (Johanningsmeier 1994:71-72). Together, they published a syndicalist paper called *The Toiler* between October 1913 and January 1915, and led an AFL sponsored unionization push among the "unskilled" workers of Kansas City in the spring of 1914 (the Labor

¹⁷⁶ *St. Louis Lumberman* July 1, 1913.

¹⁷⁷ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* June 13, 1913.

Forward Movement, see Chapter 3). According to Browder and Foster, syndicalists controlled the Cooks, Barbers, and Office Workers unions, and had gained significant power in the Central Labor Council. Until his arrest for resisting the draft in 1917, Browder himself served as the librarian of the Labor Temple.¹⁷⁸

Foster developed his brand of syndicalism from his understanding of the French rank and file syndicalist movement. Foster toured Europe in 1910-11, and became convinced that French radical unionists had the most advanced left movement in the world. He published his manifesto in 1912 (along with Earl Ford, Ford & Foster 1990), laying out a particular revolutionary perspective that influenced the political culture of the Kansas City labor movement through *The Toiler* and the Kansas City Syndicalist League of North America. Foster viewed politics and economics as separate spheres of action, with politics considered non-revolutionary by definition. He spent most of his energy for propaganda denouncing Socialists, including Eugene Debs. He also criticized the IWW for splitting the union movement, accusing them of being an arm of the Socialist Party.

For Foster, the AFL should be taken over by a militant minority boring from within, but the IWW split the most radical workers and cut them off from the majority of the rank and file. The militant minority made for a key concept in this brand of syndicalism, as Foster had a negative view of the masses within the working class. Foster explicitly denounced the principle of democracy, and felt scientific and technocratic principles would instead govern work processes after a syndicalist revolution. Under his doctrine, only a handful of committed syndicalists were required to speak and act on

¹⁷⁸ *Labor Herald* Jan. 1917 union roster.

behalf of the working class as a whole, by inciting general strikes that would automatically and swiftly lead to the end of capitalism. In short, the manifesto embodied a caricature of the vanguard party concept as described by anti-Leninists.

Using teleological evolutionary language, Foster argued that French syndicalists were the most advanced workers in the world owing to France having the most number of revolutions, writing, “Syndicalism is thus a product of natural selection” (Ford & Foster 1990:34). The most preferred tactic by syndicalists was the general strike:

By the term ‘general strike,’ used in a revolutionary sense, is meant the period of more or less *general cessation of labor* by the workers, during which period, the workers, by disorganizing the mechanism of capitalist society, will expose its weakness and their own strength; whereupon, perceiving themselves possessed of the power to do so, they will seize control of the social means of production and proceed to operate them in their own interest, instead of in the interest of a handful of parasites, as before. (Ford & Foster 1990:9-10, emphasis added)

Note that the Kansas City general strike authorization also used the language of “general cessation,” rather than general strike. Foster emphasized the many forms of hidden protest on the job, like slowing down and sabotage, to conclude, “vast masses of unorganized workers can be readily provoked into revolt by the contagious example of a few, and, also, that these workers, once on strike, are in a few days easily and effectively organized -- though for years previous untold efforts have been expended to organize them” (p. 12). He believed this indicated that a general strike would set off an unstoppable cascade of events: “The general strike will be so devastating in its effects that it can last only a few days, during which period, if need be, the workers, accustomed as they are to starvation, and sustained by the enthusiasm of the revolution, could live on the most meager rations” (p. 12).

Although *The Toiler* collapsed in early 1915, coinciding with the collapse of the Syndicalist League, Foster spoke at a 1916 conference in Kansas City for its replacement, the International Trade Union Educational League. Foster believed that US involvement in the Great War would be inevitable, and that state repression would isolate anti-war radicals from the labor movement. Therefore, American workers should not waste time trying to prevent it. He told workers they should instead, once the US entered, “take advantage of war conditions to organize the workers and raise bigger and bigger demands” (Johanningsmeier 1994:84, 90).¹⁷⁹ French syndicalism inspired the widespread desire by business agents in Kansas City to use the general strike tactic during the 1910s, but what did it look like in practice?

GENERAL CESSATION OF WORK

Between the general strike authorization on March 14th, and the scheduled start on the 25th, labor leaders sent several letters asking for help to avert the sympathetic strike, which they said had “unlimited possibilities for disorder and [that] industrial disruptions [were] inevitable.”¹⁸⁰ Their telegram and letter to President Wilson went unanswered, but the Department of Labor (DOL) watched the situation nervously. Their worries intensified when a representative of the streetcar union (AASERE) sent the DOL “disturbing reports” that trolley workers would feel unsafe operating cars during a general strike.¹⁸¹ Tension existed between the business agents and their spokesperson

¹⁷⁹ For his part, Browder did not follow Foster’s advice. He spent much of the war in the Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary for anti-war activities, reading Marx alongside Mexican revolutionaries.

¹⁸⁰ NA 280 33/993, Steward telegram to Kerwin, March 19.

¹⁸¹ NA 280 33/993, Fitzgerald telegram to W. B. Wilson, March 18; NA 280 33/913, Kerwin telegram to Steward, March 19.

(Painter Earnest L. Keeran), and the general strike committee in which they invested executive authority. Keeran joined Steam Fitter Frank J. Peterson and Barber Grover C. Skaggs on the committee.

Porter of the Laundry Owners' Association sent the DOL a letter informing them of their justifications for rejecting mediation. He claimed the whole controversy boiled down to a few disgruntled, but well-paid, delivery drivers who intimidate women into joining the strike. Porter emphasized the property damage and assaults on drivers, claiming such actions were coordinated through the Labor Temple. He wrote that the public, "take the position that it is not Unionism, but a state of anarchy that prevails at the Labor Temple. Unionism has already suffered an irreparable loss in this community by reason of the methods pursued by the leaders of the movement now in power." Porter closed by stating, "We know that President Wilson and yourself would denounce these men in as strong a language as they are being denounced by the citizens of Kansas City today if by an impartial investigation you find the statements contained in this letter to be correct."¹⁸²

Mediator Steward sent a report on the same day making clear Porter did not believe in the legitimacy of any union activity, however.

In spite of the fact that between 700 and 800 laundry workers and between 200 and 300 laundry drivers are enrolled as members of their respective unions Mr. Porter contends that the strike is ended and that practically no employees are remaining out. His views toward organized labor are extremely bitter.¹⁸³

Steward went on to note his paranoid demeanor: "Mr. Porter's attitude toward organized labor in general is characterized by such extreme bitterness that almost his entire

¹⁸² NA 280 33/993, Porter letter to DOL, March 16.

¹⁸³ NA 280 33/993, Steward letter to Kerwin, March 16.

conversation consists of charges of violence, anarchy, dishonesty, bad faith, etc. directed at all persons in any way connected with organized labor.” A letter to Louis Post, the Assistant Secretary of Labor, by a friend in Kansas City offers support to that conclusion: “it must truthfully be said that had the leaders of the employers’ association here and a little handful of hot-headed labor leaders shown the slightest disposition to really work with Mr. Gill he would have had this strike settled within forty-eight hours.”¹⁸⁴ Even the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce seemed exasperated with the LOA and EA, and attempted to prevent the general strike with a proposal that they would mediate between five representatives of the LOA, and five strikers. The EA immediately told the Chamber to mind their own business, which they grudgingly did.¹⁸⁵

Thus, the LOA and EA remained unmoved after the general strike call, and in the words of local labor leaders, “the workers are restless and cannot be pacified.”¹⁸⁶ Rev. Burris A. Jenkins launched a final attempt to prevent the strike on the night of the 24th at the Linwood Boulevard Christian Church. Jenkins invited the LOA and labor leaders to hear his plea for mediation. Jenkins intoned,

You men ought to get together. You owe it to your country; you owe it to your son and my son, who are offering up their lives for us; you owe it to the future of this Nation; you owe it to Almighty God, himself. Isn’t there some way? Remember, there is no difficulty so great that willing men cannot straighten it out. And if you are not willing men, I must brand you as traitors to your country.¹⁸⁷

Jenkins went on with typical progressive framing that both sides had a duty to the public good:

I realize perfectly I am skating on thin ice tonight. I fear the employers will go away and say I’m a rabid Socialist and can’t be in sympathy with men who hire

¹⁸⁴ NA 280 33/993 Rose letter to Post, April 5.

¹⁸⁵ SHSMO Chamber of Commerce, Executive Committee minutes for March 20 and 22.

¹⁸⁶ NA 280 33/993, Labor Temple letter to President Wilson, March 16.

¹⁸⁷ *Star* March 25.

labor; and I fear the laborers will go away and say that I belong to the capitalistic class and cannot be in sympathy with the man who toils. But I am prepared to be misunderstood, misquoted and maligned by both sides. A man has no right to say this is my business and I shall run it the way I please. You have no right to run your business in your own way, and the bigger your business the less right you have to run it your own way. Your big business is in the nature of a public utility and any question that concerns it is a question between you and society, and not a question between you and individual man. You have got to consider me, although I may have nothing whatever to do with your business. Labor unions have a right to be fostered. Labor has got to unite and has to bargain collectively because it never will have the power to bargain individually. But labor unions have tremendous power and they frequently -- too frequently -- abuse that power. Particularly do labor unions abuse their power when in war time they declare strikes.

Labor leaders in attendance applauded the speech and agreed to a 48 hour delay.

Business agent spokesperson Keeran said,

The stirring appeal of Doctor Jenkins only further convinced us of our duty as American citizens at this critical time. The repeated challenge that by taking the action embraced in our call a general cessation of work would in itself offer proof that we are only giving aid and comfort to the common enemy, causes us to take this final method of placing the burden of the proposed action on the Employers' Association, where it rightfully belongs.¹⁸⁸

Forrester of the EA and Porter of the LOA, however, left the church as soon as Jenkins concluded, saying his speech "doesn't influence us at all." An official with the Barbers' international labor reported,

A minister of the gospel thought that the capitalists of Kansas City, Mo., were different from the capitalists of other parts; that they had a heart or a soul, but he found out there was no difference; they had neither. Labor responded to the call that the preacher made, but the capitalist gave it a deaf ear.¹⁸⁹

While some labor leaders signalled they would give up the general strike if the laundries would simply take back all of their old employees, the LOA remained uninterested in giving even that small concession.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁸ *Star* March 25; also see *Journal* March 25.

¹⁸⁹ *Journeyman Barber* 14:161.

¹⁹⁰ *Star* March 26, 27.

The stage was set for a sympathy strike on March 27. Keeran summarized business agents' feelings on the eve of the general strike:

From the inception of this controversy the laundry owners have been upheld and supported both morally and financially by the Employers' Association of Kansas City, which latter organization we are informed represents the greater part of the business interests of this vicinity... The issue thus broadened out from one between laundry workers and laundry owners to one between capital and labor... Organized labor has not attempted to go against the wishes or ideas of the National Council of Defense, and is not attempting to change present conditions, and is simply asking for the right of the American citizen to maintain an organization.¹⁹¹

The General Strike Begins

Just as labor leaders could not prevent the rank and file from initiating the general strike, they also had little control over the behavior of workers when they gathered in public.¹⁹² Organizers meant to have a lengthy mass rally at The Parade public park near the Labor Temple to keep about 3,000 strikers occupied. The geographical proximity of most of the commercial laundries to the park proved too enticing for the angry crowd, however. One newspaper quoted a worker saying, "We don't want to hear any stump speeches now. What we want is action in wrecking that [laundry] building."¹⁹³ By evening time, strikers destroyed the windows at several laundries with rocks and bricks, and set laundry on fire in the streets.

The sheer number of strikers overwhelmed the police and private guards, and the strikers had coordinated for the destruction in advance. A group of strikers would march down the street behind two men, a woman, and a boy carrying a US flag. Planting the

¹⁹¹ *Star* March 27.

¹⁹² The descriptions of what happened each day of the general strike are derived mostly from the *Star*, *Journal*, and *Post* from the day or day after events took place.

¹⁹³ *Journal* March 28.

flag in front of a laundry building was the signal to let loose a volley of rocks and bricks, which were already piled up near at hand. At one laundry, a guard fired a gun into the crowd from inside the building. A laundry driver, Lon Amos Millsap, received a bullet in his stomach, becoming the only fatality of the general strike two days later (Raye 2018). Police officers who attempted to arrest strikers were overtaken in multiple instances, and workers set fire to at least one paddy wagon.

Building tradesmen, bartenders, barbers, porters, and brewers joined the general strike the first day, shutting down several construction projects, as well as elevator and heating services in downtown buildings. Around dinner time, labor leaders succeeded in dispersing these strikers to a meeting in the Labor Temple where they implored participants to stop wrecking property. Several hundred cooks, waiters, and waitresses, and their supporters, marched downtown at 10pm, anyway. For the next three or four hours, this group of strikers pressured restaurant workers to join the strike, and destroyed the businesses that remained open. When Mayor Edwards visited one damaged restaurant, the strikers returned with more bricks, injuring the mayor inside (it is not clear if the strikers knew he was there or not). A newly formed National Guard regiment, made up mostly of businessmen, cleared downtown by 2am with machine guns posted on the streets.

Peterson, Keeran, and Skaggs (the general strike executive committee) decided the first day to exempt all unionists working on government contracts from the general strike. This amounted to fourteen companies on the Missouri side. The largest industry working on contracts was meatpacking on the Kansas side, though the 14,000 workers

would not have joined the general strike anyway, owing to their ongoing participation in federal arbitration of nationwide conditions.

Kansas Citians awoke on the second day of the strike to newspaper photographs and drawings of property destruction at several laundries and restaurants. The EA also placed full page ads screaming, “How long will Kansas City continue to be a victim of Ruin, Riot and Vandalism?” Mayor Edwards and his advisors decided not to declare martial law, apparently in part because they feared how it would affect the upcoming municipal election, though the memory of the Civil War in Kansas City was the reason they gave publicly.¹⁹⁴

The strike made finding food extremely difficult. One cook claimed, “You could not have bought a glass of good old lager or a ham sandwich in those first six days if you had a million dollars.”¹⁹⁵ The labor movement eventually established a communal kitchen for participants:

The Cooks and Waiters opened a cafeteria in their headquarters with large lard cans on an oil stove--boiled coffee, stews, beans, sauerkraut and Frankfurters was the bill of fare, every person waiting on himself, even to washing their own dishes. They fed from one to two thousand three times a day. The presenting of your union card was your meal ticket.¹⁹⁶

The major event on the 28th, however, was the streetcar union announcing they would break their contract to join the general strike at 3pm. Panicked office and retail employees immediately deserted downtown to get home before trolley service ended.¹⁹⁷ A crowd of over 800 strikers gathered at 48th and Troost to block trolleys from exiting a

¹⁹⁴ *The Journeyman Barber* v14:161; *Post* March 28.

¹⁹⁵ *The Mixer and Server* 27(6):59.

¹⁹⁶ *Journeyman Barber* 14:161.

¹⁹⁷ *Journal* March 29.

carbarn, but National Guardsmen dispersed them. Nonetheless, strikers successfully halted streetcar service by the end of the evening.

On the night of the second day, Frank Peterson of the general strike committee publicly ordered the city waterworks employees to stay at their posts.¹⁹⁸ The general strike authorization stated water service would be shut down after 48 hours. This clause spread confusion and fear for the entire two weeks leading up to the general strike, as well as tension between the business agents and the general strike committee. After newspapers reported that citizens contacted Mayor Edwards' office to volunteer to run the waterworks during the strike, some labor leaders signaled they would modify that part of the general strike authorization. However, several days after that, the business agents voted to keep the 48 hour clause. A prominent Baptist minister, Reverend O. P. Bishop, who had helped investigate commercial laundry plants during the strike, responded by saying shutting down the water service would be treasonous and promised he would personally defend the water plant with a gun.¹⁹⁹

The third day of the general strike brought news that Lon Amos Millsap had succumbed to his wounds at the age of 32, inspiring calls for a mass funeral procession (which either did not materialize or it was not reported). The streetcar company also announced it would test-run a few streetcars from 3-7pm. They equipped each car with a flag and a placard with a quote from President Wilson: "It is essential that public utilities be maintained."²⁰⁰ At 4pm, 5,000 strikers and spectators gathered at 15th and Troost to block tracks and stone streetcars. Three women led the brick throwers, carrying two flags

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ *Star* March 16-17, 23-24; *Journal* March 17.

²⁰⁰ *Post* March 29.

and yelling “scabs!” The LOA and Mayor Edwards had criticized the police in the morning for their unwillingness to stop the strikers from destroying laundries the previous day. The police at this location had no qualms with using violence to reestablish their control of the situation. Before the National Guard could arrive with an armored car and mounted machine gun, the police ran into the crowd with clubs flying and guns firing. Somehow, no one was killed in the melee, but many were injured and a total of 23 people were arrested over the course of the day. Organized labor responded to the police violence by calling chauffeurs back out on strike, having earlier exempted them in order to relieve citizens of the inconvenience posed by no streetcar service.²⁰¹

On Saturday, March 30, limited streetcar service began with replacement workers and police protection. The National Guard was posted outside the laundries. Rank and file workers held their breath when William D. Mahon, president of the AASERE, arrived. Mahon was a conservative unionist, and most assumed he would order the streetcar workers back to work, given he had directly ordered them by telegram to stay out of the general strike. However, because the rank and file of Kansas City were so committed to fighting the Employers’ Association, he was convinced after he arrived that unilaterally undermining the general strike would have led to “riot and bloodshed.” Mahon took the position that both the EA and the labor movement had made mistakes, and that the only thing to do would be to negotiate a mutually acceptable settlement. Contrary to how local leaders framed the sympathy strike, Mahon echoed the laundry owners’ assertion that the general strike had occurred in sympathy with only a handful of disgruntled laundry drivers, rather than the women who wanted union recognition.²⁰²

²⁰¹ *Star, Journal, Post* March 29-30.

²⁰² WHS Gompers, Reel 94, Mahon to Gompers, April 8, 1918.

Less merciful was the press. The normally friendly *Post* intensified its editorial stance against the general strike:

That among the first arrests for participation in strike riots were German aliens, without union cards, should make every union man in this city stop and think again before he participates in a strike which has no parallel in the history of craft unionism. It is at least evident that German sympathizers are eager for just the situation which now exists to occur, are ready to foment it and increase its menace for reasons of their own, not for any sympathy with workers. Organized labor has won its place only by reason of its insistence at all times on the integrity of its contracts.²⁰³

The general strike also caught the ire of a *New York Evening Sun* editorial, which the *Star* reprinted.²⁰⁴ Frank Walsh's nemesis, Missouri Senator James A. Reed, denounced the Kansas City labor movement on the floor of the Senate:

I shall now, because of the conditions in Kansas City, denounce organized labor. I shall not indulge in any general criticism of organized labor. But as its sincere friend I say this, and say it with all the solemnity of my soul, that the day organized labor created disturbances that arrest those industries which are essential to the carrying on of this war it will be a very dark one for organized labor and for our beloved country. Organized labor will lose the best friends it has ever had.²⁰⁵

Easter Sunday remained relatively quiet in the streets, as the number of participants in the general strike topped 20,000. Missouri Governor Frederick Gardner assured the Kansas City Chamber of Commerce that "Law and Order will prevail." Several pastors used their sermons to decry both "Kaiserism" and the general strike.²⁰⁶ The major news that day happened when the Bakers decided to join the general strike. Bread was considered the lynchpin of the wartime domestic economy, and state officials warned bakers not to join. The Bakers publicly denied they were breaking their contract,

²⁰³ *Post* March 30.

²⁰⁴ *Star* March 30.

²⁰⁵ 56 *Congressional Record* p. 4432, April 2, 1918.

²⁰⁶ *Journal* March 31-Apr. 1.

and each member simply called out from work individually, claiming a death in the family.²⁰⁷

The federal mediators and Mahon settled on a new approach to gaining an audience with the LOA and EA in order to negotiate a settlement. They formed a committee of businessmen to act as go-betweens, led by Henry D. Faxon and George W. Fuller. Faxon was the spouse of key KCWTUL ally Peake Faxon (see Chapter 3), and Fuller the spouse of a prominent clubwoman with ties in the solidarity infrastructure. While Faxon was a respected businessman and Republican, he was also privately obsessed with the Bolshevik Revolution, which he viewed as “the dawn of human values.”²⁰⁸ Thus, although the EA and LOA refused to treat with federal mediators or labor representatives, they agreed to meet with a group of businessmen chaired by social progressives connected to the solidarity infrastructure.

Faxon and Fuller convened a marathon meeting of 20-30 independent businessmen, the mayor, and the EA and LOA on Monday, April 1, at Hotel Snyderhoff. The businessmen prepared extensively with the Department of Labor mediators and Mahon of the AASERE in order to accurately represent government and union interests. Just before sunrise on Tuesday, April 2, the EA proposed a truce to end the general strike. An exhausted Mayor Edwards trudged over to the Labor Temple for another lengthy and contentious meeting of union business agents, who were not inclined to accept the proposal. The EA offered to reinstate all union contracts that had been broken by participants in the general strike, while the laundry owners would take back all of their old employees without union recognition. Mediator Gill and Mayor Edwards pleaded

²⁰⁷ *Journeyman Barber* 14:162.

²⁰⁸ LOC O'Reilly Papers, Reel 7, Faxon to O'Reilly, January 1918.

with the business agents for hours to accept the deal, but the rank and file representatives desired a clear victory for the labor movement. Eventually, Mahon lost patience with the whole ordeal and told the business agents that he would order AASERE members to return to work on the streetcars at the threat of losing their union charter, if they did not accept the EA's armistice. On the night of April 2, the business agents acquiesced, and Kansas City returned to work the next morning.²⁰⁹

Despite the fact that the general strike ended in a stalemate, Skaggs of the general strike committee framed it as a victory:

We have had what the employers call a sympathy strike, which has proven an absolute success, as it proved to the world at large that the labor movement in this city stands as one. We have shown to the employers of this community that to discriminate against one is to discriminate against all.²¹⁰

Indeed, the fact that the labor movement emerged from the general strike relatively unscathed is remarkable, given the financial resources of the Employers' Association, and the willingness of the police and National Guard to freely apply violence.

CITIZENS' TICKET & ELECTION

The formation of a third party ticket for municipal elections in 1918 offers a window into the electoral ramification, or lack thereof, of the solidarity infrastructure. Although a full analysis of electoral politics is beyond the scope of this chapter, the episode directly relates to the longstanding problem of why the American labor movement never formed a successful labor party. There are three moments that scholars point to as missed opportunities for independent working class electoral politics based on

²⁰⁹ *Star, Post, Journal* April 2-3. WHS Gompers Papers, Mahon letter to Gompers, April 8; NA 280 33 993 Gill to Steward, April 6.

²¹⁰ *Journeyman Barber* 14:176.

comparative analysis. The first is the fall of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s (Fink 1983; Voss 1993). The post-Haymarket repression by employers, along with a defensive and sectional reaction by craft workers and influx of foreign-born proletarians, spoiled the best opportunity according to this narrative. The second moment occurred in 1893-94, when members of the new American Federation of Labor debated a socialist platform and proposal to form a labor party (Archer 2007). In this narrative, the state repression of industrial unionism and fear of ideological factionalism within the labor movement ruined the best opportunity. Lastly, Eidlin (2018a) argues the door to independent politics did not fully close until labor political activism became co-opted and incorporated into the Democratic Party in the 1930s. The Kansas City case fits well in the last narrative, and not only because of its timing relative to the other narratives.

As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, several political centers of gravity vied for control of municipal and county governments through the 1910s. Thomas R. Marks headed the Republican party machine, with the backing of manufacturing brothers Fed L. and Walter S. Dickey. Homer B. Mann, the “South Side Silk Stocking Boss”, represented business interests in the party. Anti machine forces were led by Mayor George Edwards and Controller Eugene Blake. The Democratic party had two primary machines led by Tom Pendergast and Joe Shannon. Other ward bosses and judges also controlled some votes and patronage, but rarely had as much power as Pendergast or Shannon. Because of their proven abilities to deliver votes during elections, anti machine voices in the Democratic party were easily neutralized (Dorsett 1980; Reddig 1986).

In early 1918, it was not obvious that Tom Pendergast would soon dominate the Democratic party. Just two years previous, an all out political war between Pendergast

and Shannon resulted in Pendergast delivering votes to the Republican George Edwards to spite Shannon. The labor movement argued that the most powerful figure among Democrats was banker William T. Kemper, who they called “the real Democratic boss.”²¹¹ Labor viewed Kemper as the man behind the LOA curtain as well, saying he held “mortgages on several of the laundries and is personally responsible for all the trouble.”²¹²

Labor movement leaders frustrated with the two party system and machine politics formed a third party at a convention at the Labor Temple on March 3, 1918. The delegates nominated labor lawyer Cliff Langsdale for mayor, and clubwoman Phoebe Ess for school board.²¹³ The plan was to run some candidates independently for both the Upper House and Lower House of the city council, and endorse some Democrats and Republicans. The party platform called for municipal owned utilities, increased pay for teachers, a commission style city government, loyalty to President Wilson, and home rule for the police department.

The Democratic party took the Citizens’ Ticket as a direct attack on their slate, however, as about three fourths of union members normally voted Democratic.²¹⁴ Party leaders forced every Democrat to remove their names from the Citizens’ Ticket slate on the evening of the 23rd, including Isaac Reicher, a member of the Tailors’ union and a beloved incumbent in the eyes of unionists.²¹⁵ Spokespeople claimed the third party was a conspiracy of the Republican machine boss Marks. The Democrats were unusually united

²¹¹ *Star* March 21.

²¹² Quoted from meeting minutes that summarize Frank J. Peterson’s comments, Chamber of Commerce, Executive Committee minutes March 20 (SHSMO).

²¹³ *Journal*, *Post* March 4.

²¹⁴ *Journal* March 4.

²¹⁵ *Post* March 24.

for the 1918 election, and felt confident enough that they did not need any labor ticket endorsements. The nomination of a corporate lawyer by the Republicans for mayor no doubt boosted their belief that they could hold on to workers' votes (Dorsett 1980:62-74).

An important obstacle for the Citizens' Ticket was that the two main parties adopted their platform, making it difficult to convince voters to switch parties. The overwhelming similarities of the three platforms is a reflection of the same political context that benefited the labor movement in strikes. Business influence was not strong enough in the fractured political climate to eliminate popular ideas like municipal ownership of utilities from political discourse.

The unity of the Pendergast and Shannon factions during their off again, on again 50-50 nominations agreement made for a peaceable convention. Democratic ward bosses could confidently deliver votes to a unified ticket, and their platform was relatively unimportant. Thus, they simply created a popular program at the moment, which overlapped with the Citizens' Ticket platform. They endorsed municipal ownership of utilities, improvement of telephone service, increased teacher salaries, opposition to street car fare increase, a reorganized health department, better labor conditions, competition for contracts to build school buildings, and a new city charter. Rhetorically, the convention attacked corporate influences within the local Republican party, and tied Democrats to the war effort. Judge Ralph Latshaw took the floor to denounce anyone who questioned President Wilson: "This is no time for the sowing of seeds of dissension by disappointed office seekers and egotists. I say, intern them, stand them up against the

wall and shoot them. They are traitors. I don't care who they may be-- [Teddy] Roosevelt or any body else."²¹⁶

The Republican convention, in contrast, became very fractious. The Marks machine kicked the highly effective anti-vice incumbent Judge Joseph Keirnan off of the ticket, and placed Marks ally Dr. W. A. Armour on the slate for the school board. Anti-machine forces were outraged, especially by the failure to nominate Keirnan for reelection to the south side court, because they felt it would signal to voters that Republicans were no more serious about cleaning up vice than Democrats. Compromise was reached, however, for the nomination of corporate lawyer Cyrus Crane for mayor, and the popular incumbent comptroller, Eugene Blake.²¹⁷ As with the Citizens' Ticket and Democrats, the Republicans crafted a platform for a new city charter, municipal ownership of utilities, and increase of wages for teachers. Republicans also supported home rule for the police department, eliminating vice, and women's suffrage, and opposed street car fare increases.

At the same time that the Citizens' Ticket was organized, the African American community demanded a voice in the Common Council, given their sacrifices for the war and their increasing concentration along the Vine Street corridor in the 8th Ward. The placement of a Black lawyer on the Republican ticket for 8th Ward representative in the Lower House almost tore the party apart in the following days. The majority of voters in the 8th Ward, which included the Labor Temple, were Black. In the context of wartime sacrifices by Black soldiers, who were often sent to the highest casualty areas of the battle front, African Americans refused to accept white representation any longer. The

²¹⁶ *Star* March 10.

²¹⁷ *Star*, *Post* March 10.

convention closed without an official nominee in the 8th Ward, and the Black lawyer William C. Hueston was placed on the ticket after it adjourned. White Republicans immediately claimed his nomination was not legal, and a few politicians, including the popular Blake (endorsed by the Citizens' Ticket), threatened to remove themselves from the ticket if Hueston stayed on. Black leaders held their ground, however, saying they would simply run a Black candidate independently.²¹⁸ While Democrats openly admitted they would use racism against the Republicans if Hueston remained, white Republicans backed off after a few days, and the original ticket remained intact. For his part, Crane firmly backed Hueston's inclusion, stating,

If any man had any reason to get off the ticket because a colored man was on it it must be on one or two things, it must rest on his prejudice, or it must rest on his fear, because, as I said to them and say it now, you have a right to have a man on the ticket--and that is a real right. I stand for the right and take the consequences, whatever they may be.²¹⁹

The Citizens' Ticket did not run or endorse anyone for the 8th Ward, a difficult fact to interpret without more evidence of how that decision was made.

As the general strike wound to a close, male citizens cast their votes for Democrats, Republicans, and the Citizen's Ticket in the local election, and marked a decisive victory for the Pendergast machine across the city, and white supremacy in the 8th Ward. Even though 7,000 fewer votes were cast than in the 1916 municipal election, the Democrats' confidence that they could win without endorsements from the Citizens' Ticket was confirmed.²²⁰ Democrat James Cowgill won a majority of votes in the mayoral race (22,216) compared to Republican Cyrus Crane (15,911), with Cliff

²¹⁸ A Black musician, Winston Holmes, did attempt to run as an independent in the 10th Ward, but the election clerk prevented him from getting on the ballot.

²¹⁹ *Post* March 19.

²²⁰ *Post* Apr. 3.

Langsdale only receiving 4,750 votes (Johnson 1981). The Democrats swept all executive and judicial positions, along with every at-large position in the Upper House of the Common Council. Only a handful of Republicans won seats to represent their wards in the Lower House, some with Citizens' Ticket endorsements.

A dispirited Langsdale remarked, "Undoubtedly this was the wrong time for a Labor ticket."²²¹ The *Labor Herald* did not hold back its disappointment in union members, writing, "As there are over 20,000 members of organized labor in this city, most of whom are of voting age, the majority of them must have either voted for candidates on the other tickets or not voted at all."²²² The most successful Citizens' Ticket candidate was Phoebe Ess, who received over 16,000 votes, but still came up short in securing one of two openings on the School Board.

Newspapers reported widespread violence and fraud brought to bear on Black voters in the 8th, 9th, and 11th wards.²²³ Police arrested a Black Republican worker in the morning and held him at police headquarters. Further,

At a voting precinct in the Ninth ward on Troost avenue, near Nineteenth street, deputy county marshals beat negroes with black-jacks and drove them from the polls. A policeman threw his baton at a fleeing negro at the voting booth. The baton missed the negro and went crashing through a plate glass window in a store at Ninteenth [sic] and Troost.²²⁴

In addition to police repression, white solidarity among voters swung the results. "The white population banded together and Republicans and Democrats voted solidly against the negroes."²²⁵ Even with election clerks switching ballots, police intimidation, and

²²¹ *Journal* Apr. 3.

²²² *LH* Apr. 5.

²²³ *Journal, Post* Apr. 3.

²²⁴ *Journal* Apr. 3.

²²⁵ *Post* Apr. 3.

white solidarity, the white Democrat Sannell only beat Hueston in the official tally by 84 votes. The Black-owned *Sun* summed up the day as such:

The White man, first and last, stands our most dangerous opponent to anything like progress for our people. Hence, at his door we properly place the cause of our non-success at the polls. The White man boasted of his intention to steal, browbeat and intimidate the Negro vote – and he did!²²⁶

The solidarity infrastructure failed to create a successful labor party. Still, for an independent labor party to garner eleven percent of the vote for mayor as late as 1918 is unusual in American history (see Ansell & Burris 1997). Further, organizers of the Citizens' Ticket were no doubt hampered by the planning and execution of the general strike. Meeting with constituents, knocking on doors, and attending public forums was not exactly at the top of the priorities list for people involved in the labor movement. Perhaps more importantly, both the Democrats and Republicans adopted virtually identical platforms to the Citizens' Ticket, making it difficult to convince people to spurn their preferred party. Much like Eidlin (2018a) demonstrated at the national level in the 1930s, the presence of a cooptative political party (rather than only hostile parties) makes it difficult to sustain independent labor politics.

GENERAL STRIKE CODA & CONCLUSION

What were the immediate reverberations of the general strike? After April 2, restaurant owners in the Cafe and Restaurant Owners' Association refused to abide by the agreement signed by the Employers' Association. Mayor Edwards pressured them to allow their workers to come back to work under their previous union contract, arguing it

²²⁶ *Sun* April 6.

was their patriotic duty to get back to prevailing conditions.²²⁷ The industry-wide lockout officially ended April 18, but pickets against several open shop holdouts lasted months, and they failed to fully retain previous union rates.²²⁸

A cook later explained,

A mass meeting was called, which was attended by most of the labor leaders from other crafts; some of them wanted to call all union workers out again, but the culinary crafts said they were patriotic and did not want to hinder the Government in any way while our country was at war and would endeavor to do our best to win out.²²⁹

Despite the fact that around 70 percent of unionized Cooks and Waiters eventually won their union contracts back, one local cook regretted participating in the general strike after all the trouble it caused in the food service industry: “advising all never to go out on sympathetic strike again.”²³⁰

Without a collectively bargained contract tying their hands, the Laundry Owners Association quickly went back on their verbal promises to raise wages and improve working conditions at the close of the general strike. For the following few months, the KCWTUL held mass meetings to keep the pressure up for union recognition, with about 300 women maintaining laundry union membership.²³¹ But by September 1919, there were no laundry union members reported to the Missouri Department of Labor (1920:905).

After witnessing the militancy of women workers and the vital work of the KCWTUL, the labor movement did take further steps toward greater gender

²²⁷ NA 280 33 993 Gill to Steward, April 6.

²²⁸ *LH* Apr. 12, 26, May 3, Sept. 6, 13, 1918.

²²⁹ *Mixer & Server* 27(June):59.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ LOC Pinchot I/9 KCWTUL 1917-19 Report.

inclusiveness. During the summer of 1918, the streetcar union became the only AASERE local in the country to allow women members, and at least 200 women signed up as conductors (Greenwald 1990:141). Additionally, G. C. Skaggs of the general strike committee began a lengthy crusade to get the Barbers' international to open up to women members, which did not succeed until 1924.²³²

The solidarity infrastructure aided in the success of early wartime strikes among streetcar and packinghouse workers. It continued to articulate solid and necessary support for working women, when clubwomen helped to extend the laundry strike long enough for the labor movement to pull off a general strike. The general strike tactic had its origins with the influence of transnational syndicalist political culture, going back to the beginnings of the emergence of the solidarity infrastructure in 1913 and 1914. Although the solidarity infrastructure failed at class formation in the realm of electoral politics, the 1918 municipal election also demonstrates that it was a victim of its own success -- the Democrats and Republicans both adopted nearly identical platforms. In the concluding chapter, I continue the analysis of the origins of the Kansas City solidarity infrastructure, and consider the limitations of alternative approaches to answering the research questions.

²³² *Journeyman Barber* 14:176-177, 324-325; 15:57-58, 432-433.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, WHY IN KANSAS CITY?

The rather lengthy concluding chapter that follows accomplishes several remaining tasks. First, now that the reader is familiar with the full empirical scope of the case, I summarize the solidarity infrastructure concept and its relation to the events in Kansas City. Next, I take a broader look at why a solidarity infrastructure emerged in Kansas City during the 1910s, finding that diffuse political power, the spatial organization of African American residents, and uneven women's rights help to explain the unique confluence of social forces. Finally, we return to the dynamics of solidarity literature to assess why a novel concept was required in this research project.

SOLIDARITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Let us review the questions that guided this dissertation: *How do we explain unexpected coalitions across class, gender, and race in Kansas City from 1910 to 1918? What collective action processes and unique historical conditions explain the militancy and solidarity exhibited during this time period?* My answer to these questions comes in the form of an original concept, the *solidarity infrastructure*. It is prudent to take stock of what it means and how it applies to the Kansas City case.

A solidarity infrastructure is a set of formal and informal links across multiple movement sectors, which coordinate a contentious front that, at the very least, articulate support for working class formation and solidarity. Singular links can be emerging, reproducing, strengthening, in abeyance, or eroding, meaning a solidarity infrastructure is a process, and in constant flux. The resources made available by a solidarity

infrastructure can help extend and deepen working class solidarity in class struggle over commodity production or social reproduction. Within a solidarity infrastructure, the independent resources of member organizations and networks helps to overcome power imbalances, a common problem in diverse coalitions. Solidarity infrastructures are animated by solidaristic political cultures, and support not only institutional forms of collective behavior, but also extra-institutional tactics found in militant labor movements or in confrontational civil disobedience. Let us review the Kansas City solidarity infrastructure more concretely.

In 1910, the labor movement helped found and fund the Kansas City branch of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL). The founders of the WTUL intended it to be run by working class women, with middle class ally support, to facilitate unionization of women workers, equal pay, suffrage, and to create friendly relations with the American Federation of Labor. In practice, most branches were effectively controlled by wealthy allies whose motivations were more philanthropic than supportive, and trade unionists rebuffed efforts at equal collaborations. In Kansas City, however, the labor movement already had cooperative relations with clubwomen, starting the branch off on relatively friendly terms with male unionists. Labor leaders committed to quality public education, women's suffrage, and prison reform, issues they worked on together through the 1910s. The KCWTUL struggled to attract working class women members, however, and had to rely on its allies. Significantly, a small group of relatively radical progressives in the city took interest, helping to maintain the organization and orient it toward working class militancy.

The Kansas City labor movement encompassed a broad range of political tendencies among its members, and came to collaborate with a revolutionary strain of syndicalism around 1913 and 1914. The radicals organized a citywide unionization drive through the AFL unions, appealing to waitresses and hiring two Black organizers. One particularly militant waitress eventually became the KCWTUL president, and helped turn the organization into an independent group that held influence among clubwomen and trade unionists alike. KCWTUL and white clubwomen engaged Black clubwomen in friendly, if not particularly close, collaborations throughout the period. After racist violence in East St. Louis in 1917, Black workers organized their own independent organization to support race-conscious worker militancy. They worked with the KCWTUL in at least one major strike during the war.

By 1917, the solidarity infrastructure included regular contact and trusting relationships between male trade unionists, women unionists, progressive supporters of working class solidarity, and white clubwomen, and less regular contact with African American clubwomen and workers. A number of progressive, producerist, socialist, Marxist, and syndicalist ideas animated these relationships. The meso-level solidarity infrastructure articulated support for working class militancy across gender and skill divisions, and opened up space for interracial solidarity as well. Most importantly, there was widespread agreement that all workers had the right to a union, and that employers were to blame for the financial and health woes of workers.

The solidarity infrastructure immediately mobilized and became a causal force in early wartime strikes in 1917. The KCWTUL and its clubwomen contacts whipped up community support, and pressured local and federal officials, to make several strikes

successful throughout the summer and fall. The explosion of militancy and solidarity sharpened class lines and illustrated a balance of class forces tipping toward workers. The Employers' Association, organized in 1903 to demolish all unions in Kansas City, turned increasingly desperate to block the tide of unionization. Their "moral and financial" support of commercial laundry owners against the strike in February and March of 1918, galvanized the solidarity infrastructure behind a class-based showdown across the city. The solidarity infrastructure made the general strike possible through its role in building the unionization momentum that caused such an intense showdown, and through its available resources for legitimizing expansive class solidarity amidst war hysteria.

The organizational independence of working class women and the Black community meant resources within this coalition were not centralized under the direction of middle class allies, nor conservative male trade unionists. Solidarity was forged organizationally through difference, rather than a single universalist class organization. Participants of the solidarity infrastructure, however, united in support for working class militancy and self activity, particularly in instances that directly affected women. The solidarity infrastructure took shape and became a counter-hegemonic force in the 1910s, when it articulated class-based interests and identities in opposition to unlimited private property rights.

In the context of 1910s Kansas City, the solidarity infrastructure linked "modern" subjects (e.g., upper class clubwomen, elite progressives, white male trade unionists) with working class people who did not necessarily understand or respect the boundaries of the public versus private spheres, private property and competitive markets, formal rationality, or institutional channels for political engagement. The civic, political, and

cultural norms of middle and upper class urban citizens were not necessarily intelligible to African American workers, white rural migrants, transient male laborers, or southern and eastern European immigrants. The links and resources made available, furthermore, did not act to discipline the latter group into becoming “modern” subjects (as typically constructed by classical and second wave historical sociologists, see Adams, Clemens, and Orloff 2005:14-15), but served in a supportive and defensive capacity for extra-institutional collective action (i.e., pickets and property destruction). For actors who supported or participated in working class militancy, urbanization threatened democracy and social order if citizens and the state allowed employers to impoverish and degrade workers and their families. Unchecked private property rights, in other words, were articulated as a threat to the modernity they imagined, and working class militancy was articulated as a means to check that threat.

The solidarity infrastructure concept contributes a theoretical lens through which to view solidarity as a dialectical process. Too often, solidarity is viewed as either the logical outcome of economic structures, or the voluntaristic imposition by ideologically motivated activists (Roediger 2016:232). Explaining an instance of a solidarity infrastructure requires looking at the creative agency of activists operating within structural contradictions and pressures. Using solidarity infrastructure to explain historical outcomes is an exercise in illustrating the ways solidarity can arise, not just out of given structures, but also from structures built by workers themselves. The concept highlights the importance of maintaining consistent collaborations with allies for labor movements, instead of only reaching out for collaborators during strikes, because a

solidarity infrastructure can produce unintended and beneficial results by altering the field of possibilities.

Sectors	Labor movement, social movement, community groups
Organizations/ Networks	Unions, social movement organizations, representative organizations, bridging organizations
Resources	Money, access to political system, access to media, cultural and social capitals to bridge networks, information, worthiness
Collaborations	Meetings, public events, strikes, boycotts, lobbying, elections, citizenship rights
Orientations	Support for working class militancy, working class solidarity, and women's rights

Figure 6.1. Characteristics of a Solidarity Infrastructure.

Figure 6.2. The Kansas City Solidarity Infrastructure, 1913-14.

Figure 6.3. The Kansas City Solidarity Infrastructure during World War I.

WHY IN KANSAS CITY?

Chapter 2 introduced six indicators of solidarity infrastructure formation and development -- municipal politics, spatial organization, demographics, political cultures, leadership, and collective action -- to lend the chronological narratives some analytical structure. I return here to the issue of solidarity infrastructure formation in Kansas City. What were the case-specific historical forces that explain both its emergence in the 1910s and its dissolution in the 1920s? My analysis identifies three factors -- diffuse political power, spatial organization of African American residents, and uneven women's suffrage.

For each factor, I identify their timing within the Kansas City case, illustrate the degree to which they developed uniquely compared to other cities during the Progressive Era, and clarify how they operated as mechanisms in creating the solidarity infrastructure. In other words, within-case temporal comparisons and comparisons to other cities (based on secondary literature) develop the arguments because they establish correlations of the factors identified with solidarity infrastructure presence, and point toward how they work as causal mechanisms. Diffuse political power set the context within which the spatial organization of African American residents and uneven women's suffrage operated.

Although I do not return here to the leadership and bridging work of Peake Faxon, Sarah Green, and the KCWTUL as discussed in Chapter 3, their agency within a particular organizational and political cultural context remains essential to my explanation of solidarity infrastructure emergence in Kansas City. The following sections represent the outcome of process tracing analysis.

DIFFUSE POLITICAL POWER

This section looks more closely at how municipal politics as a political system shaped the behavior of labor and progressive activists. Chapter 1 introduced the concept of political opportunity structure. In social movement literature, opportunities have been counterposed with threats. Opportunities are understood to encourage mobilization by a single social movement organization, while threats facilitate coalitions (Dixon, Danaher, and Kail 2013; McCammon and Campbell 2002; McCammon and Van Dyke 2010; Staggenborg 2010; Van Dyke and Amos 2017). Tarrow (1996) identified four political opportunity structures. The first type is the opening up of political access. When political parties, state bureaucracies, and policy processes become less insular, activists may perceive an opening for collective action to directly impact the state. They mobilize constituents to ask for representation of a particular issue on committees and arms of the state. And, because the political system is more amenable than previously, movement organizations may have successes that raise their profiles and mobilization potential.

Secondly, unstable political alignments create elbow room for challenges to institutional authority. Electoral instability, for example, motivates partisan actors to accept new coalitions with activists if it can make voting patterns more predictable and favorable. Thirdly, having allies embedded in the political system brings advantages for collective action. Well placed friends can shield a movement from extreme police and legal oppression. They can also provide important information to activists and frame their interests to elite actors, lending a mediation function to movements.

Finally, conflict among political elites signals to activists that the political system lacks unity to suppress challenges to authority. Further, as with unstable political

alignments, conflict among elites increases the likelihood that a fraction of the elite will link up with a movement to defeat their elite foes. Of course a potent social movement can create these very conditions for itself or other movement organizations, as Tarrow recognized. The main idea is that opportunities allow protesters into the system through alignment with elite fractions.

Threats, in contrast, are the components of a political environment that prevent a movement from achieving its goals, mobilizing constituents, or maintaining organizations. Threats may come from political elites, state bureaucrats, counter movements, or shifting economic and cultural circumstances. In threatening situations, movement organizations seek out defensive coalitions with other movements. Although other factors like organizational resources and ideological alignment also affect coalition formation, political threats are a powerful motivator for coalitions (McCammon and Campbell 2002). Coalitions, then, are understood to arise out of defensive logics.

However, movement organizers are always presented with both opportunities and threats by the political system that they must interpret (Eisinger 1973; Tarrow 1996). While a system that is perceived as more open than closed to action on a particular issue may encourage each organization to mobilize individually, and a system perceived to be more threatening than open may encourage coalitional strategies, individuals and organizations are not always oriented toward single-issues. Particularly in the US, different levels of the state may also send conflicting signals of opportunities and threats. A labor movement, for example, may have opportunities open up for protective legislation at the state level, while local police threaten picket tactics, and while the local city council considers legislation to both take over public utilities and do away with

collective bargaining rights. We can imagine a similar situation for progressively minded civic reformers' organizing efforts. Additionally, individuals within each movement will disagree about how to interpret and prioritize various opportunities and threats, and what tactics should be employed. It is very difficult, in other words, to simply periodize different moments as open or threatening for social movements in order to explain why organizations may act individually or in coalition at different times. The analysis shows that the most important dimension of Kansas City's political environment to our story was the *diffuseness* of political power, rather than opportunities or threats to particular issues at any given time.

Developments in Municipal Politics

Chapter 2 introduced the decentralized nature of development and boosterism in Kansas City. From 1869 to 1920, political power remained contested and diffuse in Kansas City, Missouri. In that time span, Democratic mayoral candidates won eighteen elections, while Republicans claimed victory in nineteen. Democrats never held the mayor's office more than four years, and the Republicans never over six. Democratic and Republican heelers claimed domains over individual wards, but their fiefdoms required constant favors to voters and businesses to keep competitors at bay. The most successful boss of the period was Jim Pendergast. By all accounts, Jim never stuffed ballots, resorted to violence, or engaged in explicit quid pro quo deals for votes, as his younger brother Tom later would. The respect he earned from working class Irish and Black voters through favors and generosity, not to mention protection for gamblers and saloon owners, lent a loyal following. However, Jim's only moment of citywide control lasted,

at best, from 1900 to 1904 (Dorsett 1980:22-41). The heyday of Tom Pendergast's domination of city politics launched in 1925, although he began to consolidate power among Democrats in 1918. The 1910s in particular represented a time when power was particularly fractured *and* relatively amenable to alliances across race, class, and gender.

The political opportunity structure that facilitated solidarity infrastructure emergence in Kansas City disintegrated in the 1920s, thereby making continued alliances across the labor movement and clubwomen less likely. When the Tom Pendergast Democratic machine consolidated municipal power in 1925 after a civic reform measure handed him a powerful city manager position, the political system transformed. This process began when Pendergast tightened his grip on the local Democratic party in 1918, and continued into state level dominance, and even several years of federal influence in the 1930s. Individuals and organizations had to choose sides: were they willing to work with Pendergast, or would they fight the corruption?

Despite Pendergast trading in racism and sexism at times, this political polarization in the 1920s split up coalitions across race, class, and gender (Coulter 2006:276-277; Dorsett 1980:75-117; Hanzlick 2018:194-211). Many of the upper class clubwomen, including Phoebe Ess, and other progressive reformers continued to battle Pendergast with a bipartisan Citizen Fusion ticket, which replaced the GOP in local elections. But business interests had to assess the risk of crossing Pendergast and falling out of favor with his powerful City Manager, Henry F. McElroy. Businessmen were divided, but so were workers. Pendergast provided infrastructure and desperately needed services to poor African Americans, as well as jobs and police protection for Black Democrats and entrepreneurs of vice and jazz, to the chagrin of Black Republicans.

White women, mostly court clerks and wives of public employees, assisted with voter fraud and corruption. City construction projects, which kept the building trades working through the 1930s, provided incentive for labor movement collaboration.

The city hired very few Black workers, however, which incensed Black masons and hod-carriers, as well as community leaders (Coulter 2006:276-77). The long history of biracial construction sites in Kansas City ended. Many white workers were already loyal to the Democratic Party, and needed few incentives to remain loyal. Further, the Kansas City Police Department operated under the control of the anti-vice Republican Matthew Foster from 1921 to 1924. Foster was an officer of the National Guard during the general strike, and the labor movement singled him out as a particularly violent anti-union politician. Complaints of police brutality were aired from a number of corners of society during his reign of terror (Schirmer 2002:133-135). The labor movement could collaborate with the Pendergast machine as opposed to Foster, but that cut off avenues of collaboration with clubwomen, progressives, and some African Americans.

Degree of Diffuseness in Comparative Perspective

To put a finer point on my argument that Kansas City politics were particularly fractured during the Progressive Era, it is useful to contrast it with other cities. Urban regimes, whether rooted in machine organizations or upper class reform circles, were never static. Any successful political regime had to continuously reconstitute coalitions that might involve various combinations of saloon owners, ethnic groups, suburban clubs, policy experts, labor unions, white nativists, and competing business interests. Yet most cities had a situation where the political system produced sharp boundaries between

interests in or out of power, or produced bipolar terrains that prevented coalitions between labor, clubwomen, and African Americans (Ansell and Burris 1997; Bridges and Kronick 1999; Finegold 1995).

Cities with strong patronage machine organizations frequently emerged when divisions occurred among elites. For example, one of the most dominant machines operated in Omaha, where Boss Tom Dennison ruled alongside the populist Democratic Mayor “Cowboy Jim” Dahlman for all but three years between 1906 and 1930. They established a Western paradise for saloons, boxing, and gambling. Dahlman lived and played among the proletariat of the city, personally bailing drunks out of jail and driving cheating gamblers out of town. Moral crusaders and good government reformers failed to overcome their divisions to join in an effective opposition (Richard 1972). In New York City, the Democratic Tammany organization controlled city government throughout most of the opening three decades of the twentieth century. Upper class reformers and the populist base of William Randolph Hearst could not effectively join forces against the patronage system, and divisions between old money and new money further frustrated reform efforts (Finegold 1995:33-68). A strong Republican organization formed in Cincinnati around George Cox between 1894 and 1911, which included saloons, construction trade unions, private utility interests, and a Republican newspaper, but it produced a more bipolar context than in Omaha or New York. Democratic fusion slates of upper- and middle-class anti-Cox forces competed strongly, culminating in a broad progressive coalition taking power in 1911 and the Republicans pushing Cox allies to the margins (Miller 1968).

Machines not only thrived when elites were divided, but also when pure and simple craft unionism dominated labor movements in rejection of solidarity strikes and independent labor politics. The culmination of a centralized machine coming to power New York City, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia, for example, came only after the threat of independent labor politics in the 1880s first caused the centralization of nomination powers within political parties, and then after local craft unions fully embraced exclusive craft unionism (Ansell and Burris 1997:16-23).

Divisions between old money and new money facilitated Cox's rise in Cincinnati. But general elite anxiety regarding the river city's slipping status in the railroad age created a more unified business class that cooperated through high culture, civic engagement, and the desire to clean up their national reputation for misgovernment. An effective Employers' Association also kept the labor movement weak from 1903. By the 1910s, bourgeois solidarity reigned and the labor movement had little power even after Cox's control waned (Haydu 2008:35-60).

In St. Louis, another old river city struggling against the rise of Chicago, proceeded in a similar, but more corrupt and disorganized, pattern. The city's 1876 charter reduced executive power and created the unintended consequence of enticing businessmen to pay city council members bribes as the only effective way to control development policy and taxation. Religious and ethnic fractures combined with all out war between populists and goldbugs within the Democratic party. An Irish Democratic ward organization led by Edward Butler provided Catholic and anti-prohibition forces an effective voice. Radical reconstructionists lost control of the Republican party toward the end of the century, introducing a Catholics versus nativists and African Americans

dynamic in that party. Into this environment stepped the progressive Democrat “Holy Joe” Folk and Joseph Pulitzer’s *Post-Dispatch* to attack corruption, which included not only Butler, but much of the business class that formed the base for traditional reform in other cities. Despite the complicated and shifting dynamics of local politics, two poles could be identified in St. Louis in the early twentieth century -- “the people” versus “the Big Cinch” (wealthy elites and corrupt politicians). Like Cincinnati, St. Louis politics had effectively become bipolar by the 1910s (Primm 1981:345-461).

Other cities’ politics developed with more unified elites. Chicago elites coalesced around organizations like the Municipal Voters’ League, but the decentralized structure of municipal government meant ward-level machines maintained political control. The unified elites could not tolerate radical populism, syndicalism, or socialism, and sometimes allied with the patronage network of Democrat Carter Harrison II to keep leftists out of power (Finegold 1995:119-168). Indeed, Harrison could not control the nomination of Democrats, demonstrating his reliance on the social base of traditional reform politics (Ansell and Burris 1997:23-27). In Indianapolis, members of the upper class were socially and politically homogeneous. These white Protestant men and women joined the same organizations, went to the same social events, and controlled the individualistic philanthropic organizations that dominated development and reform throughout the period. Democratic boss Thomas Taggart stabilized politics for those excluded from Indianapolis’s high society (Badertscher 2017). In Los Angeles, newspaper publisher “General” Harrison Gray Otis unified downtown Christian elites through the early twentieth century and controlled city development with an iron fist. Although Jewish elites were excluded and anti-Otis progressive elements existed, the

carrot of profits from a rapidly expanding city and the stick of a popular Socialist Party threatening to gain power maintained his grip through the Progressive Era (Davis 2018:99-102).

Not all cities followed these patterns. In Cleveland, Democrat Tom Johnson became mayor in 1901 as a Henry George-style populist, beating out patronage organizations. Johnson instituted an expert-led progressive administration, however, that attracted some reformers that initially opposed him. Even after Johnson's departure in 1909, Cleveland's politics continued to be structured by the expert-driven and efficient populism he had institutionalized (Finegold 1995:69-118). In lawless and vice-ridden Memphis, Edward Crump created a centralized Democratic political organization that acted like a machine, but battled vice and juvenile delinquency, and fought for municipal ownership of utilities (Miller 1957).

San Francisco's elites remained deeply fractured throughout the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, but instead of a typical machine stabilizing politics, an alliance between white unionists and white small capitalists dominated via the Union Labor Party. Shared economic interests against large capitalists and the Southern Pacific railroad, as well as racist hatred of Chinese small capitalists and low-wage workers, stabilized an explicitly white regime. The relatively isolated nature of the Bay Area's markets meant the increased costs of small manufacturers' and merchants' acquiescence to closed union shops could be passed on to consumers. The politics of corruption in this context linked labor politicians with prominent businessmen further still (Haydu 2008:61-81).

In Kansas City, like Chicago, the structure of municipal and county government made the dominance of a single machine difficult. Competition among ward-based

organizations in both the Democratic and Republican parties failed to produce a big boss until the 1920s when a new city charter centralized power.²³³ However, unlike Chicago or Indianapolis, business and social elites did not unite politically. Businessmen instead either allied with machines in their preferred parties, or joined upper class reform organizations. But one of the wealthiest locals, William Volker, funded progressive efforts like the Bureau of Public Welfare, which moved beyond philanthropy to attacking structures that created social problems. Volker's preferences created financial resources for gadflies like Frank Walsh and the BPW's leader Halbert to develop policies that neither directly served politicians nor business interests.

Additionally, Kansas City elites and politicians believed that the low number of immigrants meant they were immune to radical threats. Certainly, there were no major threats of populism (as in New York and Chicago) or socialists (as in Los Angeles) taking power. In other words, Kansas City lacked a strong enough radical flank that could unite elites with machines against populism.

At the same time, the Kansas City labor movement continued to constitute a local class-based movement rather than a collection of sectional locals under the control of national unions, demonstrated by the sympathy strikes of the 1890s and 1900s, and third party tickets in the elections of 1887, 1888, 1894, and 1904. As in Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, and Cleveland, the presence of independent labor politics and class identification across craft divisions further militated against the consolidation of a machine in Kansas City (Ansell and Burris 1997:23-34). Nonetheless, elites did not

²³³ Progressive reformers often wanted to centralize municipal control in order to fight ward level organizations, but this sometimes unwittingly helped create a citywide machine in the process (Ansell and Burris 1997; Bridges and Kronick 1999).

perceive independent labor politics as threatening enough to circle the wagons and thereby polarize politics. Not only did Kansas City lack a stable regime as in Omaha, New York, San Francisco, or Los Angeles, local politics did not even have a definable bipolar structure as with Cincinnati or even St. Louis.

Mechanism of Diffuseness

The fractured nature of politics in 1910s Kansas City sent clubwomen, social progressives, labor organizers, and African American leaders searching for ways to achieve their goals and defend their interests. Allying with ward politicians was an ineffective tactic for pushing legislation through the city council. And, despite the presence of a social elite and general agreement regarding the desirability of economic development, unified political vehicles representing business interests did not exist. The implications for working class formation and solidarity will continue to be developed in the following two sections.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN RESIDENTS

This section and the following section look at uneven experiences with racialization and women's rights. "Unevenness"²³⁴ means that the racialized and gendered social order could not be taken as natural givens. The state line between Missouri and Kansas in particular marked different institutional arrangements, even as workers and organizers crossed the state line in everyday life. The independent activities

²³⁴ By "unevenness", I simply mean that the racist social order lacked consistency across institutions, space, and time. "Uneven development" has a different meaning in Marxist geography that refers to spatial fixes to problems in capital accumulation (see Gotham 2014).

of Black community members and white women also facilitated organizational bases for community support of non-white male workers. In other words, the solidarity infrastructure's relative inclusiveness across gender and race emerged out of a particular community and workplace spatial organization.

As discussed in Chapter 2, white supremacy increasingly structured social interactions in Kansas City during the 1880s and 90s, and politicians explicitly mobilized racist resentment across the state from 1903 to 1910 (Grothaus 1970:31). Thanks to the efforts of Black Republicans and Democrats, in addition to the Democratic ward boss allies in Jefferson City, local and state segregation laws were prevented. Various forces then competed for Black votes throughout the 1910s.

As an example of racial unevenness, Kansas high schools were required to be integrated by law (unlike segregated Missouri schools). But when a popular white student instigated a fight and was killed by a Black resident in 1904, parents and school officials supported a white student strike and lobbied Topeka for a segregated high school. Against the wishes of a well-organized campaign by Black leaders, state legislators carved out an exemption for Kansas City, and the Black-only Sumner High School opened in 1905. Like Lincoln High School in Missouri, it became one of the best schools in its state (Greenbaum 1982; Peavler 2005).

The rise in white supremacy included shifts in white middle class housing patterns on the Missouri side, and African Americans began moving to the Vine Street corridor in increasing numbers through the first two decades of the twentieth century, in part due to the location of African American institutions that supported a strong and independent Black community. However, this neighborhood still included both the Labor Temple and

a great deal of white working class residents. The institutionalization of the Vine Street neighborhood as a white-enforced ghetto did not fully occur until the 1920s. Here I sketch out the racialized housing patterns of the 1910s and contrast them with other cities.

Developments in Spatial Organization

Historian Sherry Lamb Schirmer (2002) showed in a detailed examination of residential patterns in Kansas City that racist segregation did not fully institutionalize until the mid 1920s. Sociologist Kevin Fox Gotham (2014) had a slightly different interpretation, writing that the Lincoln-Coles District (Vine Street) could be identified as a ghetto by 1920 (p. 34). Ward-level residential data support this overall picture. For example, in 1890, out of 14 Missouri-side wards, half had at least ten percent Black residents. The same can be said for three out of six wards in Kansas. In 1900, this statistic slipped to six out of 14 in Missouri. In Kansas, however, the pattern shifted to more residential distance between African Americans and foreign born whites, spurred by a 1903 flood that forced Black residents to permanently resettle in the Third Ward enclave (Greenbaum 1982).

Sociologists have quantified enclave and “ghetto” patterns, which allow some very rough comparisons of residential patterns between 1900 and 1920 (Massey and Denton 1993:17-24). Table 3.1 states Black Dissimilarity Index values by ward for fifteen cities, including Kansas City, Missouri. The Dissimilarity Index conveys how many Black residents would have to move to a different ward in order to achieve equal proportions across the city. For example, in 1900, 13.2 percent of Black Kansas Citians

would have needed to move to a different ward for each ward to have 10.7 percent African American residents. As a rule of thumb, values between 30 and 60 are interpreted as moderate segregationist, and over 60 represents extreme racial segregation. By 1970, hypersegregation had set in across American cities, with average block-level white Dissimilarity Index values well into the 80s.

Caution must be practiced when interpreting these numbers. Dissimilarity Index values have consistently remained lower in Southern cities, reflecting a white supremacy that shaped social interactions and citizenship rights prior to the presence of mass transportation and large factories. In other words, low values indicated that Black domestic workers lived close to white employers, not less racism. Further, calculating the index by ward is imprecise, and makes comparisons between cities and decades problematic. Kansas City ward boundaries were redrawn multiple times throughout this period, and the total population in each ward varied significantly. Recent studies of cities (not including Kansas City) based on the smaller Enumeration Districts of the US Census produced far higher Dissimilarity Index values than found in Table 3.1 (Bae and Freeman 2021; Logan et al 2015).

Schirmer (2002) took a closer look at residential patterns in two neighborhoods from 1900 to 1920. In the slums of Belvidere Hollow and Hick's Hollow, Black semi skilled and unskilled workers consistently made up about one third of the population. Native-born white residents, who were mostly white collar, skilled, and semiskilled workers, moved out in significant numbers. Taking their place included unskilled and professional whites, many of whom were Italians and Russian Jews.

Secondly, the famous Vine Street Corridor (aka the Lincoln-Coles District, which included the Labor Temple) experienced a more intense shift. The total population of Black residents increased dramatically for the period, and the proportion shifted from 23 percent to 73 percent. The expansion of public parks, stockyards, and railroad facilities forced many Black families to move around 1900. At the same time, cheap and high quality housing became available along the Vine Street corridor after a real estate bubble popped. Easy access to streetcars, and therefore places of employment, enabled many Black families to live a middle class lifestyle (Shortridge 2012:86-87). The movement of African Americans during this period proceeded, at least in part, through patterns of enclave formation, rather than segregation.

Sociologist Kevin Fox Gotham (2014) showed that institutionalized housing segregation in Kansas City originated with real estate developer J. C. Nichols. His experiments with restrictive covenants and homeowner associations, beginning in 1908, helped set the foundation for federal redlining policies in the 1930s. But Nichols's strategy to stabilize property values first targeted wealthy and middle income whites. Additionally, up to the 1940s, litigation involving covenants almost always involved white homeowners suing other whites to prevent them from selling to Black families, showing that the discipline of contracts and courts was necessary to maintain segregation (pp. 42-48).²³⁵

²³⁵ Interestingly, the first restrictive covenant in the area may have been a separatist covenant in the late 1880s in Kansas City, Kansas. African American brothers with the last name Hogg developed a neighborhood restricted to dark skinned Baptists, which the city seized in 1909 to build Kensington Park (Greenbaum 1982).

	1900			1910			1920		
	BDI	%	#	BDI	%	#	BDI	%	#
Kansas City, MO	13.2	10.7	17,567	21.7	9.5	23,566	23.7	9.5	30,719
Boston	6.4	2.1	11,591	11.3	2.0	13,564	15.2	2.2	16,350
Buffalo	4.4	0.5	1,698	5.7	0.4	1,773	10.2	0.9	4,511
Chicago	10.4	1.8	30,150	15.1	2.0	44,103	38.1	4.1	109,458
Cincinnati	10.1	4.4	14,482	13.2	5.4	19,639	26.9	7.5	30,079
Cleveland	7.5	1.6	5,988	7.9	1.5	8,448	23.9	4.3	34,451
Detroit	6.4	1.4	4,111	6.8	1.2	5,741	14.7	4.1	40,838
Indianapolis	15.1	9.4	15,931	18.5	9.3	21,816	23.4	11.0	34,678
Milwaukee	2.4	0.3	862	1.9	0.3	980	4.1	0.5	2,229
Minneapolis	1.6	0.8	1,548	1.7	0.9	2,592	2.1	1.0	3,927
Newark	5.5	2.7	6,694	5.4	2.7	9,475	7.0	4.1	16,977
New York	5.0	1.8	60,666	6.7	1.9	91,709	20.5	2.7	152,467
Philadelphia	16.4	4.8	62,613	15.7	5.5	84,459	20.8	7.4	134,229
Pittsburgh	12.0	5.3	17,040	12.0	4.8	25,623	16.5	6.4	37,725
St. Louis	12.6	6.2	35,516	17.2	6.4	43,960	29.5	9.0	69,854
<i>mean</i>	8.6	3.6	19,097	10.7	3.6	26,497	18.4	5.0	47,899

Table 6.1. African Americans in Select Cities, 1900-1920: Black Dissimilarity Index, Proportion of the Population, and Number of Black Residents. BDI ward-level data from Massey and Denton 1993:24. Note that ward-level BDI data are not very precise and numbers would be higher at the Census tract-level. Additionally, ward boundaries changed often during this time period in many cities. Other data from the US Census.

To summarize housing patterns, white and Black working class people lived on the same blocks throughout a swath of housing just to the east of downtown. This area also housed the Labor Temple, as well as commercial laundries and trolley barns that became sites of wartime strike actions. Although wealthier whites already lived in homogenous neighborhoods and were beginning to buy motor vehicles, working class whites shared spaces with Black neighbors. The segregation and exclusion found in many unions should caution our interpretation of these facts, but uneven segregation at least posed the question of interracial class solidarity.

How did the spatial organization of African American residents work out politically in the 1910s? Both parties had mixed records on racism, and African American leaders were united in fighting attempts to expand segregation or use racism in partisan politics. But Black Republicans were led by newspaper editor Nelson Crews, and Black Democrats by medical doctor William J. Thompkins, indicating centrifugal forces on Black political unity, at the very least over tactics. The Democratic ward boss Joe Shannon and his lieutenant Cas Welch, who operated out of the increasingly Black Vine Street neighborhood, and Republican boss Tom Marks, all used patronage and protection from segregation to court Black voters. In 1914, Shannon's ally Henry Jost ran for mayor, and secured the support even of die-hard Black Republicans. Jost won easily and appointed Thompkins to superintendent of the Black hospital and censored *Birth of a Nation*. In 1916, intraparty fights between Shannon and Pendergast led many African Americans to vote GOP on the local ticket. However, that same year, a Democrat was elected governor of Missouri by such a narrow margin he would have lost without Black Democrats in Kansas City supporting the state ticket (Grothaus 1970:78-81).

The political and social independence of the African American community in the 1910s, along with the uneven racial terrain, made organized solidarity a possibility. Things shifted after this brief moment, however. From the mid 1920s through the Great Depression, residential segregation institutionalized, and the Pendergast machine stabilized spatial patterns of vice by protecting it in the Black Vine Street corridor and suppressing it in middle class white areas (Schirmer 2002). In the 1910s, however, “race relations” were still in flux, and leaders at the Labor Temple decided to open their doors to community events. Many of the most important Black community events between roughly 1919 and 1921 were held there -- Benny Moten first developed the sound of Kansas City jazz during his three weekly concerts at the Labor Temple (Coulter 2006:222-225). But residential segregation did travel from upper and middle class neighborhoods to working class neighborhoods in the 1920s.

Additionally, fewer people rode streetcars. The Kansas City Railways Co. went into receivership in 1920. Throughout the 1920s, trolley operators fought private bus companies and cheaper automobiles for passengers. A new company took over the streetcar lines in 1926, and began decommissioning tracks and replacing them with bus lines in the 1930s (Dodd 2002:129-143). While working class people may have continued using streetcars more than middle class folks, residential and transportation patterns both moved toward racial segregation throughout the class structure.

The labor market also became more restrictive through the 1920s and 30s. As the meatpacking industry began to shrink in Kansas City throughout the period, African Americans were squeezed out in the 20s (Coulter 2006:68). Increasing percentages of Black workers toiled as chauffeurs, servants, and porters. Unionization efforts among

African Americans in Kansas City shifted to the dangerous job of organizing the railroad porters, independently of the AFL (pp. 68-73). As previously mentioned, construction during the 1930s centered around municipal government projects as private development dried up. The lack of opportunities for Black building tradesmen on these projects further segregated workplaces. By 1930, white and Black workers interacted far less at work or at home than during the early twentieth century.

African Americans in Other Industrial Cities

How did African Americans relate to municipal politics in the Progressive Era elsewhere? To begin with, most industrial cities had very low proportions of Black residents, until World War I cut off the supply of cheap labor from Southern and Eastern Europe. In 1910, Black residents of Chicago, New York, Cleveland, Omaha, and Los Angeles made up well below five percent of each city's population. They simply did not enter into the central political processes of coalition building in these places until at least the teens. Further, demographics are not destiny. Indianapolis shared similar demographic patterns as Kansas City, but white vigilantism took hold there. Vigilantes chased African Americans out of public spaces in 1901, and multiple instances of high-profile racist violence occurred in 1917, for example. In the 1920s, over one-quarter of Indianapolis's eligible population joined the Ku Klux Klan (Jones 2007).²³⁶

The Black population of Cincinnati increased from 4.4 to 7.5 percent between 1900 and 1920. And, despite the largely Southern composition of native white and Black

²³⁶ African Americans made up 48.8 percent of Memphis's population in 1900, and 34.7 percent in 1920. Additionally, Mayor Crump did register some loyal Black residents to vote in the early 1910s, However, white supremacy ruled politics in Memphis, and the vast majority of Black residents were disenfranchised - there were no opportunities for independent Black politics (Miller 1957).

migrants to the Queen City, African Americans succeeded in creating some competition for their votes, similar to Kansas City. Cincinnati made for an incredibly diverse city with a high proportion of foreign born residents, and strong communities of Jewish and Catholic faiths. Because politics were competitive and bipolar, both the Cox machine and Democratic fusion slates elicited and received Black support. However, just as the Cox center of gravity disintegrated, nativism and racism surged around 1913. The intense battles among Republicans over state and national politics, as well as local utilities and vice problems, pushed the concerns of the African American community to the side and failed to protect them in the teens (Miller 1968).

The African American community in St. Louis remained at a consistent six percent of the city until World War I. They generally lived in enclaves along the river, or took over the least desirable housing in the central parts of the city. As in Kansas City, many Black voters became frustrated with Republicans in the 1890s and were attracted to friendly Democratic ward bosses. However, more Black voters remained loyal to the GOP in St. Louis, likely because friendly ward heelers had less influence within the Democratic party there. White solidarity expanded in salience over ethnic identities in St. Louis in the teens. In 1916, white homeowners who lived near African American neighborhoods placed an initiative on the ballot to segregate housing, churches, and dance halls. Despite the vigorous organized opposition by the NAACP, the *Post-Dispatch*, the (mostly German-membership) Socialist Party, Democratic ward heelers, the influential sociologist Roger Baldwin, and Jewish Leaders, the initiative passed by an overwhelming three to one margin (but the Supreme Court of the United States nullified the initiative in 1917). The war inspired more developments in whiteness. St. Louis

capitalists owned large factories across the Mississippi River in East St. Louis, Illinois, where they brought in large numbers of Southern African Americans to break strikes and keep wages low. Horrific white vigilante violence killed scores of Black migrants there in the summer of 1917. The racist anger of white workers, small businessmen, and professionals had deadly consequences. St. Louis provided relief to the refugees from across the river, many of whom stayed in Missouri (Grothaus 1970:16-18, 82-85, 95; Primm 1981:435-441).

No labor movement of the Progressive Era developed as much economic and political dominance as in San Francisco. Yet it was a dominance built explicitly on white solidarity among laborers, craft workers, professionals, manufacturers, and merchants. The labor movement's political alliances gave it power to pursue the eight hour day and prevent employer tactics during strikes. But they also opposed municipal ownership of utilities and attacked socialists and syndicalists. Anti-Chinese labor solidarity developed in the 1870s and carried forth for decades, supported not only by the Union Labor Party, but by California state Democrats as well (Haydu 2008:61-81).

Kansas City represents a unique case for industrial cities of the period. Although racism structured social interactions, the African American community carved out a much larger space for independent politics compared to other cities in the 1910s. The rise of segregation locally began in middle class neighborhoods, reaching working class areas more thoroughly in the 1920s. As the blocks surrounding the Labor Temple shifted increasingly Black in the 1910s, labor organizers decided to regularly rent space to African American community events, rather than openly give in to racist reaction.

Mechanism of the Spatial Organization of Racialized Residents

It would be foolish to pretend racism did not saturate institutions in Kansas City. Indeed, race has served as a master category of difference throughout American history, even if its meaning has remained remarkably inconsistent (Omi and Winant 2015). Many local unions, for example, practiced racist exclusionism, and some whites refused to sit next to Black commuters on the unsegregated streetcars (Coulter 2006). Yet African Americans participated in the electoral process, served in appointed municipal positions, and lived in surprisingly diverse neighborhoods in the 1910s. They built their own institutions and openly fought for civil rights.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, white supremacy went through a process of consolidation. Both Kansas Cities elected mayors running on racism and segregation in the early 1900s. Real estate developers, social workers, and sociologists began connecting urban blight, low property values, and public health issues with Blackness (Gotham 2014:37-38). In short, while working class whites had Black neighbors, rode integrated streetcars, and sometimes worked together on killing floors and construction sites, ideas of fundamental race difference gained steam, posing the question of race solidarity.

Residents were confronted with two types of uneven racialization and spatial organization. Within each Kansas Cities' boundaries, racial patterns of neighborhoods and other public spaces had no consistent logic. Secondly, unevenness occurred across the Missouri-Kansas boundary in public education and other segregationist policies. To live in Kansas City between 1870 and 1920 was to experience daily the arbitrary and

inconsistent racialization of space and citizenship, all while coming into regular contact across “race” differences.

Perhaps a thought experiment is in order to establish the significance. Without downplaying the violence of French colonialism and discrimination against Africans, numerous twentieth century Black American veterans and intellectuals commented on the strange experience of living in Paris, where their skin color did not seem to matter in social interactions with white French people (Fabre 1991). They remarked that a weight was lifted from their shoulders, enabling them to experience a kind of freedom not possible in America. Race ceased to structure space and social interactions for these Parisian transplants, other than their political organizing against American racism and European colonialism. Contrast this with times and places in American history where racist segregation is thoroughly and firmly in place in every institution -- neighborhoods, suffrage, education, religion, labor market, and so on. Race matters very much in these instances, but it matters so much that interracial solidarity becomes almost unthinkable. Race is reified to the point where, at least for whites, racial boundaries act as forces of nature.

Similar to my argument here about the Kansas City case, Andrews and Biggs (2006) found that Southern cities were more likely to have sit-in protests against segregation in 1960 when the proportion of Black residents hit a sweet spot. If about one-third of the population were African American, then the chances of a sit-in protest increased because it was a big enough community to generate its own independent resources, but not so big that the entire white power structure unified in a siege mentality.

For the question of interracial solidarity to be posed to collective actors, race must be part of institutions, but not so institutionalized that race is completely reified for whites. This was the context under which white and Black labor organizers, workers, clubwomen, and progressives made decisions about organizing and alliances. In other words, the institutional arrangement, and its shifts through space and time, confronted organizers with the question of race when considering alliances.

UNEVEN WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

The unevenness of women's rights across the Missouri-Kansas border interacted with the political opportunity structure, just as Black politics did, motivating white clubwomen to seek out allies on issues such as suffrage and education reform. These issues aligned well with the labor movement in the 1910s. After federal suffrage in 1920, clubwomen continued to organize around getting a woman elected to the school board. But by the mid-1920s, the unifying political issue among clubwomen became opposing Tom Pendergast. Whereas the labor movement and some African Americans could work with Pendergast, clubwomen joined with right wing businessmen on anti-machine fusion tickets (Hanzlick 2018:198-99, 205-06).

Developments in Clubwomen Politics

As discussed in Chapter 2, when the Kansas City Women's Christian Temperance Union shifted away from suffrage organizing around 1898, a vacuum opened up in the first decade of the new century (Hanzlick 2018:155). But when the Athenaeum and General Federation of Women's Clubs embraced the issue in the 1910s (p. 190), efforts

were led by clubwomen amenable to working with the labor movement. Some of them were former teachers who worked with the labor movement to increase wages for teachers and provide free books to students. Phoebe Ess, a former teacher herself, presided over the Kansas City Woman Suffrage Association, formed in February of 1911, following a lecture by the British leftist and suffragist, Sylvia Pankhurst. Through this group (later renamed the Susan B. Anthony Suffrage League of Kansas City), Ess formed the state-wide Prison Reform League in 1916 to successfully reform the notorious Missouri State Penitentiary (Scott 1920). In this effort, she secured the support of the labor movement, including among Catholics, to end sadistic practices in the prison and prison labor (which competed with union made commodities).²³⁷ Prison reform represented an important collaboration between the labor movement and clubwomen prior to the First World War, organized through a suffrage association.

The divide between Catholic community institutions and the clubwomen movement, which included Protestants, Reform Jews, and African Americans, was also bridged by Frank P. Walsh. An Irish Catholic and a powerful public speaker, Walsh passionately spoke for women's suffrage to working class audiences. When New York state had a suffrage referendum in 1915, organizers tapped Walsh to headline a major meeting on suffrage for male workers in New York City. Although a legal case prevented him from attending at the last minute, his words via telegram were read at the event, providing us a window into how he framed the issue. He wrote,

I call it the duty of every labor man and of every associate worker in the great cause of labor to work to the limit of his capacity and to vote for the enfranchisement of the women of the Empire State, and of every state in this

²³⁷ The Missouri Federation of Labor had lobbied against prison labor since 1907. The 1916 movement achieved passage of a bill in 1917, but the fight to enforce it and later bills lasted into the 1930s (Graham 1934:60-69).

union. There is no political duty stronger than that. There is no economic duty stronger than that... [O]n no class of the people of this country is that duty to vote for woman's suffrage so strong as on the class of working men... Shall we keep them enslaved politically, in order that they may be all the more easily enslaved industrially? Labor must say no, a thousand times no... Except for the sham argument of 'woman's sphere', there is not one of the arguments advanced today against the right of women to vote that has not been used against the right of working men to vote... I absolutely reject the argument that 'woman's sphere is in the home', so long as that argument is supported by men who turn homes into sweatshops and who force women and children out of the home to work in factories and to scrub office floors at the smallest pittance of wages their necessities compel them to accept.²³⁸

The Missouri AFL president from 1912, Reuben T. Wood, was another strong suffrage advocate. He went so far as to argue in 1913 that, "The good wife is always a slave to a slave," arguing working class women must be *politically independent* through suffrage as a result.²³⁹ MOFL secretary-treasurer, Kansas City's John T. Smith, also supported suffrage. Thus, these male unionists did not just pay suffragists and women workers the typical AFL lip service; they framed suffrage as an issue of justice on its own merits.

Throughout the 1910s, joint delegations of clubwomen and labor organizers travelled to Jefferson City, Missouri, to lobby for an end to convict labor, 54 hour week, child labor restrictions, employers' liability, and limited workday for women legislation. When the St. Louis WTUL branch achieved a 9 hour day for women workers in Missouri, the Board of Public Welfare inspector Nan Willison, a KCWTUL member, attempted to enforce its provisions in commercial laundries. The Industrial Council consistently supported higher wages for school teachers (which were typically put to a vote of taxpayers). They also endorsed trade unionists for positions on the school board.

²³⁸ LOC O'Reilly Papers, Reel 7, Oct. 14, 1915, telegram.

²³⁹ LOC NWTUL papers, 1913 WTUL Conference Proceedings:27.

Unionists valued education for the children of workers, evidenced by local and state lobbying for a free textbook policy, and opposition to a proposed reduced length of the school term. When talk spread of starting an industrial school in Kansas City, the Industrial Council argued it should only serve young people aged 14-15, the age when adolescents were legally old enough to quit school but too young to work a regular job.²⁴⁰ In 1913, the KCWTUL and IC collaborated with Mrs. G. W. Addison of the Council of Women's Clubs in support of creating a Women's Farm, similar to one that existed for male convicts, to replace the notorious Women's Reformatory in Kansas City.²⁴¹ Addison would later support the striking laundry workers in the lead up to the general strike in 1918 (Chapter 5). When progressive journalist Anna Louise Strong came to Kansas City to put on a Child Welfare Exhibit, along with a local school teacher and Willison, the IC assigned a committee to help collect information for the exhibit.²⁴²

Limited evidence suggests that white clubwomen had a cordial relationship with Black clubwomen in the 1910s. For example, one of the most effective public speakers on behalf of suffrage was the Black clubwoman, Ida Bowman Becks who moved to Kansas City in 1908 (Coulter 2006:143-145). In 1919, white and Black clubwomen held a large joint event at the African American Lincoln High School that indicated they had worked together for many years.²⁴³

But political dynamics shifted in the 1920s with the growing power of Tom Pendergast. Pendergast and his ally, Senator James A. Reed, vigorously opposed women's rights and women running for elected office, creating a rift between clubwomen

²⁴⁰ *LH* July 14, 1911, Nov. 17, 1911, March 29, 1912, July 11, 1913, Apr. 3, 1914.

²⁴¹ *LH* March 28, 1913.

²⁴² *LH* Oct. 13, 1911.

²⁴³ *Sun* Apr. 19, 1919.

and those forces aligned with the Democratic Party. Pendergast even spread last-minute rumors about a white clubwoman running for office in 1925, falsely claiming that she was Black in order to appeal to white identity (Hanzlick 2018:185-191). Clubwomen increasingly worked within the Citizens Fusion ticket, which became the sole opposition party to the Pendergast machine. A leading figure of the GOP and Citizens Fusion ticket throughout the 1920s was Matthew Foster, a far right businessman who had used his positions in the National Guard and on the police commission to violently suppress the 1918 general strike and African American community (mentioned above). Pendergast's willingness to spend a great deal of money on construction projects using union labor, as well as city services for Black neighborhoods, fractured the alliances of clubwomen, the labor movement, and African Americans in the newly bipolar political terrain.

Clubwomen Elsewhere

The rise of women's clubs in Kansas City was part of a national trend in the 1890s and early 1900s. Middle and upper class women formed literary societies by the early 1890s and moved from this organizational basis first into reform politics around sanitation and education, then became more interested in suffrage and child labor issues by the 1910s. The main area of variation from city to city came with the class composition of women's clubs and their connections to the working class. In Indianapolis and Los Angeles, clubwomen tended to be closely tied to the business class and had little engagement with working women (Badertscher 2017; Wallis 2010:68-85).

Members of the Woman's City Club of Chicago came from elite capitalist families like the McCormicks and Rockefellers, but dabbled in social progressivism more

than their male family members. They tended to favor municipal control over private property rights, support public mediation of labor disputes, and wanted to ban private guards. They spent a great deal of time in poor and working class neighborhoods through organizing kindergartens, parks, and civic education in public schools. Cross-over between elite clubwomen and the local branch of the Women's Trade Union League existed as well (Flanagan 1990).

The Wednesday Club in St. Louis followed similar patterns to Chicago -- influenced by the settlement house movement, they felt compelled to address social problems and class conflict by bringing middle class morals and values to working class neighborhoods, although community engagement certainly bridged some cultural divisions regarding differing systems of morality (Belanger 2009). Despite the fact that elite clubwomen in several cities had closer relationships and sympathies with working class community concerns than elite businessmen's clubs, there is no evidence that these coalitions articulated the degree of support for worker militancy found in Kansas City.

Uneven Women's Rights as a Mechanism

The unevenness of women's rights across the state border motivated a range of middle and upper class women to work together across religious and political differences. Local clubwomen followed national trends in the 1910s in expanding their political engagement across a range of issues affecting public health and civic engagement in working class communities. The structure of politics in Kansas City lended itself to the logic of reaching out for a range of allies to achieve prison reform, higher pay for teachers, and better resources for schools, for example. Had Kansas City been dominated

by a single regime, clubwomen would have faced a different set of strategic choices. The introduction of bipolar politics in the 1920s ended up splitting clubwomen from the labor movement and the concerns of many African Americans.

Further, as Hanzlick (2018) alludes to, the achievement of suffrage soon made political differences among women more salient across the country. Former partners in the suffrage struggle ended up battling each other over partisan loyalties. Generational and class differences also created deep rifts regarding how to define vice and immoral behavior, as well as the Equal Rights Amendment movement. The question of how to define a women's rights agenda once citizenship rights were achieved for white women, in other words, expanded the political implications of differences among clubwomen and across race and class.

Throughout the 1910s women of all classes on the Missouri side could see the injustice of the lack of basic citizenship rights. In one sense, they could literally see white and Black women voting in Kansas (in municipal elections since 1886, in all elections after 1912). In another sense, women could see their lack of basic citizenship rights because the legitimacy of women's suffrage had been established in every segment of society through Black activists like Ida Bowman Becks, the KCWTUL, local male labor organizers, social progressives, and clubwomen. The unevenness of women's rights, then, provided the context for the salience of sisterhood in activism and alliances across class throughout the 1910s.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURE & COALITIONS

Now for a brief reflection regarding the relation between my analysis and the literature on opportunities and threats mentioned above. The social movement coalition literature views political threats as a key condition for coalition formation. The analysis in this chapter found that the political opportunity structure of Kansas City is indeed very useful for explaining the development of the solidarity infrastructure. However, it came through a specific type of opportunity, rather than threat. Political opportunities are typically framed as shifting political coalitions and divisions among political elites. Activists and organizers can use this situation to link up with politically influential allies to gain access to the political system.

My argument, in contrast, is that power in Kansas City remained so fragmented and diffuse during the 1910s that various social forces sought *each other* out, rather than alliances with divided elites. No single political party, businessmen's organization, newspaper, or ward boss could control the direction of Kansas City. Thus, in order to pursue a positive agenda, rather than defensive, clubwomen, social progressives, and the labor movement joined on several projects to use their combined influence, independent of other groups with access to power. It was not so much the presence of particular threats that brought these groups and individuals together, but the precise form of political opportunity present -- they did not necessarily have to rely on factions of the business and political elite to achieve their goals.

African Americans endured under constant threat from hostile politicians, the police, a segregated labor market, and many progressives who closely associated Blackness with vice and political corruption. Yet their best defense remained political

independence. Their numbers, combined with the lack of a dominant political party, meant that at least some politicians of both parties would offer favors and protection. They built their own community institutions with the time and money of Black workers, and sometimes collaborated with white clubwomen and the KCWTUL. Again, the diffuse and fragmented nature of the political terrain worked to facilitate a strength and independence that made Black working class collaboration with certain elements of the labor movement possible. The formulation in the social movement literature that opportunities mean organizations go on the offense, and threats lead to defensive coalitions, does not make much sense in the Kansas City case, where diffuseness of power characterised the political system.

DYNAMICS OF SOLIDARITY LITERATURE & THE KANSAS CITY CASE

To close out this concluding chapter, I return to the dynamics of solidarity literature in order to more fully justify the need for the solidarity infrastructure concept in answering the research questions.

Spontaneity

The spontaneity perspective holds that moments of mass defiance represent breaks with organizing work preceding each cycle of revolt. Piven and Cloward's (1979) thesis, for example, presents insurgency as a temporal break for the masses, with each instance disjointed from the last. There is no sense that moments of collective action can build on each other, or that oppositional cultures can flow into insurgency. Workers and poor people are compliant, then defiant for a short time, then return to compliance in a

modified institutional arrangement. This is a narrow view of collective action that ignores organizational and cultural connections between movements and over time. In many ways, Piven and Cloward presented history like path dependency models, where society chugs along statically for a time, then a conjuncture suddenly arrives, and a narrow set of new paths open up briefly. But how do we more fully explain the arrival of conjunctures, or the connections between them?

Rosa Luxemburg wrote a relevant analysis of the 1905 Russian Revolutionary movement in her 1906 (2008) pamphlet, “The Mass Strike” (also see Brecher 1997 for a similar analysis of American mass strikes in the late nineteenth century). For Luxemburg, a mass strike is a period of worker rebellion that begins spontaneously, but which becomes increasingly political and revolutionary in character from one event to the next. Revolutionary activists and social democratic electoral parties cannot schedule or plan mass strikes because such events are historical products, but they *are* initiated through the perceptions and courage of rank and file workers. Luxemburg’s analysis is deeply historical and rejects schemas, but she notes that emergent organizations have an important role in mass strikes. If revolutionary organizations are sufficiently embedded in worker rebellions, they can provide key leadership for politicizing and connective events, and pushing bold tactics to prevent confusion and demobilization. In my analysis of Kansas City, the solidarity infrastructure is not consciously revolutionary. I argue, contrary to Luxemburg, that it both helped set the stage for worker revolt (partially explaining the trajectory of militancy), *and* pushed a sequence of events that increased the stakes of capital-labor conflict once wartime militancy broke out (providing an unconscious leadership role).

The spontaneity perspective ultimately fails to adequately explain the Kansas City case because it narrows our historical focus too greatly. We cannot fully understand the 1918 general strike if we begin our study with the 1917 wartime strikes that immediately preceded it. The same forces that sparked militancy in Kansas City also caused walkout strikes around the US. Only in Kansas City were they so successful, and did they lead to a broader confrontation between capital and labor. What made the Kansas City labor movement different? Organizational networks and resources made working class solidarity possible and effective, which widened the conflict beyond individual strikes for union recognition. Without clubwomen assistance in extending the commercial laundry strike in the face of replacement workers and private guards hired by laundry owners and the Employers' Association, it very likely would have collapsed before the general strike happened on March 27, nearly six weeks after the laundry walkout began. Only by looking at collaborations, political cultures, and bridging activities that *preceded worker insurgency* can we explain the general strike. The spontaneous perspective contributes the insight that mass mobilization is rarely, if ever, directly caused by movement leadership. But it narrows our historical scope to moments of insurgency, which are nonetheless affected by organizational resources that operate within longer historical processes.

Community Experience

The community experience literature emphasizes oppositional working class cultures that are rooted in shared community and political experiences to explain working class solidarity. Many of the insights and methods of social history and the city trenches thesis help contextualize the unique features of the Kansas City case, and explain the

origins of the solidarity infrastructure. The unique spatial organization of African American residents of Kansas City is shown to partially cause the emergence of the solidarity infrastructure, for example.

However, there are few insights from this perspective to analyze how political cultures of organizations or organizational networks made solidarity possible.

Community cultures can foster class solidarities across social divisions, or exacerbate those divisions. Black men, Black women, and white women workers did not share the same experiences with each other, nor with white men, at work or in politics. Our analytical problem remains why Kansas City actors chose class solidarity in historically unique patterns. To do so necessitates that we dig into how the ideas of various political cultures congealed into organizational practices and networks. Scholars of community experiences help us highlight the unique features of Kansas City demographics, but cannot explain why diverse workers chose solidarity rather than exclusion.

Work Process

The work process thesis places the ways that capital accumulation organizes workers at the point of production in the center of its explanation of solidarity. A version of the work process thesis specific to the Progressive Era periodizes skilled workers' syndicalism in the early 1900s. Haydu (1988) showed that craft workers, as opposed to semi-skilled operatives, were often the source of militant minorities in the heyday of craft radicalism, between 1890 and 1917. Depending on the logic of the work process and the alignment of various grievances, many artisans linked their militancy over worker control with economic grievances of operatives. The point is that class formation did not

necessarily have to come with proletarianization of the populace; it could happen through alliances across skill divisions. Haydu's insights lend structural explanations to why the interests of craft workers in Kansas City and low-wage workers might have aligned in the 1910s. Trade unionists were losing control over the work process through technological changes, human relations changes, and increased production speed. Inflation sparked militancy among those in low wage jobs while the job market tightened. But we are still left with the necessity of explaining how class formation happened across a geographic area (Kansas City) rather than within individual places of employment, and why it became relatively inclusive across gender and race divisions.

On one hand I argue that the syndicalist political culture derived from the work process theories of William Z. Foster (Ford and Foster 1990), which infused the labor movement and KCWTUL with militant and solidaristic practices (Chapters 3 and 5). Yet as a theory of organizing based on simply agitating for a general strike among workers whose resistance to capitalism is shaped by the work process, it fails to fully explain what happened in Kansas City. An emphasis on the work process can explain general American militancy and solidarity within each workplace during our time frame, but cannot adequately analyze a citywide general sympathy strike.

Methodical Organizing

The fourth theory of solidarity, methodical organizing, highlights the importance of strategy and planning. But the immediate implications of McAlevey's (2016) organizing methods for analysis of historical outcomes, for example, are overly

voluntaristic. Organizers do not impose their wills on history.²⁴⁴ Strategy matters, but there is no evidence that Kansas City organizers had a specific strategy for instigating a general strike.²⁴⁵ Further, McAlevey's organizing methods are generally set up for winning a workplace strike and building a strong union (although she has also connected this to building toward a national political general strike, McAlevey 2019). The question remains, how do we explain the decentralized organizational network and resources available to the Kansas City labor movement?

Additionally, the shortcoming of Lenin's belief in the importance of maintaining a disciplined cadre so that a revolutionary party can spring into action when mass defiance occurs for explaining the Kansas City case is that the solidarity infrastructure had no centralized leadership with a coherent and intentional strategy. Nonetheless, the solidarity infrastructure did provide resources that aided in the success of wartime strikes and pushed them toward wider solidarities beyond narrow craft interests. Thus, revolutionary strategy and leadership did not play a consistent or decisive role in the Kansas City case. The organizing methods and leadership of Kansas City activists were important (including bridging work), but they were less coherent, intentional, and coordinated than the methodical strategy perspective elucidates.

²⁴⁴ See McCarthy (2010) for an important contribution to our understanding of the organizational factors inhibiting militant strategies within unions.

²⁴⁵ Revolutionary syndicalists played a role in the analysis, but their hope to spark a general strike does not appear to be very methodical. Further, the war created the possibility for the general strike, not syndicalists per se. And the main syndicalist leaders were no longer embedded in the labor movement by 1918.

Contribution

The Kansas City case offers an opportunity to examine how alliances across race, class, and gender occur in a specific time and place. I have found that the solidarity infrastructure concept expands our analytical toolkit for exploring dynamics of solidarity in particular times and places. It emphasizes the importance of resonant material culture through networks, and foregrounds the importance of having a meso-level organizational infrastructure in place -- which articulates a bloc in support of worker militancy and solidarity -- when conditions are ripe for widespread worker defiance. When defiance does occur, an existent solidarity infrastructure can both increase its record of success and channel the energy in solidaristic directions. It is not a guarantee that worker militancy can create a counter-hegemonic bloc or necessarily proceed along inclusive and solidaristic paths in the heat of contentious collective action.

The implications for organizing alliances across race, class, and gender are not wholly original, but they bear repeating. Morris (1986) emphasized the importance of independent and indigenous mobilizing capacities among Black communities in the South during the 1950s and 60s. Likewise, the independent organizational resources of the Black community in Kansas City during the 1910s made participation in the labor movement possible, and provided a basis from which to resist power imbalances within the coalition. Morris also noted the importance of leadership at key nodes of overlapping networks. In a similar vein, Roth (2003) highlighted the causal force of bridging work within inclusive labor movements. On that note, the leadership and bridging work of Peake Faxon, Sarah Green, and the KCWTUL helped channel the direction of articulation that the solidarity infrastructure took toward militancy and solidarity.

My argument predicts that in cities where a renewal of rank and file democracy and radicalism occurs, paired with collaborations among community groups and social movements, we should see new possibilities open up for militancy and solidarity.

EPILOGUE: 1918 TO 1921 AND 2021

The research questions have been answered, and contributions to scholarly literature spelled out. But the labor movement of the 1910s did not end with the general strike. Nor do the scholarly contributions represent the only lessons to be learned from the Kansas City case. Allow me to briefly describe events in the labor movement between 1918 and 1921, as well as offer some reflections about the political relevance of the solidarity infrastructure concept today.

GENERAL STRIKE DIVIDENDS & THE COLLAPSE OF THE STREETCAR & PACKINGHOUSE UNIONS

In June of 1918, just a couple months after the general strike, the streetcar union local (AASERE 764) initiated seven women conductors into their union,²⁴⁶ becoming the only AASERE local in the country to include women members (Greenwald 1990:141). That January, union officials had promised a strike if the Kansas City Railways Co. hired women.²⁴⁷ At that time, the union rejected the company's claims that they could not find qualified men to fill open positions because of the war, and would therefore need to hire women (at lower wages). By June, the union men had either changed their mind about the labor market, or were convinced through the general strike that men and women could fight together in the same organizations. Over 200 women joined in the next few months, before a failed strike left women out of the industry once again.

²⁴⁶ *LH* June 28, 1918.

²⁴⁷ *LH* Jan. 11, 1918.

In August and September, 1918, the streetcar union presented arguments and testimonies in front of the National War Labor Board (NWLB) for the government body to arbitrate their second contract. Co-chaired by Frank P. Walsh and William Howard Taft, the NWLB weighed cost of living and working conditions in contract disputes in order to prevent strikes, and thus impediments to war production. While its legal authority to enforce its rulings was never established, businesses typically complied with its rulings voluntarily, at least until the end of the war in November. Kansas City streetcar workers demanded a wage increase to keep up with runaway inflation of consumer goods, and demanded equal pay for women workers. The union placed a handful of women conductors on the stand to answer questions about their family situation and working conditions. These women had dependent children and were either widowed, or their husbands were fighting in Europe. They complained of long and irregular hours on their feet, but stressed they enjoyed the work and wanted to keep their jobs -- they just needed a living wage.²⁴⁸

On October 24, 1918, the NWLB granted the union their requests, including equal pay for women, beginning December 1. The company claimed they could not afford the new wage scale without an increase in fares, which both Kansas City and the state of Missouri claimed authority to regulate. The NWLB directed the company and union to work for an increase in fares, but the union interpreted this to mean that the wage scale would come into effect regardless of the price of fare. In a complicated series of events, Kansas City officials rejected a fare increase, while the Missouri Public Service Commission approved it. Kansas City and Missouri battled in the courts regarding

²⁴⁸ NA 2 265 contains the NWLB files for this case, including transcripts of testimony.

jurisdiction, and the fare remained five cents. The streetcar union accused the city and the company of collaborating behind the scenes, so that the company would have an excuse not to implement the new wage scale. Considering the war had ended, management also felt that they had more latitude to ignore the NWLB's directives. When December 1st came and went without the wage increase and equal pay for women, streetcar workers were furious.

At a mass meeting at the Labor Temple on December 10, 1918, men and women workers voted to authorize a strike for the following morning, in order to force the company to implement the government's ruling.²⁴⁹ Unlike during their previous two strikes in August 1917 and the general strike, they were met with a hostile mayor. Mayor James Cowgill immediately put the police in the service of the streetcar company.²⁵⁰ After two days without trolley service, the city and the streetcar company coordinated to begin limited service. Almost immediately, an accident killed two customers and injured several more. Deadly accidents continued to occur frequently for the next few months, with the union blaming inexperienced replacement workers, and management alleging that union members had tampered with equipment.

Striking workers did engage in open violence on streetcars, and several instances of dynamite explosions rocked trolleys, carbarns, and a loyal employee's home. The women conductor union members joined the pickets and enthusiastically took part in the violence, property destruction, and intimidation of replacement workers. The labor movement denied any responsibility for the violence and bombings, claiming they could

²⁴⁹ *LH* Dec. 13.

²⁵⁰ *Post* Dec. 11, 13, 16, 17.

be chalked up to police violence and a few radicals not associated with the union.²⁵¹

Nonetheless, the National Guard mobilized between Christmas and New Year's, with orders to shoot to kill on 24-hour patrols. Federal authorities arrested twenty union officials in January, including Sarah Green of the KCWTUL, under charges of violating a federal injunction because of the violence.

The streetcar workers continued to hold out hope that they would be victorious into the spring. They achieved an additional ruling by the NWLB that considered the streetcar company in contempt of their authority, and demanded that management abide by the new wage scale. The labor movement donated to the strike fund, and streetcar service ran at half its capacity, an extremely costly situation for management. AASERE even claimed that the streetcar company would have given in to union demands, except for the pressure placed on it by the mayor and by the Employers' Association to crush the union at all costs.²⁵² The company did offer to take its employees back around the New Year, but strikers refused to accept the condition that 57 of their coworkers would be blacklisted. Mass meetings of streetcar workers voted to stay on strike three times, as late as April 13, 1919.²⁵³ Sarah Green travelled to Washington, DC, to demand more assistance from the NWLB. She also went to Chicago and secured a meeting with J. Ogden Armour, the meatpacking baron with investments in the streetcar system. Armour timidly offered sympathy to the union workers in Green's formidable presence, but claimed he had no power to force the company to change course.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ *LH* Jan. 10, 17. *Post* Dec. 19, 22, 28, 30. *Journal* Jan. 15-17, 24, 26, 28.

²⁵² *LH* Dec. 27, Jan. 24, Feb. 28, March 7, Apr. 11.

²⁵³ *LH* Dec. 20, Apr. 18. *Journal* Jan. 7.

²⁵⁴ *LH* March 28.

In May, some of KC Railways Co. president Col. Kealy's soldiers in the 140th Infantry returned from France. Kealy had stayed in the United States under a medical deferment, which unionists claimed Kealy secured under bogus and cowardly pretenses. Kealy and AASERE each courted these returning soldiers for loyalty, as many had streetcar work experience.²⁵⁵ Early on in the strike, editor Thomas West published a poem in the labor paper called "Disgracing Their Uniforms," complaining of veterans who worked as replacement workers, often in their Army uniforms. It read, "These soldier 'finks' are a disgrace/ To the uniforms they wear/... Any soldier who is guilty/ Can be called a 'Labor Hun'" (appealing to anti-German sentiments).²⁵⁶ The union failed to stem the tide of replacement workers, however, and the federal government disbanded the NWLB the same month. Despite the solidarity and commitment of the men and women strikers, and the backing of the whole labor movement, the streetcar strike failed. The streetcar company succeeded in increasing fares to seven cents in 1919 and eight cents in 1920 after destroying the union, but it was too little, too late. The cost of the three strikes between August 1917 and May 1919 sent the company into receivership in September 1920 (Dodd 2002:99).

The solidarity forged in the 1910s had one last go among packinghouse workers in a strike from December 1921, to February 1922. After management cut wages, over 600 AMCBW members went on strike. The Black laborer that packinghouse workers elected to their 1917 strike committee, G. W. Reed, helped organize this strike (Coulter

²⁵⁵ *LH* May 9.

²⁵⁶ *LH* Dec. 27.

2006:68). Using Black replacement workers, this strike too was crushed, signalling the end of the solidaristic labor movement of the 1910s.²⁵⁷

SOLIDARITY INFRASTRUCTURES IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Much has changed in American politics and the international capitalist system since the 1910s. How much insight can we glean from the Kansas City case? To begin with, we should not overstate differences between the 2020s and 1910s. Women, Black, and immigrant workers still toil in dangerous and underpaying jobs -- wage labor has always been precarious for these groups in America. Additionally, the fogs of the Cold War and neoliberalism have begun to lift, opening up opportunities for socialists, syndicalists, and progressives to once again build large movements and collaborate with each other. Furthermore, while the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act continues to constrain and bureaucratize the labor movement, industrial relations law has become so onerous that many working class activists, like public school teachers across the country, are once again finding creative ways to win “illegal” strikes through working class and community solidarity. If the PRO Act becomes law, which would in effect repeal Taft-Hartley, we may see even more rank and file militancy that harkens back to the 1910s and 30s.

Some conditions are, if anything, more conducive for solidarity infrastructure emergence today. The American labor movement has taken huge strides over the last thirty years in its inclusivity of women, people of color, and immigrants. Union

²⁵⁷ When a cadre of radicals organized packinghouse workers into the CIO from 1935-39, interracial solidarity had to be built again from scratch, and workers did not even realize there had been historical precedence (Horowitz 1997:84-103). When a Master’s student at the University of Missouri interviewed labor figures, like the lawyer Clif Langsdale and editor West, on the eve of the Cold War, they did not even discuss the tumultuous events of the First World War (Sears 1947).

organizers now recognize the importance of diversifying leadership, and of creating inclusive union cultures. Progressives too now strive for anti-racism, immigrant rights, and movements that affirm the gender and sexuality of all people. The questions that remain are whether the labor movement can once again expand its membership, and if 21st century progressives will be willing to support working class militancy.

My belief that the Kansas City case provides lessons today is rooted in a continued faith that collective struggle is most effective when it is rooted locally. There is no shortage of valid objections to that position. Voters are far more likely to pay attention to national elections than local politics, at least in part due to the never-ending horse race coverage of DC beltway politics on cable news. The neoliberalization of labor markets and popular culture has also created a workforce that moves long distances on a regular basis, and eschews civic engagement (and is too exhausted from work, anyway). Finally, the rise of message boards, blogging, and social media has shifted our identities and political consciousness onto online networks, rather than with our neighbors, co-workers, and unions.

As the Covid-19 pandemic has shown many of us, however, there is no digital space that fully substitutes being in the same physical space as someone else when it comes to creating affectionate and trusting relationships. If people are to risk their livelihoods and sacrifice their time and energies to collective struggle, they are most likely to remain committed to people they can struggle with in the same neighborhoods and workplaces. It is difficult to imagine large numbers of people engaging in high risk contentious action based solely on solidarity rooted in digital networks.

But social media does require flexible thinking in relation to solidarity infrastructures. A meso-level counter-hegemonic bloc does not have to fully exist within a city. Digital platforms do generate solidaristic political cultures, financial support for strike funds, and social solidarity for demoralized militants. Even here, the differences from the 1910s can be overstated. Kansas City unionists received similar benefits from workers in St. Louis, the coalfields of south eastern Kansas, and beyond. Nonetheless, future research on contemporary solidarity infrastructure emergence will need to expand its indicators of development to incorporate digital dimensions.

My conviction in the continued relevance of the solidarity infrastructure concept rooted in place received a major boost in 2019 when teacher strikes in Los Angeles (Jaffe 2019a) and Chicago (Jaffe 2019b) won major demands to improve conditions in the workplace and community.²⁵⁸ In both instances, rank and file teachers had spent years building a militant and radical political culture within their unions. Black and Latinx teachers made bridges with parents, community groups, and other local unions to build trust and shared goals. When the United Teachers Los Angeles union went on strike, their demands included a ban on random police searches of students, for the school district to use its unused real estate holdings for affordable student housing and green spaces, the hiring of more nurses and counselors, and for the school district to contribute money to legal defense funds for students and their parents. The united front of the union, parents, community groups, and other unions won most of those demands. Los Angeles teachers took inspiration from the Chicago Teachers Union movement, which also won more

²⁵⁸ Kansas City continues to inspire as well, through the herculean organizing efforts and coalition building by Stand Up KC (a Fight for \$15 organization) and KC Tenants (a community group fighting for the right to safe housing for all).

nurses and counselors, reforms for racial justice, and housing for unhoused students in their 2019 battle.

If those of us who work on college campuses want to truly make them inclusive and equitable spaces for diverse students, faculty, and staff, we should take the work of teacher activists in Chicago and Los Angeles seriously. Helpfully, a member from each union serves on the advisory committee of Bargaining for the Common Good,²⁵⁹ a coalition of unions, community groups, racial justice organizations, and students that helps workers around the US win collective bargaining contracts for themselves and the surrounding community. As my research highlights, creating the necessary trusting relationships takes time, inclusive political cultures, bridging work, and alliances between independent organizations that can resist power asymmetries within such coalitions. Not only can such a solidarity infrastructure win major demands for policy changes and resource reallocation for marginalized campus members, but it can forge deep bonds of solidarity across existing divisions of income levels, status, race, gender, age, and nationality. We can never predict when mass collective action will break out, but we can build solidaristic networks with common visions for higher education in the here and now.

²⁵⁹ <https://www.bargainingforthecommongood.org/>

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VITA

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