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This issue of the Binghamton Journal of History is dedicated to Professor Warren Wagar.

For many years, Professor Wagar has been the heart and soul of the undergraduate program and, in no small measure, is responsible for the formation of this Journal. He served as director of undergraduate studies since time immemorial, anyway, for a solid decade. He has given simply enormous blocks of his time to overseeing the undergraduate program, to maintaining contacts with the students, and to caring about the nature of undergraduate studies on this campus.

And, he nearly singlehandedly created the Binghamton University chapter of the History Honor Society, Phi Alpha Theta. His leadership and driving presence in that organization have been incredible. His sure hand, wit and commitment in guiding Phi Alpha Theta truly have been inspirational.

With respect and gratitude, this issue thanks Professor Wagar for his extraordinary and unselfish service to our students and this institution.

## **Aspects of the Great Depression:**

### **Its Causes, the Struggles of the Unions, and the Plight of the Unemployed**

By Tania Springer

This research paper focuses on three aspects of the Great Depression: why it happened, the relationship between workers and unions, and how the Depression affected the jobless.

It was the summer months of 1929 that industrial production declined, business slumped and depression began in the United States. Rising unemployment, falling incomes, increasingly underutilized capacity, the drop in primary-product prices and the collapse of international trade combined to depress the international economy. Property owners felt depressed because their assets were shrinking, manufacturers had to deal with declining sales, building operators experienced a crippling lack of demand, railroad managers were desperate because fewer people utilized the rails, farmers were ruined by deflated prices, wage-earners were facing unemployment and successive wage cuts. Everybody fought the long and arduous, discouraging battle for subsistence.

#### **WHY IT HAPPENED**

The Great Depression of the 1930s was a worldwide phenomenon, composed of an infinite number of separate but related events. And it seemed indisputable that there was a pattern to the trend of events nearly everywhere. At the time, this developing pattern was not immediately clear. The people of every country were, however, aware that the same forces were at work everywhere and that these forces had caused an economic catastrophe of unprecedented proportions. If the Great Depression was the same everywhere, international cooperation was necessary for ending it. But despite the urgings of economists and statesmen, the nations were singularly unsuccessful in coordinating their attempts to overcome the depression. Most countries adopted nationalistic policies, some deliberately aimed at benefiting their own people at the expense of the people of other nations. According to Ohlin insufficient cooperation lay at the root of much suffering. If the nations had cooperated with one another better in dealing with their economic problems, they could have avoided or at least ameliorated the terrible economic losses that all of them suffered during that decade of depression.

At the time, a substantial majority of Americans and nearly all foreigners who expressed opinions on the subject believed that the Wall Street Stock Market crash of October 1929 had triggered the Depression, thereby suggesting that the United States was the birthplace of the disaster. The Wall Street downfall triggered declines in other securities markets and led bankers to make borrowing more difficult, which caused a further decline of already depressed commodity prices. In any case, most scholars tend to locate a majority of the underlying causes of the Depression in American events. One thing that the experts at the time did agree on was that the Depression was the downward phase of the business cycle. Awareness that the economic activity went through periodic difficulties that were essentially self-generating first emerged in the nineteenth century. These cycles were a product of the Industrial Revolution. There were periods of economic growth and relative prosperity, others of stagnation and decline. Demographic trends, the opening of new lands, and climatic changes produced these shifts. Random events such as wars, droughts, and epidemics could also alter economic conditions in dramatic fashion.

In addition, economists divided business cycles into four stages: expansion; crisis (or panic); recession or contraction; and recovery. Although all economists claimed to know what business cycles look like, they did not entirely agree about what caused them. Some attributed cycles to the effects of the weather on agriculture. Some economists also claimed that climatic changes had subtle psychological effects on masses of people, at times causing them to be optimistic, at other times to be depressed, with corresponding effects on their economic behavior. Most economists, however, saw a more direct connection between economic activity and the cycles. Some located the source of change in banking practices. These experts reasoned as follows:

When banks had large reserves, they lowered interest rates. Cheaper loans encouraged manufacturers to invest in new equipment and hire additional workers. The resulting expansion of production caused an upswing of the cycle. But, the increased borrowing eventually reduced the banks' reserve, causing them to raise interest rates. That discouraged investment and slowed the economy down.

Another explanation blamed maldistribution of wealth for the cycles. During the prosperous times, the rich were unable to spend all their income. They saved more, which resulted in increased investment, more production, and eventually in more goods than the rest of the society had the money to consume. Then goods piled upon shelves and in warehouses, prices fell, production was cut back, and workers were discharged. As a result, the economy entered the depression phase of the cycle.

Other elements were related to production. But, many insisted that the main reason why the Depression had not ended was that monopolistic corporations and cartels, labor unions, and government controls were interfering with the free functioning of market forces. Rigid prices, rigid wages, and government regulations such as tariffs had stifled new investment, kept inefficient producers from going bankrupt, and prevented prices from falling low enough to stimulate demands. These many explanations of the business cycles differed mainly in emphasis. They complemented rather than contradicted one another.

However, the most nearly universal example of a counterproductive government policy that tried to counteract the Depression was the effort that nations made to keep their budgets balanced. Doing so proved next to impossible. The Depression caused tax revenues to decline at the same time that the governments were being forced to spend more on relief for the unemployed and others in need. With prices falling, unemployment high, and economic activity stagnating, deliberated deficit spending would have provided "salutary simulation to their economies." Flaws in the international financial system were a major cause of the collapse, and errors made by bankers and politicians in trying to repair the damage prolonged it.

Most economists and scholars neither claim that the United States alone was responsible for the Depression. American financial policy had little to do with the underlying imbalances in the world economy of the 1920s, principally the persistent, pervasive slump in the prices of agricultural commodities and of nearly all raw materials. This structural imbalance hampered economic growth in non-industrial countries and deprived the industrial countries of potential markets. The war debt and reparations tangle, for which the United States was only partially responsible, also had much to do with the severity of the Depression. In any case, the Great Depression occurred and ran its course.

## WORKERS AND UNIONS

It is important to keep in mind that during the Great Depression, people who had full time jobs were usually better off, at least economically, than they had been before 1929. This was true because in nearly every nation, the cost of living fell faster and further than wages fell. It is also worth noting that at all times, a large majority of the work force was employed. Put another way, the unemployed, although numerous, were always a minority. Another important fact to remember is that unemployment, for a minority of those who suffered the experience, tended to be a temporary condition.

In the middle and late twenties, real wages were rising and working conditions improving in most industrial regions. The percentage of white-collar and service industry jobs was increasing, which meant that more workers have adopted middle class values and expectations. When workers moved up the economic and social ladder, places opened for others to take the jobs they had vacated. For example, American blacks from Southern farms to factory jobs in Northern cities were examples of this.

Thus, the onset of the Depression brought to an end what had been a period of relatively good times for most workers. Even those who continued to work steadily after 1929 were bound to find the change in the economic climate unsettling. The social and economic mobility characteristic of the previous decade slowed to a halt. Fewer workers could feel safe when ever-larger numbers of their colleagues were out of work, and no end to the hard times was in sight. In addition, the Depression caused labor unions, which had been losing member even in the 1920s, to suffer still further declines. Workers tended to drop out of unions when they lost their jobs because they could not afford to pay dues, but also because the attitudes of most unions was less fully supportive of the jobless. Especially in countries that had government insurance and relief systems, the help that unions provided for their idle members was chiefly "rhetorical".

As for the unions, most adopted extremely conservative policies. The largest, the American Federation of Labor (AFL), was determinedly apolitical. Its branches were organized on trade rather than industrial lines and consequently had done almost nothing in the 1920s about organizing unskilled workers in the expanding mass production industries such as electrical appliances, chemical, and automobiles. Nearly all the AFL locals discriminated against blacks. In 1928, for example, only 81, 000 of the three million AFL members were black. In addition, the unions were for the unemployed all-out. But doing something for the unemployed was more often than not another matter entirely. Most unions outside the United States favored government relief programs and unemployment insurance systems. They opposed cuts in benefits and in welfare payments to workers whose insurance benefits had been exhausted. But the unions did so in large part out of self-interest. Welfare and unemployment insurance took some of the pressure off union members in the sense that without this kind of assistance, unemployed people would be forced to seek work at any wage at all. And the unions resisted government proposals to increase worker contributions to the insurance funds. They did so without regard for the steady decline in the cost of living, which was causing the real wages of full-time workers to rise.

During the Depression, job security was of enormous importance to workers. When layoffs occurred, last hired, first fired was an almost universal union policy. The stress on seniority discriminated against younger workers and in most instances against women. Also, unions tended to tighten rules governing the admission and training of apprentices. They also advocated keeping young people in school longer and lowering the retirement age,

both socially desirable policies but ones that if adopted would put some people out of work for the benefit of others. In a way they attacked the unemployment problem by redefining who was unemployed, not by finding new jobs for the idle. Unions also favored getting married women out of the workforce, which was not socially desirable at all, and strictly selfish national policies such as high protective tariffs, "buy American," and measures aimed at sending foreign workers "back to where they came from."

### **WHAT IT DID TO THE JOBLESS**

To contemporaries, persistent, high unemployment was the most alarming aspect of the Great Depression. In every industrial nation, more people were out of work than in any period in the past. It has been estimated that in 1933 about 30 million workers were jobless, about two-thirds of these in three countries—the United States, Germany, and Great Britain. But little can be gained by citing numbers.

Beyond the difficulty in counting the unemployed, there are all sorts of variations to be considered that affected the significance of unemployment to the unemployed and to the societies they inhabited. It made great difference whether a person was unemployed for a few weeks or months or for a longer period. Unemployment affected men differently in most cases than women, old people differently than young, married people differently than single. Such obvious matters as the number of children in a breadwinner's family and the existence and amount of unemployment insurance or welfare also affected the meaning of joblessness for its victims. So did the amount of unemployment in the community.

Furthermore, the trends obscured what was happening to many individuals. After all the unemployed were a relatively small minority of the population. The steep decline of food prices, a result of the agricultural depression, meant that most people with jobs could improve their diets during the Depression years. But in order to obtain enough to eat, unemployed people had to cut down on relatively expensive items like meat and fresh fruit. Even milk and other dairy products cost more than many could afford to buy in adequate amounts. The failure of many poor people to manage their meager resources efficiently complicated the problem. They had nothing to eat their evening meals but bread and coffee. The margin for poor people was so thin that it was difficult even with the management to provide a good diet. Routine medical and dental care tended to be neglected by the unemployed in favor of more pressing needs.

Many of the unemployed suffered from a lack of proper clothing and from poor housing. Social workers often reported that children of their clients could not go to school because they had no shoes. Many families suffered cruelly in winter because they had no money for coal or wood. Landlords frequently allowed destitute families to remain in their homes out of pity. But the newspapers were full of stories of people evicted for non-payment of rent or forced to part with their homes because they could not meet mortgage payments. There was a big increase in vagrancy as people lost their homes and as the jobless took to the road in search of work. Lodging houses operated by local governments and by charitable organizations such as the Salvation Army took care of many of these unfortunates.

Moreover, attention was also paid to the effects of unemployment on the families of the jobless. Members of families that suffered serious financial setbacks substituted their own labor for goods and services previously obtained with money. In some cases, unemployment caused trouble within families. In other instances, it brought family members closer together. Some men enjoyed having more time to be with their children, others found

that being around the children for prolonged periods of time to be extremely stressful. Some men became absorbed in doing chores around the house; some took up new hobbies. Some took to drink; others sulked.

One of the few general effects of unemployment on family life was its strong tendency to increase the influence of women, both as wives and as mothers. What form this influence took and its impact on husband-wife and mother-child relationships varied considerably. Some wives were very supportive of their jobless spouses, others scornful. Some found jobs, leaving their husbands to take care of home and children. When these situations were shaky to begin with, unemployment was likely to make them worse. Examples of this are: 1) male resentment at loss of dominance, especially if the woman became the breadwinner; 2) loss of prestige (and the power to control by dispensing of allowance money) in the eyes of the children; 3) social isolation, caused by lack of money to entertain, by shame, and eventually by apathy; and 4) sexual problems, caused by such things as decline in physical energy, apathy again, and fear of pregnancy.

Finally, what to do about the unemployed was part of the larger question of how to end the economic collapse that had caused so many workers to be laid off. It was agreed that ending the Depression would solve the unemployment problem or at least bring unemployment down to manageable levels. There was also, however, the more immediate problem of what to do about the unemployed people who needed help merely to survive. Whether the efforts to aid the unemployment would help end the Depression or make it worse was a matter of controversy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The origins of the Great Depression, which began in 1929, placed an impossible strain, directly and indirectly, upon the world economy. The economical and financial structure, which had developed during the 1920s, was fragile and many economies were moving into a recession in 1929; therefore, when the U.S. boom broke, the general collapse was inevitable. The weaknesses varied from country to country but problems were closely related; once the Depression began, a chain reaction set in and there was no international body or individual state which was able to halt it. The Depression left a deep psychological scar on all nations- even those, which were among the most fortunate; the poverty, the insecurity and despair are still remembered in the urban and rural communities who experienced the mass unemployment or the steep decline in agricultural incomes.

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## **Walt Whitman's Influence on Germany**

By Ute Ferrier

Walt Whitman (1819-1892) is considered to be one of the greatest American poets of the nineteenth century. While Edgar Allan Poe may have been more widely read, Whitman had more international writers actively respond to him and his poetry than any other American poet. A century after his death, writers around the world are still in dialogue with him, pondering the questions he posed, arguing with him and elaborating on his insights. People have been attracted to Whitman for numerous reasons. For his time he was truly unconventional and introduced the modern lyric with his autobiographical collection of prose poems called *Leaves of Grass*. The impact Whitman has, however, exceeds technical innovation; it lies in his universal appeal.

Walt Whitman is many things to many people. The poet once remarked about the various photographs of himself he used to come upon, "I meet new Walt Whitmans every day. There are a dozen of me afloat." Perhaps even more manifold than the physical images of the author are the ways in which he has been perceived. The purpose of this paper is to examine how Walt Whitman's poetry influenced Germany. How the poet was received, which aspects of Whitman's philosophy most attracted Germans, ultimately has to do with the *Zeitgeist*, the intellectual climate of the day.

For numerous authors Whitman has primarily been a poet of democracy and political questions have often been at the center of the international responses to Whitman. While this aspect of his poetry has inspired people from states such as the former Soviet Union and China, it has not been the only theme to spellbind his admirers. Authors from India, for example, have been able to identify with Whitman on a spiritual plane, seeing in him a Hindu vision. Clearly the way in which people relate to the poet has much to do with what is essential and pertinent to their own lives.

### **Whitman's Influence**

For Whitman's contemporaries the most obvious deviation from the norm was his prose style. Whitman does not submit his thoughts to metered rhyme, yet they are rhythmic, just not in the traditional sense of a stanza. His free verse forms have been likened to the ebb and flow of the ocean tides, which inspired him throughout his life. The innovation of Whitman's poetry, however, exceeds structure and pattern and those who have admired his poetry have also been intrigued by its content. Whitman relished life and never lost that child-like quality to look at reality with curiosity and awe. He wrote about nature's wonders with the same enthusiasm he had for

technological innovation. And his *Leaves of Grass* while intimately personal was at the same time a universal appeal to his fellows to strive toward higher ideals.

Whitman published his first edition of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855. In subsequent years he revised some of the poems in this collection, added new poems to it and deleted some of them. It was as such a "work in progress" which culminated in the sixth and practically complete edition that has been in print since 1882. While Whitman's literary career in the United States thus starts in the 1850s, it took over a decade before it made inroads in Europe. For Whitman's poetry the late 1860s marked the beginning of his European reception. In 1867 William Rossetti's British edition of *Leaves of Grass* introduced the author to Britain. That marked the beginning of Whitman's influence on the international literary community. In the assessment of Gay Wilson Allen, who devoted his life to studying Whitman, the poet was even more appreciated abroad than he was at home. Readers all over the world who seriously pondered democracy, took Whitman seriously long before he was recognized in the United States. He was more respected and more widely read in Europe well into the twentieth century.

While Whitman wrote relatively few poems about political revolutions, many political activists saw a compatriot in him. The Bolsheviks found his references to the brotherhood of all nations particularly attractive and a Russian journalist even called the poet "the spirit of revolt" and a champion of the oppressed. Allen considers this dimension of Whitman's work to have had the greatest impact. According to Allen, "Whitman's influence in world literature has been mainly in the realm of ideas, and especially as a symbol of love, international brotherhood, and democratic idealism rather than in esthetics." In this respect, Allen concludes, Whitman's impact is only rivaled by George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

### **Introduction to the German-reading public**

Whitman's democratic content also appealed to the German poet Ferdinand Freiligrath (1810-1876), who was a political exile in London. Freiligrath was a revolutionary poet and friend of Karl Marx, who was already known in the United States for his literary work. In 1868 he discovered Rossetti's edition of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and consequently translated some of the poems into German. The ten Whitman poems and an essay introducing the poet were published in the *Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung* and were well received.

For Freiligrath the American was a breath of fresh air. In his essay on Whitman he introduced the poet as "the only poet America has as yet produced." Freiligrath appreciated that Whitman was "[n]o follower in the beaten track of the European muse but fresh from the prairie . . . and from the earthy smells in hair and beard and

clothing of the soil from which he sprang." He was an antidote to German stuffiness and perhaps even more importantly he spoke to those who were yearning. Whitman's admirers, Freiligrath pointed out, see in him "the only poet at all, in whom the age, this struggling, eagerly seeking age, in travail with thought and longing, has found its expression; the poet par excellence."

How should Germans receive Walt Whitman? Freiligrath was clearly taken by the poetry. "We confess that it moves us, disturbs us, will not lose its hold upon us." At the same time Freiligrath cautions his readers not to jump to conclusions. Still he cannot resist to "have a closer look at this strange new comrade, who threatens to overturn our entire *Ars Poetica* and all our theories and canons on the subject of aesthetics." Clearly the potential for change seemed monumental and Freiligrath was aware that this could be the poetry of the future.

Freiligrath's introductory essay is considered a historical turning point, the moment when Whitman was introduced to the German-reading public. Walter Grünzweig points out, however, that Freiligrath was highly selective in his choice of poems and as such did not offer an accurate picture of Whitman's work. Undoubtedly Freiligrath published the poems he most cherished. In the late 1860s Prussia was engaged in several wars and militarism was on the rise. In this political climate democracy was particularly appealing to dissenters such as Freiligrath. The poems he translated were mostly from Whitman's Civil War poetry in *Drum-Taps* and as such he did not do justice "to the essential modernity of the American's work." Nonetheless Freiligrath needs to be credited for being far enough on the periphery of German society to be able to appreciate Whitman, while at the same time still being connected enough to be able to bring the American to the German people.

For Freiligrath content may have been more important than aesthetics. This does not mean, however, that the unconventional forms went unnoticed. Freiligrath reflected on Whitman's style and pondered if "the age [has] so much and such serious matter to say, that the old vessels no longer suffice for the new content." Twenty years later, after the first book-length translation of *Leaves of Grass* (*Grashalme*) was published in Zürich, some critics were also puzzled over content and style. Overall *Grashalme* was well received and in the minds of German-speaking Europeans the work reflected "the newness of the New World" which at this time seemed very mythical.

### **Naturalist or Mystic**

Freiligrath had initially introduced Whitman to the German public in 1868, but Whitman's work did not widely circulate for another two decades. After the publication of *Grashalme* in 1889, Whitman's work became well known, in part because of the efforts of Johannes Schlaf, leader of the German Whitman cult. The second introduction to this audience was more successful than Freiligrath's had been

twenty years earlier. Whitman became well known and would remain influential until the 1930s. With this more prominent introduction came a shift of emphasis.

Whitman's work was now seen from a different point of view than Freiligrath's and was utilized for different purposes. The political ideals that had attracted Freiligrath seemed less important to the new generation. Schlaf, along with Arno Holz and Gerhart Hauptmann introduced "naturalism" into German literature and they connected with Whitman on this level. In 1892 Schlaf wrote an essay in which he elaborated on how Whitman's poetry enabled him to escape from the limitations of German naturalism so that he could discover his inner self. In Whitman's cosmic musings, Schlaf saw a means of escape. To those who were distraught over rapid industrialization and the effects it had on society, Whitman's poetry was therapeutic.

Schlaf embraced the religious foundation of Whitman and noted that "his main theme is the sublimity of religion." Not the traditional religion that requires circumscribed behavior. "Not the cult, the dogma with its imperatives, but the powerful broad awareness of life whose force comprises the cosmos with love and wonder, the religious feeling, the intimate, jubilant consciousness of belonging to everything."

The fact that people were embracing this aspect of Whitman indicates how much they were searching for new meaning in a world that was changing too fast, where old ways of knowing and believing were no longer considered valid. Whitman was the symbol of a "new humanity" which defined itself according to new rules. He was the embodiment of the new generation. In this search for purpose one could easily utilize aspects of Whitman that fulfilled that longing.

As such the mystical side of Whitman could be linked up with his image as the "good gray poet" which he had earned during the Civil War. Whitman had already been established as a journalist and poet by the time he became a nurse in the war and the poems he wrote about these experiences were well received. According to Grünzweig, the persona of the "good gray poet" became the favored Whitman symbol in Germany because it appealed to those in search of the new humanity:

Sleep-I and they keep guard all night,  
Not doubt, not disease shall dare to lay finger upon you,  
I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself,  
And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell  
you is so.

Whitman himself did not necessarily reject the technological age that frightened so many. He was more complicated than that. In his *Passage to India* he admires the marvels of technology, such as the transcontinental railroad. Whitman was not

looking to escape the material realities of his time, nor did he shy away from the spiritual domain. He was at home in both.

Perhaps, as Grünzweig noted, those readers who were "looking toward the American poet for assistance, the medicine they actually received was an aesthetic correlative to the newly industrialized culture from which they were attempting to escape." There is, however, another way of looking at this. Whitman may not be able to redeem the modern age, but he does by example of his autobiographical reflections offer a synthesis. Even at a time when organized religion (in particular Christianity) was under severe criticism, one did not have to abandon spiritual matters altogether in order to be recognized as an intellectual and sensible being. One could, indeed toggle between both worlds, admiring technological innovation while seeking communion with higher forces.

### **Whitman and Nietzsche**

As far as scholars have been able to ascertain, there is no evidence that Walt Whitman influenced Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Both men have acknowledged a debt to Emerson but Nietzsche never mentioned or alluded to the older Whitman. It is all the more striking that their interests were parallel in many ways. There is always the possibility that Nietzsche was influenced by Whitman without publicly recognizing it, or perhaps that the influence was indirect and as such not evident even to Nietzsche. It could also be argued that both were part of the same *Zeitgeist* and tapped into similar realms without ever directly interacting.

Whatever the connection may have been between Whitman and Nietzsche may remain obscure. What can be stated with certainty is that the two men, as many of their contemporaries, were wrestling with the same issues. A parallel analysis of Whitman and Nietzsche is instructive. It clarifies the intellectual issues of the day. Comparing the two enhances the understanding of both. Juxtaposition often brings out the nuances and contours of an argument more than a solitary inquiry can.

One way to compare Whitman and Nietzsche is by comparing labels that have been attached to these two intellectuals. Whitman has been labeled many things, among them a mystic, a naturalist, a vitalist and a transcendentalist, and while there is some merit to each and all of these categories they still do not encompass the complexity of the poet. The multiplicity of labels suggests that Whitman was many things to many people. It also shows that he did not remain in a singular mode of expression (as Ernest Dowson did) but that he had a plethora of interests and that he changed over the years. In many ways Whitman and Nietzsche explored caveats that the other one did not, but on certain issues the two run on parallel tracks. Whitman's thought has a trajectory similar to Friedrich Nietzsche in the sense that both search for meaning

through unconventional ways. Both were urging their fellows to stop and smell the roses, to embrace life to the fullest. Experiencing life was for life's sake, there were no other guidelines-especially not traditional morality, to worry about. From this point of view both men were vitalists.

However, Whitman was more at home in the spiritual realm than Nietzsche; he embraced the transcendental as well as the naturalistic. For Whitman a spiritual communion was part of his earthly experience and he was not afraid to use the term God, nor did he shy away from religion.

I do not despise you priests, all time, the world over,  
My faith is the greatest of faiths and the least of faiths,  
Enclosing worship ancient and modern and all between ancient and modern. . .

Whitman continues in this vein, adding the lama or brahman and referring to eastern traditions. He refers to Jesus and says he accepts the one who was crucified, "knowing assuredly that he is divine." And a few moments later he considers himself as "belonging to the winders of the circuit of circuits."

In the nineteenth century Whitman's concept of spirituality would have seemed blasphemous but in retrospect it was convention that he spurned, not necessarily the underlying concepts. If anything, Whitman's avocation of a universal brotherhood seems to embrace the essence of Christ's golden rule "love thy neighbor as you love thyself."

Nietzsche also understood the concept of brotherhood and was driven to educate his fellows, to prod them into achieving a higher level of self-actualization. But Nietzsche would never use Whitman's terminology; instead he distanced himself as far from God as possible. In Nietzsche's mind, God was dead, or at least God in the traditional understanding of the word. This realization, however, was far from comforting. It left a void which Nietzsche desperately tried to fill. Key concepts of his philosophy, such as experiencing reality to its fullest, transcending human limitation and reaching the stage of the "overman", and being compelled to share that which you have learned with others, can all be considered as secularized versions of Christian concepts. Thus no matter how hard he tried, or perhaps even the harder he tried, to distance himself from Christian philosophy, Nietzsche could not escape the framework. He could use different words, make iconoclastic statements and tie intellectual knots but in the end his highest concepts were essentially Christian.

In Thus Spoke Zarathustra Nietzsche even utilizes metaphors and terminology from the bible. Zarathustra, the sage who elaborates on how to strive for perfection, suggests that the overman has to go through three stages: that of the camel, the lion and the child. The camel stands for those who shoulder the earthly burden, the lion is

the one who seeks freedom and creates new value. At last, though, it takes the child to overcome all human limitations because the "child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes." For the game of creation, my brothers, a sacred "Yes" is needed." The child clearly refers to one of Jesus' metaphors.

Nietzsche questions everything. He wants a clean slate and sets out to evaluate everything society has accepted as valuable. This extreme view in a sense necessitated that God be dead. Yet, as Nietzsche retraces his intellectual and moral steps he frequently recreates a slate similar to the one he set out to destroy. The only area in which he refuses to budge is that of spiritual authority.

Nietzsche has no problem discussing Jesus' love thy neighbor, but in the end he always concludes that the ultimate authority is earthly.

In their refusal to conform to the church, Whitman and Nietzsche find common ground. However, Whitman was far less tormented over spiritual issues. He was not compelled to kill God, nor did he require an entirely blank slate. Whitman simply retained his core beliefs but expanded upon them to encompass other realities, other ways of appreciating existence. Perhaps he was grounded because of his strong Quaker influence. Whitman had an impregnable sense of the inner light and for him such a communion was as real as feeling the breeze of the wind. He did not fear that his intellectual integrity was undermined by believing in life after death. Thus while both authors cherished life and were obsessed with death, they differed significantly in their outlook.

### **Responses in Germany**

It did not take long for "Whitman communities" to spring up in Germany. Hermann Hesse (1877-1962) even complained that soon the Germans would build altars for him and elevate his writings to that of a gospel. Clearly he was meeting the needs of many people. Perhaps Germans embraced him too readily, only partially understanding what it was all about. At least that's what Hesse implied when he stated that "already they are calling him all kinds of things that he is not, for example a great philosopher and a prophet of the modern laws of life." Hesse was seemingly not just criticizing the German people for their lack of discernment but also the culture at large and the times in which he lived.

Our age, with no culture and thoroughly without philosophy, has no longer a sense for dimensions. Enthusiastically they run after every true or false prophet. What have they made out of Nietzsche, of Emerson, even of Maeterlinck! Posterity will have a good and long laugh.

Hesse not even considered Whitman a gifted writer, but he recognized him as a great poet in human terms. Whitman did not have to draw from the old European treasures or "the junk shop" as Hesse called it. As Freiligrath earlier, Hesse also sees the freshness in Whitman and associates it with the fact that he is American. Whitman can be unconventional. He comes from a young country that is more interested in its grandchildren than its grandfathers. He is raw energy, a creative thrust, preaching the self. "With the proud joy of the unbroken fully-developed human being he speaks of himself, his deeds and voyages, of his country." Hesse's phrasing "the unbroken fully-developed human being" is revealing. It emphasizes that Whitman was intact and implies that this is a noteworthy feat; arguably many artists who tried to work against the grain eventually wore out. One could also infer that those who are not broken have not pushed against the boundaries of society and are consequently not fully developed. This view that the old European order stifles creativity was not only common at the turn of the century, to some degree it still persists today. America is still considered wild, which is both good and bad. It is good in the sense that it is "the land of opportunity." However, it is bad because in certain instances it lacks civility. It is too raw. Europeans' view of America is still ambiguous and seemingly contradictory. As such Hesse's assessment is timeless.

"Whoever reads in this book [Leaves of Grass] at the right moment will find something of the primeval world and something of the high mountains, the sea and the prairie in it. Much will seem flashy and grotesque, but the whole will impress him just as America impresses us-against our own will."

For many Germans Whitman represented the American spirit and global exploration. Christian Morgenstern (1871-1914), a poet and journalist translated several of Whitman's poems. He felt, as did Hesse, that the German people had gone overboard in their reception of Whitman and wrote several mocking parodies to air his disgust. Nonetheless, Morgenstern could not help but embrace Whitman's globalist poetry which seemed to break every bourgeois norm. In his poem "A Song by Walt Whitman" (Ein Gesang Walt Whitmans) he explores Whitman's internationalist theme, using the poet's writing style.

I sit, my gaze directed to my world map.  
I sing the ocean, the mother of the earth.  
Blackish it towers up, horribly it roars, like flowing mountains, unpredictable, terribly,  
a game of the storms.  
It is blue, like a promise of manifold fortune.  
Continents, carrying peoples, emerge from it.

The poem continues talking about the continents, its people and some of its characteristics. The treatment of America is once again revealing because it shows how Europeans both admired and scorned the young nation.

America, the most youthful, most immature, with forty-four chambers of the heart, but no real soul as yet, greedy, inventive, full of effervescent power, worldly with superior manners, a democrat (for the time being). . .

According to Walter Grünzweig, this poem by Morgenstern is rather earnest compared to his other parodies. Morgenstern was not necessarily out to mock Whitman but to mock the reception of his poetry. An example of the expressionists' "exaggerated adoration of Whitman" to which Morgenstern was reacting, is the poetry by Arthur Drey (1890-1965). Drey called Whitman a titan, a swinger of the torch, a universal man and a prophet. Carl Albert Lange also dedicated a poem to Whitman in which he likened the poet to the image of a giant, whose words cloak the earth. And according to Lange, in these words are the seeds to everything, to cosmic connectedness.

While the admiration may seem exaggerated from a distance, Grünzweig points out that the poems by Drey and Lange were not exclusively written to worship Whitman. They are also an outlet for the frustration that the expressionist poets felt. They were alienated and projected real or imagined deficits. By elevating Whitman to a giant or a titan, they expressed their own sense of inferiority and to Grünzweig this suggests "the degree to which the human individual is dwarfed by modern technology and industrial society. The violent emotions they ascribe to Whitman [. . .] are indicative of the impossibility of expressing subjectivity in a mechanized and controlled society."

Two Swiss poets, Gustav Gamper (1873-1948) and Hans Reinhart (1880-1963) also dedicated poems to Whitman, which were published in a Swiss literary journal in 1919. While they are less flamboyant than the poems of Drey and Lange, they have a solemn religiosity about them. In his "Homage to Walt Whitman" (Bekenntnis zu Walt Whitman), Gamper starts out:

On the path of my soul I encountered the master  
and we greeted each other as wanderers.  
Oh, to have recognized the face of the aged Camerado,  
examining, admonishing, giving, with sparkles and smiles!  
When a treetop now whispers, it whispers to me  
from Walt Whitman, the wanderer.

Gamper considered Whitman to be the most influential person in his life and he tried to model himself after him. In his best-known work *Die Brücke Europa's* (The Bridge of Europe), Gamper tried to create a national epic for his Swiss homeland in a Whitmanesque style. The poem above in homage to Whitman is in the preface of *Die Brücke Europa's*.

These genuine admiration poems stand in stark contrast to the biting cynicism of his critics. Kurt Tucholsky (1890-1935), although he admired Whitman's new style, found his optimism sickening. Tucholsky, one of Germany's most prominent satirists, wrote three Whitman parodies. In the poems he refers to "Walt Wrobel" which either refers to Tucholsky turned Whitman, or the other way around. Tucholsky particularly attacks the notion that life can be grasped by the five senses. He takes Whitman's awe of perception and replaces the stimulus that nature provides with "ridiculous observations from the author's everyday life." In the poem "The Five Senses," Tucholsky writes about taste:

What do you taste, Walt Wrobel-?

I taste the lower crust of the fruit tart which my aunt has baked; regarding the tart, it is a bit blackened below, this is where the dough got burnt, it crunches in the mouth like sand . . .

This what my taste tastes . . .

Tucholsky's satire was published in 1925 when numerous German artists embraced the so-called New Objectivity (*Neue Sachlichkeit*). This movement reflected the resignation and cynicism of post-war intellectuals in Germany. In the troubling and highly volatile atmosphere of the Weimar Republic, Whitman's optimism may have been out of place. Indeed it is precisely this optimism which Tucholsky attacks. The concluding stanza of "The Five Senses" speaks to the disillusionment of the times. This world is imperfection, her lighting is imperfect. . .

Shine, lanterns!

Stumbling, my foot is searching for the way, the lanterns are flashing.

With all five sense I take it in, and it is not their fault:

mostly it is

pain.

For Tucholsky there was little solace in Whitman's optimism and his mockery is a striking contrast to the poems of Drey and Lange who almost worshipped Whitman. Extremely divergent views were nothing new though. Whitman's work had sparked controversy early on.

One of the most contentious issues surrounding Whitman have been around his homoeroticism. Some of Whitman's poems are clearly erotic, indeed his early publications were publicly banned in the United States because of their sexual overtones. In general Whitman has kept his sexual life private and he never publicly admitted that he was a homosexual. However, many of his followers believed that he was. In some of his earlier drafts of "Once I Passed through a Populous City" he explicitly spoke of a male lover, but the same poem was later published referring to a female only.

Yet now of all that city I remember only the man who wandered with me  
there, for love of me,  
Day by day, and night by night, we were together,

thus was edited to read:

Yet now of all that city I remember only a woman I casually met there who  
detain'd me for love of me. . .

While he was still alive there seemed to be no clear evidence one way or the other. Nonetheless, admirers of Whitman who knew of the earlier poem, took it as evidence that he had homosexual encounters. They believed that Whitman's orientation could advance their cause for homosexual rights.

Eduard Bertz (1853-1931) was devoted to several political causes, among them the early homosexual movement in Germany. Around the turn of the century the movement sought legal emancipation for homosexuals. In an effort to bring around public opinion, activists published scientific articles in which they tried to dispel the myths surrounding homosexuality. Bertz was convinced that Whitman could help the movement in this effort. He wrote an article praising Whitman and "referring to him as a sexually inactive homosexual." In the psychopathological language of the day he called Whitman a noble homosexual (Edelurning). Bertz admired Whitman and had no intention of harming the poet. Nonetheless other German Whitmanites saw Bertz's efforts as a direct affront. They immediately came to Whitman's defense and Schlaf published a vicious pamphlet accusing Bertz of slander. "Bertz misunderstood and believed that Schlaf and the "terrorists" of the heterosexual world wanted to repress Whitman's homosexuality in order to thwart the movement for homosexual emancipation." The quarrel turned quite nasty but in the end Schlaf persevered. Considering how strong the prejudices against homosexuals were at that time, it was fortunate that Bertz was unable to convince the public. "If Schlaf had not managed to deny Bertz's well-meant allegations, Whitman would probably not have been accepted in the German-speaking countries."

Whitman's eroticism affected people in strange ways. The nudists took the poet quite literally. Others were attracted to what they considered quasi-eroticism. Hans Reisiger (1884-1968) and Thomas Mann (1875-1955) even postulated that only a quasi-erotic relationship between people could function as the foundation for democracy. Mann, who before the war had been politically conservative, now publicly discussed that the old hierarchical order should be substituted by an erotic commonwealth. Eroticism and sexuality they believed could serve as a glue to keep society from disintegrating. Politically this notion did not go anywhere. However, the issue of homo-eroticism was less explosive this time. Reisiger and Mann openly talked about the homo-erotic content of Whitman's poetry. Fifteen to twenty years earlier the debate between Schlaf and Bertz had been extremely nasty. This time it evoked little response, although it is not clear how much people were paying close attention.

Reisiger and Mann's interest in Whitman did stimulate a brief revival. In 1919 Reisiger, published a selection of poems and three years later a two-volume edition of Whitman's major prose work and his *Leaves of Grass*. With this edition the poet became a "classic," a recognizable household word. During the Weimar Republic numerous authors imitated Whitman's style but by the middle of the decade actual interest in his poetry was declining. As mentioned previously the avant-garde could not readily identify with his content, albeit they still embraced his style.

The Nazis had little use for Whitman. They made several futile attempts to use Whitman's poetry for their ideological purposes, but in the end he was too democratic to be useful. During the Nazi era three of Whitman's most ardent supporters in Germany were exiled: Stefan Zweig, Franz Werfel and Thomas Mann. Consequently Whitman's reputation in Germany declined.

Even after World War II, Whitman's poetry could not regain its former popularity. This does not mean, however, that German intellectuals have ceased all dialog with the poet. As early as 1945, Johannes R. Becher (1891-1958) wrote a sonnet about Whitman. Becher, who was to become the first minister of culture in East Germany thus insured Whitman's survival there. Several writers and poets from East and West Germany have likewise written about Whitman. After the political turmoil of the early 1990s there seems to be a renewed interest in Whitman's political message. Rolf Schwendter, a professor of sociology at the University of Kassel wrote his poem "You I Sing, Socialism" (*Dich Singe Ich, Sozialismus*) in 1990 for the festival of the Austrian Communist press in Vienna. Whitman's literary works are not yet exhausted even though they failed to regain their former popularity. Whitman addressed too many issues and even if some of them no longer speak to the *Zeitgeist* of today, there are others that are still pertinent.

Whitman was many things to many people. To some he was a political hero, a comrade in arms. To others he was a mystic whose visions were an alternative to positivism. He was able to speak to the Wandervögel, a German youth movement, who responded to his call for the "open road." And a few even tried to use him in their efforts to fight for homosexual rights. Most recently Whitman's democratic ideals have rekindled discussions in the re-unified Germany.

The fact that at the height of his popularity in Germany (1889-1925) Whitman was able to speak to so many Germans on so many different levels not only reflects the diversity of German culture, it also attests to the versatility of the artist. Even today one can meet as many new Walt Whitmans as one is interested and willing to find.

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# **Taking the WJLC Agenda to the National Stage: The New Deal, 1933-1938**

**By John T. McGuire, Ph.D.**

"I think that there was a direct line from the progressivism of Theodore Roosevelt through [New York City] Mayor [John Puroy] Mitchel, to Governor Smith, to Governor Roosevelt, to President Roosevelt, to the national scene . . . . It's all in one episode.

-Frances Perkins.

## **INTRODUCTION**

By April 1933, when Governor Herbert H. Lehman signed the new minimum wage bill for working women, the agenda pursued by the Women's Joint Legislative Conference began to assume national proportions for three reasons. First, the election of New York State Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt as president in November of 1932 presented an opportunity for progressive-minded reformers. Second, Conference leaders such as Molly Dewson, Frances Perkins, and Rose Schneiderman left the New York scene to pursue a reform agenda in Washington, D.C. Dewson became the head of the Women's Division of the national Democratic Party, while Perkins assumed the position of U.S. Secretary of Labor, the first female cabinet officer in American history. Schneiderman found herself appointed to the National Recovery Administration (NRA) after Congress created the agency in June 1933. Finally, and most importantly, a powerful ally helped facilitate the continuation of the Conference agenda. Eleanor Roosevelt, the new First Lady, effectively promoted women in the New Deal. As her biographer Blanche Wiesen Cook shows, Roosevelt worked with Molly Dewson to compile a list of qualified women for federal appointments. "By 1935," Cook notes, "over fifty women had been appointed to ranking national positions and hundreds to leadership positions in various government agencies on the state and local level."

From 1933 through 1938, Frances Perkins, Rose Schneiderman, and Molly Dewson fought to promote a maximum hour/minimum wage agenda on the federal level. Perkins utilized her new cabinet position to gather together old Conference allies into a new coalition that pressured both the White House and the Congress to pass federal

legislation. Schneiderman saw the NRA as a means of advancing the gains made in New York State. Using her connection to Eleanor Roosevelt, the NYWTUL president witnessed mixed results in the fight to extend protection to all women workers, regardless of race. Dewson functioned more as a behind-the-scenes facilitator, an activity consistent with her direct connection with the national Democratic Party. Working with the First Lady, Dewson placed such protégés as Elinor Morehouse Herrick in important New Deal-related positions. This subtle but effective use of patronage helped the New York State minimum wage bill at a time when the Supreme Court had seemingly nullified the measure in a 1936 case, *Morehead v. Tipaldo*. Despite frustrations, the efforts of ex-Conference leaders to promote a maximum hour/minimum wage agenda were rewarded. In 1938 the Franklin D. Roosevelt Administration successfully promoted the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938, the first federal measure to set maximum hours and minimum wages for all workers throughout the United States, with certain exceptions such as domestic servants and agricultural workers.

Since Susan Ware so extensively examined the New Deal women's network in her 1981 book, *Beyond Suffrage: Women in the New Deal*, this chapter focuses on former WJLC leaders in the New Deal from 1933 through 1938 and concludes with an analysis of the importance of the WJLC to the continuation of reform from the Progressive Era through the New Deal.

### 1932-1933: The Push for a Federal Minimum Wage and the Creation of the National Recovery Administration (NRA)

Even as the minimum wage bill wound its way through the New York State legislature in late 1932 and early 1933, WJLC leaders and their allies wasted little time in proposing similar minimum wage legislation on the national level. Although *Adkins v. General Hospital* still remained the leading precedent, Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration presented the best opportunity for reform since Woodrow Wilson's first administration. The foremost proponents of federal minimum wage legislation in the Roosevelt Administration became, not surprisingly, Molly Dewson and Frances Perkins.

After consulting with Felix Frankfurter, Dewson and Perkins sent a proposal to President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt in February 1933, just a month before his inauguration. Once in office, they suggested, Roosevelt should announce a conference of governors in Washington, D.C., to consider the issue of passing minimum wage laws based on the recent New York State measure. Dewson and Perkins further suggested that the federal government protect the states' passage of minimum wage legislation through such agencies as the Federal Trade Commission, which would prevent unfair methods of competition "by unfair wage cutting and long hours."

Determined to see her proposal become reality, Perkins continued to lobby the President-elect for federal minimum wage legislation. When Roosevelt approached her about the Secretary of Labor position, the New York State Industrial Commissioner told him that federal minimum wage legislation would constitute one of her top priorities. When the President-elect expressed his support, Perkins quickly reminded him that the Supreme Court had rejected minimum wage legislation. "Have you considered," she asked Roosevelt, "that to launch such a program we must think out, frame, and develop labor and social legislation, which then might be considered unconstitutional?" "Well, that's a problem," Roosevelt conceded, "but we can work out something when the time comes." Thus the supreme political experimenter reassured his future Secretary of Labor.

Once confirmed as Secretary of Labor in March 1933, Perkins swiftly gathered her WJLC-affiliated allies for a federal minimum wage fight. Sidney Hillman had sent a memorandum to Perkins shortly after the 1932 election, arguing that federal labor legislation constituted the only means of combating the Depression. Hillman also encouraged the Textile and Garment Workers' Union to support federal legislation. As Suzanne Mettler notes, "[T]hese unions stood out in the early 1930s for representing industries composed largely of unskilled women who worked for extremely low wages." Perkins soon called a conference of labor leaders to make further recommendations to the President. Hillman, William Green of the AFL, and Rose Schneiderman attended the conference, with Perkins forwarding their recommendations to the White House.

Even with his previous encouragement, Roosevelt still proceeded cautiously with the Dewson-Perkins proposal. While he convened a governors' conference at the White House in March 1933, he did not make minimum wage legislation a part of the agenda. When Lehman signed the New York State minimum wage bill in April 1933, Roosevelt did urge other states to follow suit. In addition, the Dewson-Perkins proposal, as well as labor's recommendations to the President, did help create the National Recovery Administration (NRA).

The contribution of WJLC leaders and their allies to the NRA initially came in the area of industrial codes, or hours and wages standards for different industries. Industrial codes had been an item on the reform agenda since 1930, when a Taylor Society committee, which included Florence Kelley and Mary Van Kleeck, had prepared a proposed national Industrial Employment Code. The proposed Code recognized the need for minimum wages, maximum hours, and collective bargaining between labor and management. Old rivals Rose Schneiderman and Jane Norman Smith came to the committee meetings to testify before the Taylor Society committee. Schneiderman stated that she approved of the Code's emphasis on collective bargaining. "Personally," she added, "I feel that industry will never be stabilized until

the workers are organized into trade unions, not only locally, but nationally, and can bargain collectively with their employers." Smith naturally objected to the Code because it included a proposed night work law for women workers.

Political expediency eventually prompted the Roosevelt Administration to follow the Taylor Society's proposed agenda. Despite the flurry of legislation prompted by Roosevelt's fabled first "One Hundred Days," some congressional supporters believed that the President had proceeded too cautiously. Democratic Senator Hugo Black of Alabama therefore proposed a measure that would cut the average workweek to thirty hours. The measure, passed by the U.S. Senate on April 6, 1933, made President Roosevelt nervous for two reasons. First, he believed that the Supreme Court might declare the statute unconstitutional, thus according the New Deal an early and unnecessary defeat. Second, the Black bill contained no minimum wage language. To facilitate a compromise, Roosevelt turned to Frances Perkins.

Working with her aides, Perkins fashioned proposed amendments to the Black bill by mid-May, 1933. The amendments, modeled on the New York State minimum wage measure, suggested the creation of minimum wage committees to oversee wage standards and to decide exemptions to the thirty-hour workweek. Recognizing the Administration's formidable opposition, Senator Black and the U.S. House Labor Committee eventually compromised with Perkins. As she had done countless times in New York State, Perkins skillfully brokered a new measure. Labor wanted the recognition of its collective bargaining rights and minimum labor standards. Business interests wanted to engage in voluntary agreements with labor. By late May 1933 Perkins presented to Congress a new statute that proved satisfactory to both sides.

The National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of June 1933 presented the initial New Deal version of maximum-hours and minimum-wage legislation. It empowered the President to establish a National Recovery Administration (NRA), which would institute "industrial codes" mandating hours and wages standards with the cooperation of both management and labor. Most important to labor interests, Section 7(a) of the NIRA recognized, if voluntarily, the right of labor to collective bargaining. In addition, part of the Act's purpose echoed the goal pursued in its New York State minimum wage legislation: "[t]o increase consumer purchasing power by mandating wage increases." This feature proved no coincidence, since Rose Schneiderman had extensively participated in the bill's drafting as a member of Perkins's special labor committee. "At the summons of the Secretary of Labor," Schneiderman reported to Eleanor Roosevelt, "I was in Washington Thursday. We . . . made suggestions for amending the [NIRA] so as to give employers some lee-way. We all felt that the bill also carry a provision for industry boards which shall have [the] power to fix minimum wage rates for the specific industry." President Roosevelt personally met

with Schneiderman and her fellow labor leaders after their deliberations. "[We] were much heartened by his understanding and willingness to help," Schneiderman added.

Ex-WJLC leaders were well represented in the NRA. Molly Dewson became a member of the Consumer Advisory Board, while Schneiderman joined the NRA's Labor Advisory Board. Dewson eventually became disenchanted with her NRA service. "The NRA is a great pipe dream," she remarked in late 1933, "but pipe dreams are rather nebulous." Schneiderman did not share Dewson's pessimism. Instead, she saw her work on the Labor Advisory Board as significant in two ways: as a means of influencing national policy and of continuing the work she had started with African-American laundry workers in 1924.

The first goal proved more feasible than the second aim. Schneiderman traveled to Puerto Rico to investigate the state of native textile workers in the American commonwealth. Alarmed by the situation, she held hearings throughout 1934 to establish hours and wages standards. In addition, Schneiderman asked Eleanor Roosevelt to help underage employees in the chorus industry and to request that the President appoint a NRA board for the American textile industry. Both requests were fulfilled. But the institution of labor standards for African-American women across the nation proved a difficult venture. Laundry employers refused to pay their black workers wages equivalent to their white counterparts. In the other national industry that employed black women-domestic service-the NYWTUL president could not convince employers to include their employees within the NRA codes. This failure proved a major disappointment for Schneiderman and Eleanor Roosevelt. As Roosevelt noted in her 1933 book, *It's Up to the Women*, domestic service was still "entirely unregulated" by either the federal government or its state counterparts. A frustrated Schneiderman could only make progress in the handkerchief industry, where employers did allow African-American women access to skilled jobs. These disappointments demonstrated how far black women had to advance before achieving full social justice.

While Dewson and Schneiderman encountered mixed results in their NRA service, another Conference colleague met with total disaster. By 1933, Mary Van Kleeck, who once enthusiastically supported Al Smith in her 1928 presidential campaign, had become associated with the American Communist Party. She regularly submitted articles to communist and socialist newspapers, once admonishing the editor of *The Daily Worker* that he was not being "comradely" enough. "I am not a liberal," Van Kleeck added. Despite this potential embarrassment, Secretary of Labor Perkins still appointed Van Kleeck to a position on the NRA's Labor Mediation Board in August 1933. The new board member resigned after one day, stating that she disagreed with the agency's caution about collective bargaining. Although Van Kleeck remained at

the Russell Sage Foundation until 1948, none of her papers reveal any further correspondence with Perkins or any other WJLC colleagues. It was a sad ending for a woman who had contributed to the WJLC's success in so many ways from 1918 through 1933.

Another area of controversy that soon arose centered on the institution of a general code by the NRA. Announced in July 1933, the code instituted a thirty-five hour week for blue-collar workers and a forty-hour week for office employees. Minimum wages were also instituted, ranging from 12 1/2 cents an hour for needlework employees in Puerto Rico to 70 cents an hour for wrecking and salvage workers in New York City. This code did not satisfy women reformers, for the standards allowed wage differentials based on gender. The connections made by the WJLC in the mid-1920s now became central to the fight against this discriminatory policy. Mary Anderson still headed the U.S. Department of Labor's Women's Bureau. She and Dewson demanded that Perkins contact General Hugh Johnson, head of the NRA. By May 1934 Anderson could announce that the NRA had changed 119 codes to equalize the situation between men and women. Perkins later proudly noted that the NRA codes constituted the first labor standards in the United States which recognized equality between men and women.

Even as Perkins and her colleagues celebrated their victory, business opponents, who claimed that the federal agency violated the U.S. Constitution, threatened the NRA's existence. In early 1935 the Supreme Court agreed in *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, ruling the NRA an "unconstitutional delegation of legislative power.

Perkins still remained determined to advance the cause of federal minimum wage legislation. She therefore prepared two bills for Congress's consideration. The first bill, known as the Walsh-Healey Public Contracts Act, passed in 1936. The statute required federal contractors to meet minimum wage standards in the production of goods sold to the U.S. government. The passage constituted a small, but significant victory. The second bill eventually became the basis for FLSA. But its introduction was delayed by the Supreme Court's decision about the New York State minimum wage law.

1936-1937: *Morehead v. Tipaldo* Arouses Controversy and Helps Lead to *West Coast v. Parrish*

Even with the successful passage of the New York minimum wage bill, Molly Dewson and Elinor Morehouse Herrick knew that the NWP would still challenge the statute in federal court. Jane Norman Smith now turned to her allies in the Republican Party and businesswomen for support. A challenge to the New York minimum wage statute slowly wound its way through the court system. Finally, in early 1936, the

Supreme Court considered the law in *Morehead v. Tipaldo*. The Justices announced their decision in June 1936, finding by a narrow 5-4 majority that the New York statute was unconstitutional. Justice Pierce Butler, one of the six Justices who had voted against minimum wage legislation for women in *Adkins*, brushed aside the arguments of the New York State Attorney General's Office and the NCL. Noting that the law did not constitute an "emergency" measure, Butler dismissed claims that the bill encompassed Sutherland's discussion of "fair value" in *Adkins*, thus making the law constitutional. *Adkins*, Butler declared, clearly made minimum wage legislation for women unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court majority, however, misjudged the political situation, for the *Morehead* decision aroused national indignation. Unlike 1923, when reformers faced an apathetic public content with prosperity, 1936 witnessed the peak of public support for the state's intervention. Social movements led by Louisiana U.S. Senator Huey Long and Father Charles Coughlin fed on public restlessness about the devastating effects of the Great Depression, demanding responses from the federal government. Always acutely aware of public opinion, Franklin D. Roosevelt had quietly shifted his agenda leftward in early 1935, resulting in the passage of both the Social Security and Wagner Acts. Reform legislation, moreover, seemed to be improving the nation's desperate economic situation. By mid-1936 unemployment had decreased from nearly 13.2 million in 1932 to 7.7 million and the average annual wage for factory workers had risen from \$1,086 to \$1,376. Just five months after the *Morehead* decision, moreover, Franklin D. Roosevelt would win the largest presidential popular margin in American history-10.8 million votes-over his Republican opponent, Alfred Landon. It was thus not a good time for conservative Supreme Court justices to invalidate reform legislation.

Recognizing a rare opportunity, Herrick, now regional director of the newly formed National Labor Relations Board, led a public relations campaign against the Court, declaring that the Supreme Court had given women "the constitutional right to starve." The NCL also reacted quickly to the decision. Lucy Mason, Florence Kelley's successor as general secretary, contacted Benjamin Cohen and asked him whether the organization should pursue a constitutional amendment. Cohen cautioned Mason that the *Morehead* decision did not constitute the last word from the Supreme Court.

Subsequent circumstances proved Cohen right. Angered by the Supreme Court's New Deal decisions, a newly reelected Roosevelt submitted to Congress in February 1937 a measure that would allow him to appoint a new Supreme Court Justice for every current Justice seventy years of age or older. Although eventually defeated in Congress. In March 1937 a 5-4 majority of the Justices decided that a women's minimum wage statute from Washington was constitutional. New York immediately

repassed its 1933 minimum wage statute, which remained in effect until 1944, when it was amended to include men.

After nearly thirty years of struggle, advocates of minimum wage legislation could relax. But one more fight remained: the passage of a federal minimum wage statute to encompass all workers. In that fight, ex-WJLC leaders and allies would prove decisive.

1937-1938: The Passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

By 1937 the three major ex-WJLC leaders in the New Deal had gone their separate ways. Rose Schneiderman returned to New York City to resume her presidency of the national Women's Trade Union League. Molly Dewson, having played an important part in FDR's re-election in 1936, had found a sinecure on the Social Security Board. Only Frances Perkins remained in the forefront of the minimum wage fight. She now used the skills garnered through her years in New York State to support the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

As historian Vivien Hart notes, "[t]he legislative battle for the FLSA was long and acrimonious." In May 1937 the Roosevelt administration confidently introduced the bill in Congress. But political circumstances had changed since the heady days of 1933. FDR's Court bill, while apparently convincing the Supreme Court to swiftly change its mind, hurt the President's political standing in Congress. Opponents of Roosevelt had quickly seized the opportunity to denounce the bill as a "Court-packing" measure. Recognizing that the bill would never pass Congress, Administration allies quietly let the measure stagnate in committee. Suddenly Roosevelt, despite his commanding electoral mandate of the previous year, looked vulnerable. A coalition of Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans began to form a coalition that would last for the rest of Roosevelt's presidency.

The FLSA presented a tempting target for Roosevelt's legislative opponents. Southern manufacturers, particularly textile employers, objected to the requested minimum wage of forty cents an hour because, they claimed, higher wages meant higher business costs. The National Association of Manufacturers also objected to the measure. Although an amended bill passed the U.S. Senate in June 1937, the new version remained in the House of Representatives Rules Committee until later that year. Even when the FLSA reached the House floor, the measure, and an alternative version offered by the AFL failed to win enough votes in December 1937.

This situation echoed the WJLC's struggles with the counternetwork in New York State throughout the 1920s and early 1930s. The NCL and Frances Perkins therefore relied upon the Conference's old tactics of legislative lobbying and grassroots mobilization to push FLSA through Congress. Relying on the precedent set by New

York's Labor Standards Committee of 1932-1933, the NCL created the National Labor Standards Committee in March 1938, encompassing a wide variety of civic, political, and labor organizations. The Committee pressured legislators on one key issue: a minimum wage of at least 40 cents an hour without regional differentials. The lobbying of Mary Edna Cruzen, Missouri's Commissioner of Labor, typically reflected the coalition's efforts. "This will inform you," she related in a letter, "that I have addressed telegrams to all of the members of Congress, from the State of Missouri, urging them to support the Wages and Hours Bill, and that I have had favorable replies from nine . . . of them."

While the NCL instituted legislative lobbying, Frances Perkins mobilized her New York labor connections. On April 27, 1938, for example, a delegation of New York City garment and textile workers testified before their representatives at a House Labor Committee meeting. The workers expressed fears that they could lose their jobs to Southern factories, whom usually paid low wages, if national standards were not established. They also cited a resurgence of "sweatshops" in the New York metropolitan area.

This joint effort was assisted by Claude Pepper's dramatic victory in the Florida U.S. Senate Democratic primary on May 3, 1938. Encouraged by the Administration, Pepper had made passage of the FLSA a key part of his program. Events now followed swiftly. On May 6, 1938, Administration allies successfully reintroduced FLSA on the House floor. After the bill passed the House in late May, a conference committee between the House and the Senate secured an acceptable compromise. On June 25, 1938, the President signed the statute into law.

"The National Labor Standards Committee wishes to express its heartiest congratulations to you on the passage of [FLSA]," Mary Dublin, secretary of the Committee, told Mary T. Norton, chairperson of the House Labor Committee, on June 16, 1938. In her reply, Norton thanked Dublin for her congratulations. "I am sure," Norton added, "I need not tell you what a great source of joy and satisfaction its final passage was to me. I am particularly happy at the thought of better working conditions now in store for so many men and women in this country." Thus the process continued by the Women's Joint Legislative Conference during the 1920s resulted in successful federal legislation.

### **The Legacy of the WJLC: A Catalyst for Reform**

This dissertation began with a quotation from a 1957 letter written by Molly Dewson. Now eighty-three years old and living with her partner in Maine, Dewson was contacted by Isador Lubin, New York State Labor Commissioner, for her thoughts on the twentieth anniversary of the repassage of the New York minimum wage statute.

Reflecting upon the long struggle for minimum wage legislation, which had taken her from Massachusetts in the 1910s to New York in the 1920s and then finally to Washington, D.C. in the 1930s, Dewson told Lubin in her reply that the battle "has been a long fight, but worth it."

Dewson's remark about minimum wage legislation can also be applied to the legacy of the Women's Joint Legislative Conference. The Conference proved a catalyst for reform by creating coalitions with both working women and the New York State Democratic Party in the 1920s and early 1930s. The eventual successes of the Conference showed how important cross-class coalitions were to the continuation of reform in the 1920s. The middle-class women in the WJLC had learned through their failures of 1919 through 1924 that unless working women showed strong support of labor legislation, the counternetwork of business interests, the NWP, and the state Republican Party could block the Conference's agenda. Opponents such as Mark A. Daly could heap scorn upon Conference members as "uplifters," upper-class women who interfered with business interests for no sufficient reason.

Although many women contributed to the establishment of a successful cross-class alliance, the major credit belongs to Rose Schneiderman. From her participation in the NYWTUL network of 1908-1915 to the NRA of 1933-1935, the NYWTUL president consistently sought to unite all classes of women behind labor legislation. Schneiderman believed the WJLC measures constituted the best means to assist working women in a world where male trade unions traditionally treated their female counterparts with hostility.

Social justice always remained foremost in Schneiderman's mind, even in the difficult days of 1921 through 1925, when her failed 1920 U.S. Senate candidacy and accusations of "bolshevism" unfairly alienated her from her middle-class WJLC colleagues. In 1925 she effectively mobilized working-class women with the assistance of Mabel Leslie for the Conference's 48-hour bill. In addition, she extended her generous vision of social justice to a group not normally considered within the purview of reform: African-American women. When her efforts to mobilize laundry workers failed in the mid-1920s, Schneiderman joined forces with Molly Dewson and the CLNY to protect such workers through the "force of law."

Yet even with Schneiderman's tenacity and dedication to working women, the WJLC would not have succeeded, even survived, without the efforts of a diverse group of women. Florence Kelley and Mary Elizabeth Dreier initiated the two Progressive Era networks that provided models for the WJLC. The two women demonstrated how legal and political networks could be constructed to promote and defend labor legislation. They later provided invaluable leadership to the Conference. Kelley's hard-won political experience enabled her to lead the Conference through its darkest

days in 1921 through 1923. Dreier, whose initial leadership of the WJLC from 1919 through 1921 was marked by continuous frustration, later provided decisive leadership in 1925.

Mary Van Kleeck, once the protégé of Kelley and Josephine Goldmark, became a key figure in the 1920s. From 1919 through 1926 the RSF official acted more as an industrial expert who provided key legislative testimony rather than ideas or important connections. From 1926 through 1933 Van Kleeck fulfilled more of a leadership role. Through her membership in the Taylor Society came the key idea of "industrial citizenship." From her connections with Mary Anderson of the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau came technical knowledge and essential support. Van Kleeck also helped successfully frustrate the efforts of Alice Paul and the NWP to use the Women's Bureau as a means of criticizing women's labor legislation. Finally, Van Kleeck provided support to Molly Dewson's long and successful battle for minimum wage legislation.

Even with these women's efforts to establish cross-class alliances, the deepening relationship between New York State women reform leaders and the Democratic Party in the 1920s and early 1930s proved the decisive factor. From 1911 through 1915 the NYWTUL and NCL networks had fashioned seemingly permanent alliances with such New York State Democratic figures as Al Smith and Robert F. Wagner. The Republican control of the state legislature after 1915, however, made identification with the Democrats risky. Upon its creation in 1918 the WJLC staunchly proclaimed its non-partisanship. The organization hoped that it could continue the tradition of women's voluntary organizations in previous eras; that is, the Conference would formulate and propose legislation, and its allies in the state legislature would pass the proposals.

Political reality proved otherwise in the 1920s. Progressivism in the state Republican Party had only lasted from 1898, when Theodore Roosevelt won the New York governorship, through 1911, when Roosevelt's successor Charles Evans Hughes left Albany for the U.S. Supreme Court. Thaddeus Sweet ruthlessly exterminated any progressivism in the State Assembly in 1919 and 1920, and only a few Progressive Republicans such as Frederick Davenport lingered in the State Senate. This gloomy political picture continued throughout the decade, as conservative Republicans controlled the state legislature from 1915 through 1931.

With the continual stalemate from 1919 through 1924, middle-class organizations in the Conference slowly changed their non-partisan viewpoint. When Dreier and Schneiderman advocated political campaigning as a tool in 1919 and 1920, organizations such as the WCCNY reluctantly exempted themselves from the campaigns and eventually took control of the Conference. The key changes came in

1924 and 1925. When the Republicans reneged on their promise to support the 48-hour bill in early 1925, Conference leaders, bitter at being betrayed, finally turned to Al Smith and the Democratic Party. The key women in establishing an alliance with the New York State Democratic Party were Eleanor Roosevelt and Molly Dewson. As shown in Chapter 5, Roosevelt and her colleagues at the Women's Division of the New York State Democratic Party effectively made the Democrats a partner with the WJLC from 1924 through 1927. Molly Dewson continued the partnership after Eleanor Roosevelt "retired" from her public commitments in late 1928. Dewson became the foremost proponent of minimum wage legislation in New York State from 1928 through 1933. Her shrewd political sense formed effective alliances with first Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt and then his successor, Herbert H. Lehman.

The Conference's alliance with the New York State Democratic Party also reflected two new developments in social justice feminism. First, a generational shift took place among women reform leaders in New York State throughout the 1920s. In 1918, for example, Florence Kelley, Mary Elizabeth Dreier, and Rose Schneiderman controlled the central organizations in the WJLC: the NCL and the NYWTUL. Each woman possessed many years of experience in promoting and defending women's labor legislation. By 1933, the women's political landscape in New York State had drastically changed. Florence Kelley was dead; Dreier had semi-retired; and only Schneiderman remained in an important position (presidency of the NYWTUL.) Three new, significant political leaders from the WJLC now asserted national control. Eleanor Roosevelt became First Lady of the United States. Molly Dewson was now poised to become a key women leader in the national Democratic Party. Frances Perkins left her position as New York State Industrial Commissioner to become U.S. Secretary of Labor. The Progressive Era generation had thus passed on the torch to its New Deal successors.

The second important development for social justice feminism centered on its growing participation in the state. In 1918 WJLC leaders such as Kelley and Dreier stood apart from state involvement. Although Kelley had served as Illinois's factory inspector in the 1890s, and Dreier had served as a FIC Commissioner from 1911 through 1915, only Mary Van Kleeck was involved in state service through the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Women in Industry. By 1933 this situation had changed. Besides the obvious example of Perkins, other WJLC leaders served, or had served, in the New York State government: Nelle Swartz, Maud Swartz, Belle Moskowitz, and Frieda Miller. This development helped ease the way for former WJLC leaders to serve in the New Deal.

Through its alliances with both working women and the New York State Democratic Party, the WJLC became an effective catalyst for reform in a decade where conservatism reigned supreme. As historians from Arthur S. Link to Nancy Cott have

concluded, the early 1920s did temporarily retain the Progressive spirit. A farmer-labor coalition in Congress made it difficult for Republicans to pass conservative legislation, particularly after the 1922 congressional elections. The Women's Joint Congressional Committee, moreover, kept a progressive agenda alive on the national stage, particularly through the passage of the Sheppard-Towner Act. But by mid-decade, the attacks of right-wing organizations proved too strong for reform on the national agenda. In sharp contrast, the WJLC continued to catalyze reform in New York State. Its long-fought but eventually successful lobbying on behalf of the 48-hour bill and minimum wage measures established important precedents for the New Deal. It also emboldened WJLC leaders such as Molly Dewson and Frances Perkins to pursue similar policy goals on the national stage. Thus an effective bridge was built from the Progressives to the New Dealers.

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# THE COLORS OF WORLD HISTORY

By W. Warren Wagar

What is world history? Bruce Mazlish contends that "world" history, as opposed to "global" history, is the study of systemic processes of interaction among diverse peoples, best typified by the work of William H. McNeill. By contrast, "global" history is the history of globalization, a process that Mazlish argues did not begin to occur on a significant scale until at least the 1950s, and, more plausibly, the 1970s. Citing prominent economic historians, Nicholas Kristof asserts that globalization actually started in the second half of the 19th Century, when steamships, the telegraph, the railroad, and European, North American, and Japanese empire-builders brought humankind into a single densely interwoven community of trade, investment, culture, and political rivalry for the first time. One of the founders of world-system theory, Immanuel Wallerstein, traces the invention of capitalism and the beginnings of what he calls the "Modern World-System" to the late 15th and 16th Centuries. His co-founder and worthy competitor Andre Gunder Frank argues that capitalism originated some five thousand years ago and that at least the Afro-Eurasian ecumene has been in continuous interactive existence ever since. As that ancient forerunner of postmodernist relativism, the Roman playwright Terence, once said, *Quot homines, tot sententiae*: "as many men, so many opinions." [1]

All of these contentions make sense, given the definitions of terms and the frames of reference of each writer. They do not necessarily conflict, and they all make their contribution to our understanding of the dimensions of world and global history. But from my own perspective, there is no hard and fast distinction between world and global history. I accept the evidence of contemporary anthropology that the career of *Homo sapiens* commenced in Africa more than a hundred thousand years ago, that tribes of biologically human men and women swiftly spread northward and eastward from their African homeland, outbred their hominid rivals, and in due course populated the whole planet. To me, this is globalization, the global diffusion of humankind and human cultures. In only a few thousand generations, *Homo sapiens* was everywhere, and everywhere essentially the same, despite superficial differences such as skin color or width of nose or degree of hirsuteness. Globalization outran evolution. The sheer mobility and versatility of *Homo sapiens* precluded significant differentiation.

Accordingly, I would like to define world history as the history of all the doings of the species *Homo sapiens* on (and off) the planet Earth, the globe Earth, since its emergence in Africa more than 100,000 years ago. In all these millennia, humankind has swarmed over the whole planet and has exchanged ideas, institutions, technologies, and languages back and forth and every which way, often making it difficult if not impossible to ascertain which idea, institution, technology, or language first arose where or when. In short, we have been globalizing from the beginning, although I freely acknowledge that in certain periods, such as the middle of the 4th Millennium B.C., the 16th Century A.D., and the second halves of the 19th and 20th Centuries, we have seen significant upsurges in the tempo and scale of globalization.

All this means that the subject matter of world--or global--history is everything that every human being everywhere has ever done, said, thought, felt, and dreamt. One cannot write off any doing, saying, thinking, feeling, or dreaming of any human being as "irrelevant" or "unimportant." Everything that ever happened bears witness to the human condition. Some happenings may have had, surely did have, more influence than others, although influence is fiendishly difficult to measure objectively, but all of them bear witness.

The only problem with this point of view is that almost all human doings, sayings, thinkings, feelings, and dreamings have left no trace: no written records, no artifacts, no impact on the Earth's crust, nothing. Even the lives of relatively well-documented figures in history, such as Martin Luther or Mohandas Gandhi, are known to us only in bits and pieces. So what can historians do? They can connect the dots, the pitifully few dots, to make conjectural pictures of the past; they can assemble the surviving evidence into narratives, or stories, about the past, with liberal resort to their imaginations; but they will always do so in the light of certain premises or theories or world-views that inform their labors, even if they have no coherent awareness of these premises, theories, or world-views. It would be advisable if historians could operate in an intellectual vacuum free of all presuppositions and all ideologies, but in fact none of us can. We are ineluctably the products of our times, our upbringing, our culture, just as limited and time-bound as the people whose lives we study.

Reflecting on all this deeply enough, one may feel paralyzed. If the historian's will is not completely or even mostly free, if the historian is the helpless creature of his or her historical milieu, why not stop writing and teaching history and just go fishing? Of course this is not an acceptable option, not for historians born to the trade. We must live within our limitations and get to work and write and teach history. In any event, people need our pictures and our stories. People are not animals. They cannot shuffle from day to day without at least some idea of where they came from. Nor can we ourselves!

Which brings me to my main theme, the "colors" of world history. Almost everything that ever happened has left no trace, but the evidence that does remain is nevertheless immense, far more than any single human being could ever hope to access and assimilate in any number of life-times. We think we have managed to condense it into textbooks only five hundred or a thousand pages long, but such books are little more than the tricks of a skilled magician: they supply an illusion of global history, but not the thing itself. Even if a single mind could take it all in, it would still be only a fragment of the total. Worse yet, everything that ever happened has, by definition, already happened--all the thoughts, all the actions are gone. The historian cannot see, touch, or feel any of them. The historian has only the surviving evidence, which is no more the real, living past than a skeleton lying in its tomb is a real, living human being. Such evidence does not speak to us. It is utterly silent. We have to "make sense" of it. When the great 19th-Century French historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, addressing his students, said "Do not applaud me. It is not I that speaks to you but history that speaks by my mouth," he was full of prunes. [2]

So how do we make sense of this plethora of dead, inert, silent evidence? We take out our palette full of colors and we paint. A palette full of colors is simply my metaphor for the ideologically conditioned screens or templates or paradigms that we consciously or unconsciously employ to determine what kinds of evidence are most worth accessing and how we go about converting them into explanations and narratives of the past. I say "consciously or unconsciously" because I recognize that many historians are not fully aware of their ideological underpinnings and the sources of their preconceptions. A further complication is that few of us in this chaotic postmodern world follow any single readily identifiable party line: we are almost always the product of several rival world-views, which can lead us into holding contradictory opinions. "Do I contradict myself?" asked Walt Whitman, "Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)." [3]

With this in mind, I like to think of historians as painters filling their canvasses with strokes in various, sometimes clashing colors, although many seem to prefer one color over the others, like Picasso during his "Blue" period. For example, it is possible to write global history that is predominantly Gray: the story of how, through science and technology and skillfully managed accumulation of capital, human beings acquired mastery of their environment, vastly increased their material wealth, and produced the globalized economy and civilization of the 21st Century. The chief ideological underpinnings of Gray global history are Enlightenment faith in reason and science and liberal political economy. Elsewhere I have dubbed this world-view "technoliberalism." [4] As of the year 2001, this is the reigning ideology throughout the so-called developed world, and its power in the so-called less developed world should never be underestimated.

Of course there are many other colors on our palette. The late Arnold J. Toynbee reached the conclusion that global history was essentially the history of the emergence and proliferation of what he termed the Higher Religions. We may call this Gold history, history as the evolution of human spirituality; most often Gold history takes the form of the comparative study of civilizations, viewed from the perspective of their allegedly religious cradles. Its ideological underpinnings range from Platonism to Christianity to Buddhism.

What else? The confluence of feminism and queer theory gives us Pink history, the history of gender and sexual orientation. The confluence of Hegelianism and Rankean "scientific" history gives us Blue history--Prussian Blue, if you please--, global history as the story of the vicissitudes of the state. My own specialty, the history of ideas, or intellectual history, might be described as Silver history; it also originated in 19th-Century German neo-idealism and should properly be known by its German name, *Geistesgeschichte*. And of course it often happens that historians strongly inclined to one color trespass on the turf of historians strongly inclined to another color, as when, for example, a Blue historian seeks to explain Gray topics by pointing to the central importance of state policy in facilitating the rise of modern capitalism.

But the two colors I want to highlight in this essay are Green and Red. Both of these colors focus on exploitation: the exploitation of the environment and the exploitation of underclasses. Either of them offers an agenda for global historiography: combined, they can supply an especially powerful and ultimately subversive way of doing and teaching global history.

First, consider Green history. Clive Ponting's pioneering overview, *A Green History of the World*, first published in 1991, has helped to establish this vital sort of history in our purview. Another useful summation is Neil Roberts, *The Holocene: An Environmental History*, first published in 1989, with a second, enlarged edition in 1998. The Holocene is the geological period in which we still live today, basically the time since the end of the Pleistocene period (or last Ice Age) some 10 to 12 thousand years ago. [5]

Does Green history have an ideological matrix? Typically it does: an ideology that I label "counterculturalism," [6] a complex of ideas and values flatly opposed to "technoliberalism," the chief inspiration of Gray history. Whereas technoliberalism is all in favor of science, technology, industry, commerce, and capitalism, in favor of headlong growth, expansion, and development, the typical counterculturalist believes in slowing down or otherwise limiting growth and creating societies in collegial equilibrium with the natural environment. In this reckoning development per se is not evil, but it must be sustainable development, development that conserves resources, encourages biodiversity, and works with nature, rather than against it. The roots of

counterculturalism lie partly in the romantic world-view of the early 19th Century, partly in the utopian socialism of the same period, partly in various religious traditions, especially both Eastern and Western mysticism and gnosticism, and of course partly in the environmental activism of the last 40 or 50 years.

So Green history is not environmental history, pure and simple: it is all about how human beings have been abusing the Earth for thousands of years and paying heavy prices for their folly, the heaviest of which may well have to be paid in the 21st Century. Be reminded that Ponting's *A Green History of the World* has a minatory sub-title, namely, *The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations*. Green history tends to be apocalyptic history.

But this is not to disparage Green history. In view of the looming ecological crises of the 21st Century, and in view of humanity's age-old dependence on the Earth, Green history should be an essential component of any attempt to study, write, or teach history today. Technoliberals, the writers of Gray history, offer an inspiring, heroic picture of how *Homo sapiens* has been able to impose its will on the face of the Earth and rack up all kinds of material progress: but their very anthropocentrism prevents them from seeing that humanity is not the only value in the equation: the Earth has always been and perhaps always will be the larger value. We human beings are simply the fleas on her back.

And what a back she has! If one construes global history as the history of human ecology, then the leading topics of a well-crafted text would include climate; topography; habitats, from river valleys to tropical islands to high plateaus; fresh water and mineral resources; all non-human species of life both animal and vegetable, including the pathogens that afflict us with infectious disease; the physical impact on the Earth of all human activity, from deforestation of woodlands to toxic pollution of groundwaters, lakes, rivers, and oceans; the size, density, and movements of human population; and even the ideologies that inform human use and abuse of the Earth. This is a full plate in and of itself; and although I am not recommending that anyone teach global history purely in ecological terms, you could do much worse.

One obvious thread worth exploring in global history is what Ponting calls the collapse of great civilizations. Scholarly opinion nowadays tends to attribute the initial rise and later collapse of many great civilizations chiefly to ecological overshoot: too much deforestation, too much grazing, too much erosion. Such practices may account for the fall of the Indus Valley civilization of pre-Aryan India, the Mayan civilization of pre-Columbian Central America and Mexico, and the civilizations of medieval Zimbabwe in southeast Africa and medieval Cambodia in southeast Asia.

But environmental studies can also help explain the predominance of certain cultures and states at one time and of other cultures and states at other times. Consider China. From the 3rd Century B.C. on down to the present, most of what we know as China has been--with occasional interregna--a single unified state. A few other great ancient empires originated earlier, but none still in existence can boast a more or less continuous existence of almost 2300 years. During at least half of those years, and perhaps more, China was also the richest and most populous country on the planet. Andre Gunder Frank contends in his *ReOrient* that Chinese pre-eminence did not wane until the early 19th Century; and we all know how rapidly China has regained its status as a major economic power during the past quarter-century, partly due to the fact that it remains the world's most populous country.[7] A further ecological consideration, emphasized by William H. McNeill, is that imperial China may have amassed more wealth and enjoyed longer periods of political unity than imperial India simply because the climate of the Indian subcontinent is somewhat less healthful, with higher incidence of infectious disease, reducing the productivity of labor, than the lands occupied by the Chinese.[8]

But China was not simply the product of the Chinese. It is singularly favored by nature. The heartland of China consists of two fertile river valleys, the valley of the Yang-Tze and the valley of the Huang-Ho. This heartland is not divided into many isolated geographical regions by vast mountain ranges or interior seas, as is the case with Europe. It was relatively easy to unify once the necessary political ideas and military strategies and technologies coalesced, as they did in the 3rd Century B.C. For the next 2,000 years China was far and away the hegemonic power in East Asia: the center of high culture, the center of commerce, industry, and craftsmanship. China was self-sufficient and unsurpassable. Even the barbarian war-bands who sometimes conquered China were soon fully assimilated into Chinese civilization, becoming no less Chinese than the Chinese themselves.

Of course the very success of China undermined, at least temporarily, its ability to compete with the rising rival powers of Western Europe in the 19th Century. Look at Western Europe from the perspectives of Green history. Mediterranean Europe, along with North Africa and Southwest Asia, was relatively easy to unify, as the Romans discovered, thanks in part to the Mediterranean Sea itself. But once--in ancient times--you reach the Pyrenees and the Alps and the Carpathians and the Balkans, you enter quite a different world: a world of dense hardwood forests, steep mountain ranges, islands, rugged coasts, rough inland seas, glaciers, snow, and ice.

The indefatigable Romans did manage to subdue part of this northern world, for a few centuries, but at least half of it remained wild and barbaric. When advances in metallurgy finally made possible the felling of the forests, much of the land proved to be fertile. Populations increased. The temperate climate of the lower-lying northern

lands was relatively salubrious, especially after economic progress made warm clothing and snug dwellings easier to come by. But the geographical boundaries remained formidable. This transalpine Europe, although not vast in extent, did not lend itself to conquest by a single imperial power. From Charlemagne to Hitler, all the would-be Caesars ultimately failed.

The outcome was a dishevelled world of many independent and semi-independent kingdoms, principalities, duchies, and city-states, all in ruthless competition with one another, unwilling to submit to the rule of any would-be Rome, and dependent in varying degrees on the enterprise of their merchants and bankers for their revenues, their arms, and their glory. Late medieval Europe supplied the perfect launch-pad for the take-off of modern capitalism, a tireless machine for the unrelenting accumulation of capital. At first Venice, Genoa, Portugal, and Spain led the way; then the Netherlands; then England. Every effort on the part of one great power to rebuild the Roman Empire, from the Austro-Hispanic Habsburgs to Bourbon and Napoleonic France to Nazi Germany, fell fatally short. Eventually, in the 18th and 19th Centuries, this divided but exuberant Western Europe conquered most of the rest of the world. And make no mistake: today, as the 21st Century gets under way, for better or worse, the whole world lies in the thrall of Western European or European-descended technology, capital, culture, and systems of belief.

So, to what can we credit the "success" of Western Europe? White skin? Blue eyes? Christian piety? I think not! The best guess is that late medieval Western Europe's relative poverty, compared to the great powers of Asia, and its disunity--frustrating the emergence of an all-powerful, all-controlling, innovation-discouraging imperial bureaucracy--gave Western Europeans the hunger, the aggressiveness, the competitiveness, and the economic machinery to reach out, grab, exploit, and dominate the world, while at the same time, and by the same token, inventing the military and industrial technology necessary to maximize their edge.

In the second half of the 19th Century, to complete the picture, three peripheral countries located outside Western Europe moved rapidly to emulate Western Europe: the United States, Japan, and Russia. Each of these was, in effect, an empire, with a strong central government. Each started out far behind Western Europe economically. The most successful, and also the most favored by geology, geography, and climate, was the United States, which had the additional cultural advantage, in the mid-19th Century, of consisting chiefly of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants from Western Europe, for whom the aping of Western European economies and technologies came easily. But Japan did not lag far behind; and Russia made strenuous efforts to catch up as well, although it never quite managed to join the core of economically super-advanced hegemonic nations.

But the breakthrough to modern capitalism and industrialism did not, and I suspect could not have, occurred in the United States, Japan, or Russia. That distinction belonged to Western Europe, and it was not a sudden breakthrough. It took centuries to happen, from its barest beginnings in Renaissance Italy to its climactic moments in the first half of the 19th Century in Great Britain and parts of northern France, the Lowlands, and western Germany. And it cannot be understood by the tools of Gray, Blue, Gold, or Silver history alone. Everything that took place was, to a considerable extent, predetermined by the hard facts of Green history. Green history is the bedrock. And if modern global capitalist industrial and postindustrial civilization manages to overshoot and exceed the carrying capacity of the environment--which seems all too possible--the hard facts of Green history will have the last word, too.

But I have one more color to discuss. If we are all fleas on the back of Mother Earth, some fleas have a better purchase on her back than others. This brings me to Red history, the history of the exploitation of some human beings by other human beings, the history of class struggle, which is rooted ideologically in 19th-Century utopian socialism and Marxism. The term "exploitation" is freighted with all kinds of pejorative connotations, but so it should be. Exploitation denotes the theft, or the undervaluing, of the labor of some to enhance the well-being of others. Without such exploitation, civilization--the process of creating urbanized societies through division of labor and the production of agricultural surplus--would never have emerged, and we would all still be living in Paleolithic communities. Nevertheless, theft is theft, and all of human history since Neolithic times is the history of theft. Theft gave us the Pyramids of Egypt and Mexico, theft gave us the palaces of Venice and Paris, theft gave us the paintings of Leonardo and the passions of Bach, the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, and the ovens of Auschwitz.

So it is perfectly possible to construct a history of the world that stresses the epic of human exploitation, the epic of what McNeill calls "macroparasitism,"<sup>[9]</sup> the ways in which certain people have taken unfair advantage of other people, have sucked the blood of other people, whether you call them slaves, serfs, natives, indentured servants, tenant farmers, proletarians, the working class, or even the bottom four quintiles of any contemporary population as measured by net worth or income. The "bottom four quintiles" may work best for present-day economically advanced countries because in such countries technological progress has transformed the nature of the working class, giving it relatively higher family incomes than in the 19th Century, more education and skills, and a change in the preponderant types of work required, from manual labor to brain labor. But although this has in some segments of the working class diminished the theft of value, it has not eliminated theft; and in any case, the past quarter-century has seen a sharp reversal of the trend toward

proportionately rising incomes for people whose income is derived primarily from work, as opposed to the ownership and investment of capital.

Over the long haul of global history, Red themes have much the same heuristic power as Green themes. State and empire formation cannot be imagined without the theft of surplus value; the glorious and inglorious shenanigans of elites and the misery of the masses cannot be imagined without the theft of surplus value; the immiseration of various subdued races and of women cannot be imagined without the theft of surplus value; the uprisings of underdogs that punctuate the pages of all global history cannot be imagined without the theft of surplus value; the struggles between elites, as for example of merchants and entrepreneurs against aristocrats and emperors, as in Ming China or Bourbon France or Civil War America, cannot be imagined without considering who gets to be the greatest thieves of surplus value; the rise to near global mastery of the great multinational corporations of our own time cannot be imagined without the theft of surplus value. And it is not stretching matters too far to imagine that the history of the 21st Century will turn on whether or not the exploitative capitalist world-system self-destructs in an orgy of greed, comparable in many ways and closely related in many ways, to humankind's ruthless exploitation of Mother Nature.

Now when you put Green and Red global history together, you have a powerful one-two punch. You have a vision of global history that is eminently subversive: subversive of unfettered capitalism, subversive of the sovereign nation-state system which has made and continues to make such capitalism possible, subversive of Western European civilization, subversive of sexism, racism, and imperialism, but also--please note--subversive of all civilizations founded, as all have been, and until recently necessarily have been, on the exploitation of Mother Nature and the theft of surplus value. Green history and Red history give no license to Hindu nationalism, or pan-Islamic evangelism, or nativist insurgency in any of its manifold forms. Green history and Red history, to use Benjamin Barber's terms, do not favor "Jihad" over "McWorld," or vice versa.[\[10\]](#) To my way of thinking, the only conceivable future that Green history and Red history can endorse is the supersession of the modern capitalist world-system by a democratic ecologically wise global commonwealth, a Green and Red world state.

But I do not argue that Green and Red history are the one, exclusive, "scientific" way to do global history. They are certainly not the only way to do global history. In the arena of competing ideologies, all the players stake their claims to truth, and their claims to overarching rationality and/or spiritual pre-eminence. In the final analysis, it is not heuristic power, explanatory power, that wins the battle, but the innermost convictions of the players. Here I relapse into my role as a Silver historian, as a relativizing historicist. I am profoundly skeptical about the possibility of a true social

science on the model of physics or biology. Human beings are somehow more than molecules or ants.

But come what may, I do believe that Green and Red history will, if the human race survives, inherit the future, becoming, together, the dominant paradigm in historical study in the course of the 21st Century. And rest assured: historians are the custodians of the collective memory of humankind. When presidents and prime ministers wonder how they will "go down" in history, they mean how we, and all those like us, will read their performance 20, 50, or a hundred years from now. For it is not history that speaks: it is we, we poor, fallible, blinkered, incomplete human beings who have chosen to help create, help report, and help preserve the memory of our species.

So I would contend that the sacrality of our function requires us to be true to our knowledge and our convictions. If our knowledge and our convictions incline us to use more of the greens and reds on our palettes than other colors, so be it!

## ENDNOTES

[1] Bruce Mazlish, *"Crossing Boundaries: Ecumenical, World, and Global History,"* in Philip Pomper, Richard H. Elphick, and Richard T. Vann, eds., *World History: Ideologies, Structures, and Identities* (Malden, MA, and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 41-52; Nicholas D. Kristof, *"The World: A Better System in the 19th Century? At This Rate, We'll Be Global in Another Hundred Years,"* New York Times (May 23, 1999), Section 4, p. 5; Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974); and Andre Gunder Frank and Barry B. Gills, eds., *The World System: Five Hundred Years or Five Thousand?* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).

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## **THE COLORS OF WORLD HISTORY**

By W. Warren Wagar

What is world history? Bruce Mazlish contends that "world" history, as opposed to "global" history, is the study of systemic processes of interaction among diverse peoples, best typified by the work of William H. McNeill. By contrast, "global" history is the history of globalization, a process that Mazlish argues did not begin to occur on a significant scale until at least the 1950s, and, more plausibly, the 1970s. Citing prominent economic historians, Nicholas Kristof asserts that globalization actually started in the second half of the 19th Century, when steamships, the telegraph, the railroad, and European, North American, and Japanese empire-builders brought humankind into a single densely interwoven community of trade, investment, culture, and political rivalry for the first time. One of the founders of world-system theory, Immanuel Wallerstein, traces the invention of capitalism and the beginnings of what he calls the "Modern World-System" to the late 15th and 16th Centuries. His co-founder and worthy competitor Andre Gunder Frank argues that capitalism originated some five thousand years ago and that at least the Afro-Eurasian ecumene has been in continuous interactive existence ever since. As that ancient forerunner of postmodernist relativism, the Roman playwright Terence, once said, Quot homines, tot sententiae: "as many men, so many opinions." [[1](#)]

All of these contentions make sense, given the definitions of terms and the frames of reference of each writer. They do not necessarily conflict, and they all make their contribution to our understanding of the dimensions of world and global history. But from my own perspective, there is no hard and fast distinction between world and global history. I accept the evidence of contemporary anthropology that the career of Homo sapiens commenced in Africa more than a hundred thousand years ago, that

tribes of biologically human men and women swiftly spread northward and eastward from their African homeland, outbred their hominid rivals, and in due course populated the whole planet. To me, this is globalization, the global diffusion of humankind and human cultures. In only a few thousand generations, Homo sapiens was everywhere, and everywhere essentially the same, despite superficial differences such as skin color or width of nose or degree of hirsuteness. Globalization outran evolution. The sheer mobility and versatility of Homo sapiens precluded significant differentiation.

Accordingly, I would like to define world history as the history of all the doings of the species Homo sapiens on (and off) the planet Earth, the globe Earth, since its emergence in Africa more than 100,000 years ago. In all these millennia, humankind has swarmed over the whole planet and has exchanged ideas, institutions, technologies, and languages back and forth and every which way, often making it difficult if not impossible to ascertain which idea, institution, technology, or language first arose where or when. In short, we have been globalizing from the beginning, although I freely acknowledge that in certain periods, such as the middle of the 4th Millennium B.C., the 16th Century A.D., and the second halves of the 19th and 20th Centuries, we have seen significant upsurges in the tempo and scale of globalization.

All this means that the subject matter of world--or global--history is everything that every human being everywhere has ever done, said, thought, felt, and dreamt. One cannot write off any doing, saying, thinking, feeling, or dreaming of any human being as "irrelevant" or "unimportant." Everything that ever happened bears witness to the human condition. Some happenings may have had, surely did have, more influence than others, although influence is fiendishly difficult to measure objectively, but all of them bear witness.

The only problem with this point of view is that almost all human doings, sayings, thinkings, feelings, and dreamings have left no trace: no written records, no artifacts, no impact on the Earth's crust, nothing. Even the lives of relatively well-documented figures in history, such as Martin Luther or Mohandas Gandhi, are known to us only in bits and pieces. So what can historians do? They can connect the dots, the pitifully few dots, to make conjectural pictures of the past; they can assemble the surviving evidence into narratives, or stories, about the past, with liberal resort to their imaginations; but they will always do so in the light of certain premises or theories or world-views that inform their labors, even if they have no coherent awareness of these premises, theories, or world-views. It would be advisable if historians could operate in an intellectual vacuum free of all presuppositions and all ideologies, but in fact none of us can. We are ineluctably the products of our times, our upbringing, our culture, just as limited and time-bound as the people whose lives we study.

Reflecting on all this deeply enough, one may feel paralyzed. If the historian's will is not completely or even mostly free, if the historian is the helpless creature of his or her historical milieu, why not stop writing and teaching history and just go fishing? Of course this is not an acceptable option, not for historians born to the trade. We must live within our limitations and get to work and write and teach history. In any event, people need our pictures and our stories. People are not animals. They cannot shuffle from day to day without at least some idea of where they came from. Nor can we ourselves!

Which brings me to my main theme, the "colors" of world history. Almost everything that ever happened has left no trace, but the evidence that does remain is nevertheless immense, far more than any single human being could ever hope to access and assimilate in any number of life-times. We think we have managed to condense it into textbooks only five hundred or a thousand pages long, but such books are little more than the tricks of a skilled magician: they supply an illusion of global history, but not the thing itself. Even if a single mind could take it all in, it would still be only a fragment of the total. Worse yet, everything that ever happened has, by definition, already happened--all the thoughts, all the actions are gone. The historian cannot see, touch, or feel any of them. The historian has only the surviving evidence, which is no more the real, living past than a skeleton lying in its tomb is a real, living human being. Such evidence does not speak to us. It is utterly silent. We have to "make sense" of it. When the great 19th-Century French historian Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges, addressing his students, said "Do not applaud me. It is not I that speaks to you but history that speaks by my mouth," he was full of prunes. [2]

So how do we make sense of this plethora of dead, inert, silent evidence? We take out our palette full of colors and we paint. A palette full of colors is simply my metaphor for the ideologically conditioned screens or templates or paradigms that we consciously or unconsciously employ to determine what kinds of evidence are most worth accessing and how we go about converting them into explanations and narratives of the past. I say "consciously or unconsciously" because I recognize that many historians are not fully aware of their ideological underpinnings and the sources of their preconceptions. A further complication is that few of us in this chaotic postmodern world follow any single readily identifiable party line: we are almost always the product of several rival world-views, which can lead us into holding contradictory opinions. "Do I contradict myself?" asked Walt Whitman, "Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)." [3]

With this in mind, I like to think of historians as painters filling their canvasses with strokes in various, sometimes clashing colors, although many seem to prefer one color over the others, like Picasso during his "Blue" period. For example, it is possible to write global history that is predominantly Gray: the story of how, through science and

technology and skillfully managed accumulation of capital, human beings acquired mastery of their environment, vastly increased their material wealth, and produced the globalized economy and civilization of the 21st Century. The chief ideological underpinnings of Gray global history are Enlightenment faith in reason and science and liberal political economy. Elsewhere I have dubbed this world-view "technoliberalism."<sup>[4]</sup> As of the year 2001, this is the reigning ideology throughout the so-called developed world, and its power in the so-called less developed world should never be underestimated.

Of course there are many other colors on our palette. The late Arnold J. Toynbee reached the conclusion that global history was essentially the history of the emergence and proliferation of what he termed the Higher Religions. We may call this Gold history, history as the evolution of human spirituality; most often Gold history takes the form of the comparative study of civilizations, viewed from the perspective of their allegedly religious cradles. Its ideological underpinnings range from Platonism to Christianity to Buddhism.

What else? The confluence of feminism and queer theory gives us Pink history, the history of gender and sexual orientation. The confluence of Hegelianism and Rankean "scientific" history gives us Blue history--Prussian Blue, if you please--, global history as the story of the vicissitudes of the state. My own specialty, the history of ideas, or intellectual history, might be described as Silver history; it also originated in 19th-Century German neo-idealism and should properly be known by its German name, *Geistesgeschichte*. And of course it often happens that historians strongly inclined to one color trespass on the turf of historians strongly inclined to another color, as when, for example, a Blue historian seeks to explain Gray topics by pointing to the central importance of state policy in facilitating the rise of modern capitalism.

But the two colors I want to highlight in this essay are Green and Red. Both of these colors focus on exploitation: the exploitation of the environment and the exploitation of underclasses. Either of them offers an agenda for global historiography: combined, they can supply an especially powerful and ultimately subversive way of doing and teaching global history.

First, consider Green history. Clive Ponting's pioneering overview, *A Green History of the World*, first published in 1991, has helped to establish this vital sort of history in our purview. Another useful summation is Neil Roberts, *The Holocene: An Environmental History*, first published in 1989, with a second, enlarged edition in 1998. The Holocene is the geological period in which we still live today, basically the time since the end of the Pleistocene period (or last Ice Age) some 10 to 12 thousand years ago. <sup>[5]</sup>

Does Green history have an ideological matrix? Typically it does: an ideology that I label "counterculturalism," [6] a complex of ideas and values flatly opposed to "technoliberalism," the chief inspiration of Gray history. Whereas technoliberalism is all in favor of science, technology, industry, commerce, and capitalism, in favor of headlong growth, expansion, and development, the typical counterculturalist believes in slowing down or otherwise limiting growth and creating societies in collegial equilibrium with the natural environment. In this reckoning development per se is not evil, but it must be sustainable development, development that conserves resources, encourages biodiversity, and works with nature, rather than against it. The roots of counterculturalism lie partly in the romantic world-view of the early 19th Century, partly in the utopian socialism of the same period, partly in various religious traditions, especially both Eastern and Western mysticism and gnosticism, and of course partly in the environmental activism of the last 40 or 50 years.

So Green history is not environmental history, pure and simple: it is all about how human beings have been abusing the Earth for thousands of years and paying heavy prices for their folly, the heaviest of which may well have to be paid in the 21st Century. Be reminded that Ponting's *A Green History of the World* has a minatory sub-title, namely, *The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations*. Green history tends to be apocalyptic history.

But this is not to disparage Green history. In view of the looming ecological crises of the 21st Century, and in view of humanity's age-old dependence on the Earth, Green history should be an essential component of any attempt to study, write, or teach history today. Technoliberals, the writers of Gray history, offer an inspiring, heroic picture of how *Homo sapiens* has been able to impose its will on the face of the Earth and rack up all kinds of material progress: but their very anthropocentrism prevents them from seeing that humanity is not the only value in the equation: the Earth has always been and perhaps always will be the larger value. We human beings are simply the fleas on her back.

And what a back she has! If one construes global history as the history of human ecology, then the leading topics of a well-crafted text would include climate; topography; habitats, from river valleys to tropical islands to high plateaus; fresh water and mineral resources; all non-human species of life both animal and vegetable, including the pathogens that afflict us with infectious disease; the physical impact on the Earth of all human activity, from deforestation of woodlands to toxic pollution of groundwaters, lakes, rivers, and oceans; the size, density, and movements of human population; and even the ideologies that inform human use and abuse of the Earth. This is a full plate in and of itself; and although I am not recommending that anyone teach global history purely in ecological terms, you could do much worse.

One obvious thread worth exploring in global history is what Ponting calls the collapse of great civilizations. Scholarly opinion nowadays tends to attribute the initial rise and later collapse of many great civilizations chiefly to ecological overshoot: too much deforestation, too much grazing, too much erosion. Such practices may account for the fall of the Indus Valley civilization of pre-Aryan India, the Mayan civilization of pre-Columbian Central America and Mexico, and the civilizations of medieval Zimbabwe in southeast Africa and medieval Cambodia in southeast Asia.

But environmental studies can also help explain the predominance of certain cultures and states at one time and of other cultures and states at other times. Consider China. From the 3rd Century B.C. on down to the present, most of what we know as China has been--with occasional interregna--a single unified state. A few other great ancient empires originated earlier, but none still in existence can boast a more or less continuous existence of almost 2300 years. During at least half of those years, and perhaps more, China was also the richest and most populous country on the planet. Andre Gunder Frank contends in his *ReOrient* that Chinese pre-eminence did not wane until the early 19th Century; and we all know how rapidly China has regained its status as a major economic power during the past quarter-century, partly due to the fact that it remains the world's most populous country.<sup>[7]</sup> A further ecological consideration, emphasized by William H. McNeill, is that imperial China may have amassed more wealth and enjoyed longer periods of political unity than imperial India simply because the climate of the Indian subcontinent is somewhat less healthful, with higher incidence of infectious disease, reducing the productivity of labor, than the lands occupied by the Chinese.<sup>[8]</sup>

But China was not simply the product of the Chinese. It is singularly favored by nature. The heartland of China consists of two fertile river valleys, the valley of the Yang-Tze and the valley of the Huang-Ho. This heartland is not divided into many isolated geographical regions by vast mountain ranges or interior seas, as is the case with Europe. It was relatively easy to unify once the necessary political ideas and military strategies and technologies coalesced, as they did in the 3rd Century B.C. For the next 2,000 years China was far and away the hegemonic power in East Asia: the center of high culture, the center of commerce, industry, and craftsmanship. China was self-sufficient and unsurpassable. Even the barbarian war-bands who sometimes conquered China were soon fully assimilated into Chinese civilization, becoming no less Chinese than the Chinese themselves.

Of course the very success of China undermined, at least temporarily, its ability to compete with the rising rival powers of Western Europe in the 19th Century. Look at Western Europe from the perspectives of Green history. Mediterranean Europe, along with North Africa and Southwest Asia, was relatively easy to unify, as the Romans discovered, thanks in part to the Mediterranean Sea itself. But once--in ancient times--

you reach the Pyrenees and the Alps and the Carpathians and the Balkans, you enter quite a different world: a world of dense hardwood forests, steep mountain ranges, islands, rugged coasts, rough inland seas, glaciers, snow, and ice.

The indefatigable Romans did manage to subdue part of this northern world, for a few centuries, but at least half of it remained wild and barbaric. When advances in metallurgy finally made possible the felling of the forests, much of the land proved to be fertile. Populations increased. The temperate climate of the lower-lying northern lands was relatively salubrious, especially after economic progress made warm clothing and snug dwellings easier to come by. But the geographical boundaries remained formidable. This transalpine Europe, although not vast in extent, did not lend itself to conquest by a single imperial power. From Charlemagne to Hitler, all the would-be Caesars ultimately failed.

The outcome was a dishevelled world of many independent and semi-independent kingdoms, principalities, duchies, and city-states, all in ruthless competition with one another, unwilling to submit to the rule of any would-be Rome, and dependent in varying degrees on the enterprise of their merchants and bankers for their revenues, their arms, and their glory. Late medieval Europe supplied the perfect launch-pad for the take-off of modern capitalism, a tireless machine for the unrelenting accumulation of capital. At first Venice, Genoa, Portugal, and Spain led the way; then the Netherlands; then England. Every effort on the part of one great power to rebuild the Roman Empire, from the Austro-Hispanic Habsburgs to Bourbon and Napoleonic France to Nazi Germany, fell fatally short. Eventually, in the 18th and 19th Centuries, this divided but exuberant Western Europe conquered most of the rest of the world. And make no mistake: today, as the 21st Century gets under way, for better or worse, the whole world lies in the thrall of Western European or European-descended technology, capital, culture, and systems of belief.

So, to what can we credit the "success" of Western Europe? White skin? Blue eyes? Christian piety? I think not! The best guess is that late medieval Western Europe's relative poverty, compared to the great powers of Asia, and its disunity--frustrating the emergence of an all-powerful, all-controlling, innovation-discouraging imperial bureaucracy--gave Western Europeans the hunger, the aggressiveness, the competitiveness, and the economic machinery to reach out, grab, exploit, and dominate the world, while at the same time, and by the same token, inventing the military and industrial technology necessary to maximize their edge.

In the second half of the 19th Century, to complete the picture, three peripheral countries located outside Western Europe moved rapidly to emulate Western Europe: the United States, Japan, and Russia. Each of these was, in effect, an empire, with a strong central government. Each started out far behind Western Europe economically.

The most successful, and also the most favored by geology, geography, and climate, was the United States, which had the additional cultural advantage, in the mid-19th Century, of consisting chiefly of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants from Western Europe, for whom the aping of Western European economies and technologies came easily. But Japan did not lag far behind; and Russia made strenuous efforts to catch up as well, although it never quite managed to join the core of economically super-advanced hegemonic nations.

But the breakthrough to modern capitalism and industrialism did not, and I suspect could not have, occurred in the United States, Japan, or Russia. That distinction belonged to Western Europe, and it was not a sudden breakthrough. It took centuries to happen, from its barest beginnings in Renaissance Italy to its climactic moments in the first half of the 19th Century in Great Britain and parts of northern France, the Lowlands, and western Germany. And it cannot be understood by the tools of Gray, Blue, Gold, or Silver history alone. Everything that took place was, to a considerable extent, predetermined by the hard facts of Green history. Green history is the bedrock. And if modern global capitalist industrial and postindustrial civilization manages to overshoot and exceed the carrying capacity of the environment--which seems all too possible--the hard facts of Green history will have the last word, too.

But I have one more color to discuss. If we are all fleas on the back of Mother Earth, some fleas have a better purchase on her back than others. This brings me to Red history, the history of the exploitation of some human beings by other human beings, the history of class struggle, which is rooted ideologically in 19th-Century utopian socialism and Marxism. The term "exploitation" is freighted with all kinds of pejorative connotations, but so it should be. Exploitation denotes the theft, or the undervaluing, of the labor of some to enhance the well-being of others. Without such exploitation, civilization--the process of creating urbanized societies through division of labor and the production of agricultural surplus--would never have emerged, and we would all still be living in Paleolithic communities. Nevertheless, theft is theft, and all of human history since Neolithic times is the history of theft. Theft gave us the Pyramids of Egypt and Mexico, theft gave us the palaces of Venice and Paris, theft gave us the paintings of Leonardo and the passions of Bach, the Taj Mahal, the Eiffel Tower, and the ovens of Auschwitz.

So it is perfectly possible to construct a history of the world that stresses the epic of human exploitation, the epic of what McNeill calls "macroparasitism,"<sup>[9]</sup> the ways in which certain people have taken unfair advantage of other people, have sucked the blood of other people, whether you call them slaves, serfs, natives, indentured servants, tenant farmers, proletarians, the working class, or even the bottom four quintiles of any contemporary population as measured by net worth or income. The "bottom four quintiles" may work best for present-day economically advanced

countries because in such countries technological progress has transformed the nature of the working class, giving it relatively higher family incomes than in the 19th Century, more education and skills, and a change in the preponderant types of work required, from manual labor to brain labor. But although this has in some segments of the working class diminished the theft of value, it has not eliminated theft; and in any case, the past quarter-century has seen a sharp reversal of the trend toward proportionately rising incomes for people whose income is derived primarily from work, as opposed to the ownership and investment of capital.

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Now when you put Green and Red global history together, you have a powerful one-two punch. You have a vision of global history that is eminently subversive: subversive of unfettered capitalism, subversive of the sovereign nation-state system which has made and continues to make such capitalism possible, subversive of Western European civilization, subversive of sexism, racism, and imperialism, but also--please note--subversive of all civilizations founded, as all have been, and until recently necessarily have been, on the exploitation of Mother Nature and the theft of surplus value. Green history and Red history give no license to Hindu nationalism, or pan-Islamic evangelism, or nativist insurgency in any of its manifold forms. Green history and Red history, to use Benjamin Barber's terms, do not favor "Jihad" over "McWorld," or vice versa.[\[10\]](#) To my way of thinking, the only conceivable future that Green history and Red history can endorse is the supersession of the modern capitalist world-system by a democratic ecologically wise global commonwealth, a Green and Red world state.

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But come what may, I do believe that Green and Red history will, if the human race survives, inherit the future, becoming, together, the dominant paradigm in historical study in the course of the 21st Century. And rest assured: historians are the custodians of the collective memory of humankind. When presidents and prime ministers wonder how they will "go down" in history, they mean how we, and all those like us, will read their performance 20, 50, or a hundred years from now. For it is not history that speaks: it is we, we poor, fallible, blinkered, incomplete human beings who have chosen to help create, help report, and help preserve the memory of our species.

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