

Trends in Working-Class History

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ARTICLES

Trends in Working-Class History

David Montgomery

THE PAST TEN YEARS have been a harvest time for historians of the working class in North America. Herbert Gutman's two great books, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom* and *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America* both came off the press in the same year that saw the first issue of *Labour/Le Travailleur* and the founding of the Freedmen and Southern Society Project. Before that time pioneering historians had wrenched their own thinking free of consensus paradigms which had guided social and political history, and of the Commons model which had strait-jacketed labour history. More through articles, lectures, and seminars than through books, they had defined new problems for research and inspired an emerging generation of scholars to turn their talents to the investigation of those problems. Their ideas had been exchanged across national boundaries, especially at heavily attended Anglo-American labour history conferences and at the round tables sponsored by the *Maison des sciences de l'homme* of Paris. By 1976 the preparatory phase was over. Since then publishers of books and articles have hardly been able to keep up with the flow of academic studies of working-class history. Perhaps it is time now to assess what we have done.

In North America the writings of the last ten years have dealt primarily with one or another of two problems: structures of meaning and structures of power. A concern with structures of power has been especially evident in studies of twentieth-century workers, which have focused attention on forms of domination in workplace and community life, workers' challenges to that domination, and the role of governmental, business, and cultural institutions in deflecting those challenges. Historians of the nineteenth century have been more successful in showing how working people understood their worlds. For example, Gregory Kealey and Bryan Palmer wrote in *Dreaming of What Might Be*:

in examining the voluminous Canadian . . . correspondence to Terence V. Powderly we came to know, perhaps as intimately as possible, the feelings, values, beliefs, angers,

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and resentments of men, and women, who saw in the [Knights of Labor] the way forward to a new, and better, way of life. . . .¹

The emphasis in this passage is on how working people created and acted upon a vision of society different from the acquisitive individualism which was favoured by the more privileged classes as an explanation of daily experience. Its authors explicitly rejected the belief of Gerald N. Grob that nineteenth-century labour organizations had simply accommodated themselves to the "materialistic, acquisitive, and abundant" values celebrated in North America.² Moreover, by placing class struggle and oppositional cultures at the centre of their analysis, Kealey and Palmer ruled out Michel Foucault's paradigm, which equates structures of meaning with structures of power.³

Historians' interest in the relationship between social life and what Lawrence Goodwyn felicitously labelled "movement cultures" has generated special attention to the Knights of Labor, to artisans, and to the self-perception of working-class women. Studying the Knights of Labor has become a veritable growth industry in the United States. Shelton Stromquist, Richard Oestreicher, Susan Levine, Peter Ratchleff, and other historians of the Order have found that during the 1880s the Knights of Labor issued charters to organizations with their own deep local roots in all corners of the continent, thus enabling the historian to examine simultaneously the distinctive characteristics of occupations and communities and the commonly held beliefs and resentments which fomented a sense of class. Leon Fink's *Workingmen's Democracy* is an especially creative analysis of the movement's impact at the level of local and state politics. Even where the Knights were weak and workers' parties absent, however, Roy Rosenzweig has shown that the customs and recreations of the working class defined basic issues of electoral politics.⁴

¹ Gregory S. Kealey and Bryan D. Palmer, *Dreaming of What Might Be: The Knights of Labor in Ontario, 1880-1900* (Cambridge 1982), 21.

² *Ibid.*, 9. Gerald N. Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900* (Evanston, IL 1961).

³ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York 1978).

⁴ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York 1976); H. Shelton Stromquist, "A Generation of Boomers: Work, Community Structure, and the Pattern of Industrial Conflict on Late Nineteenth Century American Railroads," (PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, 1981); Richard J. Oestreicher, "Solidarity and Fragmentation: Working People and Class Consciousness in Detroit, 1877-1895," (PhD thesis, Michigan State University, 1979); Susan Levine, *Labor's True Woman: Carpet Weavers, Industrialization and Labor Reform in the Gilded Age* (Philadelphia 1984); Peter J. Ratchleff, *Black Labor in the South: Richmond, Virginia, 1865-1890* (Philadelphia 1984); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana, IL 1983); David Montgomery, "Labor and the Republic in Industrial America," *Le Mouvement social*, 111 (1980), 201-15; Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge 1983).

Nevertheless, one must proceed cautiously in discussing the political ideologies of workers. Recent work on Chicago by Richard Schneirov and Bruce Nelson has warned us that the knights' use of republican values not only opposed acquisitive individualism, but also set them on a collision course with the socialist and atheist beliefs of German-American revolutionaries. Moreover, because the major parties sooner or later overcame challenges at the polls from labour reformers in virtually all localities of the United States and Canada, we still need to understand the nature of their appeal to working-class voters. Schneirov's analysis of Carter Harrison's regime in Chicago, Rachleff's interpretation of Richmond politics, Kealey's insights into Toronto's Orange lodges, Melvin Holli's splendid 1969 biography of Hazen Pingree, and Iver Bernstein's forthcoming book on Civil War New York and the rise of the Tweed Ring have begun to address this task.⁵

Republicanism has become a favourite catchword of historians trying to capture the political thrust of workers' movement culture. Its roots have been traced to the century's early decades and a piebegan culture which, Sean Wilentz has argued, was at once "traditional," in the sense that it celebrated old customs and "distinguished primarily between white 'insiders' and everyone else," and "also a very new culture, one that emerged only as the social distance between New York's rich and poor widened. . . ."⁶ Wilentz is right to situate popular culture not just in a threatened pre-industrial heritage, but also in developing class conflict. As he reminds us, the making of a working class involved struggle and a lively exchange of ideas: it was unfolding intellectual history, not just cultural lag. Wilentz's leading actors found themselves at the cutting edge of economic conflict. They were the poorer journeymen of the consumer goods and construction trades.

In *Artisans of the New Republic* Howard Rock has also drawn our attention to the prominence of public appeals by endangered artisans on one side and ambitious, optimistic mechanics on the other in setting and disseminating the ideological content of the debate over the meaning of republicanism. Bourgeois ideology, even when it came from the pens of the idle rich, celebrated the sober mechanic whose business success proved his virtue, just as his children's Christian upbringing proved that of his wife. The discourse of working-class

⁵ Richard Schneirov, "The Knights of Labor in the Chicago Labor Movement and in Municipal Politics, 1877-1887," (PhD thesis, Northern Illinois University, 1984); Bruce C. Nelson, " 'We Can't Get Them to Do Aggressive Work': Chicago's Anarchists and the Eight-Hour Movement," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 29 (1986), 3-22; Rachleff, *Black Labor*; Gregory S. Kealey, *Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892* (Toronto 1980), 98-123; Melvin G. Holli, *Reform in Detroit: Hazen S. Pingree and Urban Politics* (New York 1969); Iver C. Bernstein, "The New York City Draft Riots of 1863 and Class Relations on the Eve of Industrial Capitalism," (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1985). See also Neville Kirk, *Growth of Working Class Reformism in Mid-Victorian England* (London 1985).

⁶ Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York 1984), 263.

republicanism in America, however, like that of Chartism in England, was defined essentially by embattled journeymen, who believed that their trades, their masculinity, and their membership in the white race gave them claims to political rights and social recognition which capitalism unjustly denied them.⁷ As Jacques Rancière warned in *La Nuit des prolétaires*, the authentic worker-intellectual did exist and was a figure of major importance, but was also one who simply by virtue of participating in self-help organizations and addressing the world through the written word enjoyed an ambivalent relationship both to bourgeois society and his or her shopmates and neighbours.⁸ During the last ten years, therefore, we have profited greatly from analyzing workers' own expressions of their understanding of society, instead of proceeding from some supposed ideological consensus or from abstract formulations about "levels of class consciousness," but we must remain ever alert to the varieties of working-class experience and to the ways a movement culture has interacted with that variety.

Sarah Eisenstein's posthumously published collection of essays, *Give Us Bread but Give Us Roses*, suggests promising ways to examine the relationship of working-class women to this republican discourse. Like Susan Levine, Mary Blewett, Thomas Dublin, Christine Stansell, and Alice Kessler-Harris, Eisenstein finds work, family, and neighbourhood all enmeshed in women's sense of their own identities, and especially in the ways bourgeois society both prescribed a domestic sphere for all women and made it impossible for working-class women to live according to that prescription. Involvement in class-based movements, like the shorter-hours associations of the 1840s, the Daughters of St. Crispin, the Knights of Labor, and socialism, encouraged women to redefine their roles at home and their aspirations in the workplace. Though neither the vocabulary of the "Rights of Man" provided by the labour movement nor that of "Woman's True Sphere" provided by bourgeois society was appropriate to the experience and claims of working-class women, they put both of them to their own use.⁹ Mari Jo Buhle, Maxine Seller, Maurine Greenwald, and Varpu

⁷ Howard B. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic: Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York 1979); Gareth Stedman Jones, *Language of Class: Studies in English Working Class History* (Cambridge 1983); Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists* (London 1984). See also Charles G. Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of Revolution 1763-1812* (Urbana, IL 1984); Merritt Roe Smith, *Harpers Ferry Armory and the New Technology* (Ithaca, NY 1977).

⁸ Jacques Rancière, *La Nuit des prolétaires. Archives du rêve ouvrier* (Paris 1981); Rancière, "The Myth of the Artisan: Critical Reflections on a Category of Social History," *International Labor and Working Class History*, 24 (1983), 1-16.

⁹ Sarah Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread but Give Us Roses: Working Women's Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War* (London 1983); Levine, *Labor's True Woman*; Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: A Study of Class, Gender, and Protest in the Nineteenth Century New England Shoe Industry* (Urbana, IL, forthcoming); Thomas Dublin, *Women at Work: The Transformation of Work and Community in Lowell, Massachusetts, 1826-1860* (New York 1979); Mary Christine Stansell,

Lindstrom-Best have all joined Eisenstein in arguing that younger women's desires for birth control, a wider choice of occupations, greater respect in the home and on the job, and more independence from pastors and patriarchs in personal decisions had assumed a qualitatively new importance by the 1910s and provided that social basis for some convergence, however tentative and uncomfortable, between socialist and feminist influences in working-class life.¹⁰

In most books dealing with the present century, however, structures of power have received more attention than structures of meaning. Recent research has focused on the changing character of work, the interaction of working-class communities with urban politics and mass culture, and challenges posed by workers' organizations to the direction of industry and the state. The discussion of work relations has pivoted on the meaning of Taylorism, with Harry Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* providing the definitive text. Dan Clawson, Sharon Strom, Margery Davies, and Stephen Meyer are but some of the Americans who have examined the systematic efforts of twentieth-century managers of factories and offices to subject work itself to minute control through motion studies, mechanization, and automation. David Noble has written persuasively about the impact of this managerial quest on the American educational system and engineering professions, as well as on the choices made in technological innovations. David Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich placed what they called the "homogenization" of labour by scientific management at the centre of their influential three-stage theory of the historical evolution of productive relations in *Segmented Work, Divided Workers*, though to learn why the metal-working trades were the nursery of scientific management, one must turn to Alfred D. Chandler's massive history of management, *The Visible Hand*. The argument of Daniel Nelson that American factories became progressively better places to work after the turn of the century and that Taylorism had little actual impact on everyday work experience remains a lonely dissent from the Braverman thesis. What remains to be examined more closely, however, is just how changes in work relations

"Women of the Laboring Poor in New York City, 1820-1860," (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1979); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York 1982).

¹⁰ Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana, IL 1981); Maxine Schwartz Seller, "The Uprising of the Twenty Thousand: Sex, Class, and Ethnicity in the Shirtwaist Makers' Strike of 1909," in Dirk Hoerder, ed., *"Struggle a Hard Battle": Essays on Working-Class Immigrants* (DeKalb, IL 1986), 254-79; Maurine W. Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Westport, CT 1980); Sally M. Miller, ed., *Flawed Liberation: Socialism and Feminism* (Westport, CT 1981); Joan Sangster, "The Communist Party and the Woman Question, 1922-1929," *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (1985), 25-56; Varpu Lindstrom-Best, "'Fist Press': A Study of the Finnish Canadian Handwritten Newspapers," *Polyphony*, 3 (1981), 65-73.

influenced the relationship of workers to each other and the character of workers' mobilization.¹¹

Studies of the 1920s, which unfortunately remain rare, have used the new managerial techniques to explain the quiescence of workers after 1922. An influential essay by David Brody assessed the combination of scientific management and personnel management in "welfare capitalism" as highly successful at pacifying the working class, until its effects were undermined by the Great Depression. The more recent work of Sanford Jacoby located the creative period of managerial practice in the peak years of labour militancy (1916-22), noted a widespread erosion of welfare practices during the Coolidge Prosperity, and highlighted the importance of chronic unemployment in sapping workers' militancy during the 1920s, in the United States as elsewhere in the capitalist world.¹²

Other studies of this century's early decades have used immigrant communities, rather than work relations, as their point of departure. Donna Gabaccia's book on the Sicilians of Elizabeth Street, New York, and Ewa Morawska's careful reconstruction of the lives of Slavic workers in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, have revealed how immigrants tried to fulfill their own aspirations in the shadow of social realities which were not of their choosing. Tamara Hareven linked the personnel records of the giant Amoskeag mills to the personal recollections of many French Canadian immigrants to show the economic importance and emotional intensity of family bonds in workers' coping with

¹¹ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York 1974); Dan Clawson, *Bureaucracy and the Labor Process: The Transformation of U.S. Industry, 1860-1920* (New York 1980); Sharon Hartman Strom, "'We're No Kitty Foyles': Organizing Office Workers for the Congress of Industrial Organizations, 1937-50," in Ruth Milkman, ed., *Women, Work and Protest: A Century of U.S. Women's Labor History* (Boston 1985), 206-34; Margery W. Davies, *Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia 1982); Stephen Meyer III, *The Five Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company, 1908-1921* (Albany 1981); David F. Noble, *America by Design: Science, Technology, and the Rise of Corporate Capitalism* (New York 1977); Noble, *Forces of Production: A Social History of Industrial Automation* (New York 1984); David M. Gordon, Richard Edwards, and Michael Reich, *Segmented Work, Divided Workers: The Historical Transformation of Labor in the United States* (Cambridge 1982); Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA 1977); Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920* (Madison 1975); Nelson, *Frederick W. Taylor and the Rise of Scientific Management* (Madison 1980); David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge and New York, forthcoming).

¹² David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York 1980), 48-81; Sanford M. Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions and the Transformation of Work in American Industry, 1900-1945* (New York 1985).

industrial life — a theme seconded by Jacques Rouillard in *Ah, Les États!* and generalized to all of immigrant life in John Bodnar's *The Transplanted*. Joe William Trotter, Jr., supplemented his informative reconstruction of *Black Milwaukee* with a thoughtful appendix examining the difference between earlier authors' approach to "the making of a ghetto" and his conception of "the making of a black working class." Perhaps the most concise and comprehensive case study of the making of a working class from rural folk of many different origins, meeting under conditions fixed by large-scale capitalism, has been provided by Ronald Takaki in *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii*.¹⁰

The combined impact of changes in work and changes in community relations must be scrutinized more closely if we are to understand working-class life between the two world wars. Yves Lequin and his team of investigators from the university in Lyon have set an example for such comprehensive analysis in their study of "the great silence" between 1922 and 1935 in four French and Italian industrial districts. Among other things they concluded that the diminished role of skilled workers in the short run severed older personal links between local popular protest and national politics, but in the long run paved the way for new connections through mass-based communist parties. Their discovery of former working-class militants devoting most of their energies to the improvement of schools is much like what Ileen DeVault found in her study of the education of prospective clerical workers in Pittsburgh. After the defeat of their unions, activist steel and glass workers lavished attention on the schooling of their sons and daughters. The rise of clerical work thus became a central feature in the reshaping of working-class life. Simultaneously, as John Bukowczyk discovered in Bayonne, New Jersey, the agenda of immigrant politics shifted from issues defined by workers to one prescribed by ethnic professional and business groups during the 1920s.¹¹

¹⁰ Donna Gabaccia, *From Sicily to Elizabeth Street* (Albany 1984); Ewa Morawska, *For Bread with Butter: The Life-Worlds of East Central European Immigrants in Johnstown, Pennsylvania 1890-1940* (New York 1985); Tamara K. Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge 1982); Jacques Rouillard, *Ah, Les États! Les Travailleurs canadiens-français dans l'industrie textile de la Nouvelle-Angleterre d'après le témoignage des derniers migrants* (Montréal 1985); John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN 1985); Joe William Trotter, Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana, IL 1985); Ronald Takaki, *Pau Hana: Plantation Life and Labor in Hawaii, 1835-1920* (Honolulu 1983).

¹¹ Yves Lequin, "Social Structures and Shared Beliefs: Four Worker Communities in the 'Second Industrialization,'" *International Labor and Working Class History*, 22 (1982), 1-17; Ileen A. DeVault, "Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Pittsburgh, 1870s-1910s," (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1985); John J. Bukowczyk, "The Transformation of Working Class Ethnicity: Corporate Control, Americanization, and the Polish Middle Class in Bayonne, New Jersey, 1915-1925," *Labor History*, 25 (1984), 53-82.

All this suggests that the truly exceptional period for the United States may have been the 1930s. It was the militancy of that period which was remarkable by world standards, not the quiescence of the 1920s, when only German and British workers had continued massive confrontations with established structures of power. The contrast between the United States and Canada during the 1930s is especially noteworthy. Nelson Lichtenstein's *Labor's War at Home* has provided a sophisticated analysis of the character and limits of American workers' militancy during the depression decade and of the impact of war mobilization on the shape of union practice. The Communist Party's role in these years has received renewed attention, both in the institutional histories of Harvey Klehr and Bert Cochran and in the more innovative efforts of Maurice Isserman, Mark Naison, Nell Painter, and others to reassess the meaning of the movement to its participants at the grassroots level. The Fall 1986 issue of *International Labor and Working-Class History* (Fall, 1986) attempts to bring these two levels of analysis together.¹⁵

Special attention should be paid to two books which assess continuities and changes in working-class life from the 1920s through the 1940s. One is Ronald Schatz, *The Electrical Workers*, which analyzes the role corporate welfare practices in the 1920s had in shaping workers' demands and union practices during the depression and war years. This study identifies the strikes of 1946 as the decisive confrontation between union and corporate power, and reveals the extent to which electrical companies were subsequently able to reconstruct practices modeled on the 1920s, despite their formal practice of collective bargaining. More comprehensive in its scope is Christopher Tomlins, *The State and the Unions*. Building on a proliferation of revisionist studies of labour law in the United States and on newly available records of the American Federation of Labor, Tomlins stressed the continuity of efforts by the AFL to establish contractual relations with business independent of the state between the 1890s and the 1930s, and noted the profound break with that heritage represented by the Wagner Act of 1935 and subsequent court decisions and legislation. Tomlins' study of labour law rests on a firm understanding of union practice and may offer the most comprehensive overview yet to appear of conflicts over structures of power during the present century.¹⁶

¹⁵ Nelson Lichtenstein, *Labor's War at Home: The CIO in World War II* (New York 1982); Melvyn Dubofsky, "Not So 'Turbulent Years': Another Look at the American 1930's," *Amerikastudien*, 24 (1980), 5-20; Roger Keeran, *The Communist Party and the Auto Workers Unions* (Bloomington, IN 1980); Bert Cochran, *Labor and Communism: The Conflict that Shaped American Unions* (Princeton 1977); Maurice Isserman, *Which Side Were You On? The American Communist Party during the Second World War* (Middletown, CT 1982); Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem during the Depression* (Urbana, IL 1983); Nell Irvin Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson: His Life as a Negro Communist in the South* (Cambridge, MA 1979).

¹⁶ Ronald W. Schatz, *The Electrical Workers: A History of Labor at General Electric and Westinghouse, 1923-60* (Urbana, IL 1983); Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and*

One more area of historical research in which the yield of the last ten years has been especially rich remains to be discussed: the emancipation of American slaves. Recent studies of emancipation have drawn upon a massive body of documents gathered by the Freedmen and Southern Society Project of the University of Maryland since 1976, and two large volumes of this material have been published under the editorship of Ira Berlin during the last four years. Not since Commons' *Documentary History of American Industrial Society (1910-1911)* has a comparably rich record of the lives and struggles of working people appeared in the United States. Moreover, the lucid introductions to those volumes and the books and dissertations recently produced by historians associated with the project have situated emancipation clearly in the development of American capitalism. Better than any other studies I have discussed, the writings of Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Armstead Robinson, Leslie S. Rowland, Julie Saville, and their colleagues have addressed both structures of power and structures of meaning.¹⁷

What is emerging from this research is a depiction of the ways in which blacks formulated their own conception of freedom by word and by deed, in opposition both to those of their slave masters and those of their Yankee liberators. Customary division of working time and uses of livestock and produce which blacks had secured under slavery, efforts to reunify families scattered across many white households, attempts to put land to communitarian uses, and historic attachments to particular localities all shaped the goals which freedpeople struggled to realize. The outcome of their efforts varied from one local setting to another, as a result of shifting battle lines and governmental policies, as well as geographic and demographic features, established patterns of land tenure and marketing, migrations of refugees, and military decrees. Like the best historians of industrial workers, these scholars are aware that decisive confrontations over such issues as rights to garden plots and their produce, whether tasks were assigned to individuals or to groups, the length of

the Unions: Labor Relations, Law and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880-1960 (New York 1985). See also James B. Atleson, *Values and Assumptions in American Labor Law* (Amherst 1983); Karl E. Klare, "Judicial Deradicalization of the Wagner Act and the Origins of Modern Legal Consciousness, 1937-1941," *Minnesota Law Review*, 62 (1978), 265-339; Klare, "Traditional Labor Law Scholarship and the Crisis of Collective Bargaining Law: A Reply to Professor Finkin," *Maryland Law Review*, 44 (1985), 731-840; Katherine Stone, "The Post-War Paradigm in American Labor Law," *Yale Law Journal*, 90 (1981), 1509.

¹⁷ Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Thavolia Glymph, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861-1867* (Cambridge 1982, 1985); Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven 1985); Armstead L. Robinson, *Bitter Fruits of Bondage: The Demise of Slavery and the Collapse of the Confederacy* (New Haven, forthcoming); Julie Saville, "A Measure of Freedom: The Reorganization of Agricultural Labor in South Carolina after the Abolition of Slavery," (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1986).

pay-withholding periods, the dismissal of labourers during slack seasons, and who had actual possession of a marketable crop, provided the daily content to controversies over wage labour. Moreover, the published documents make popular association of freedom with military organization especially clear — in the armed units which linked blacks of different plantations to each other in their first political associations, codified desired standards of wages and conditions of tenancy, and asserted blacks' rights of assembly in defiance of planters' property rights and claims to working time. Apart from the published volumes of documents and Barbara J. Fields' *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, most of this work on emancipation is not yet off the presses, but what has appeared has already made our former conceptions of freedpeople's aspirations and struggles appear crude by comparison. Evidently the harvest of scholarship begun in 1976 is far from completed.

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