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Radical Reading: Print Culture and the San Francisco Labor Movement, 1880-1889

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RADICAL READING:
PRINT CULTURE AND THE SAN FRANCISCO LABOR MOVEMENT, 1880–1889

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Library and Information Science

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library and Information Science

by

Marie Louise Silva

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The Designated Thesis Committee Approves the Thesis Titled

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PRINT CULTURE AND THE SAN FRANCISCO LABOR MOVEMENT, 1880–1889

by

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APPROVED FOR THE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT

RADICAL READING: PRINT CULTURE AND THE SAN FRANCISCO LABOR MOVEMENT, 1880–1889

by Marie Louise Silva

Labor historians have documented the extraordinary growth of unionism in 1880s San Francisco and its lasting impact on the city's political and industrial landscape, emphasizing the San Francisco labor movement's impressive organizational and political accomplishments. Little attention has been paid, however, to the blossoming of radical print culture that accompanied and inspired the organizational campaigns of the 1880s. Informed by developments in the fields of labor and book history that emphasize the cultural agency of workers and working-class readers, this study addresses this gap in the historical record, reconstructing the history of radical print culture in 1880s San Francisco through a close reading of two San Francisco labor newspapers, *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, as well as other primary sources.

This study shows that the San Francisco labor movement, like other Gilded Age reform movements, valued education as a primary instrument of social improvement. To promote working-class education, San Francisco labor organizations established alternative print institutions in the 1880s. Among these institutions were two seminal labor newspapers, *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, which provided working-class readers with unprecedented access to radical texts and created a public forum for the voice of the emerging labor community. More specifically, these newspapers sustained a new ideal of reading, identified by this study as "radical reading," that welded elite, popular, and religious literary models into a powerful critique of industrial society.

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Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, working-class San Franciscans built the mightiest labor movement in the country, securing their stake in the economic, political, and cultural life of the city for generations. The 1901 election of the city's—and the nation's—first union mayor, Eugene E. Schmitz, represented the dramatic culmination of decades of labor struggle, during which working-class San Franciscans forged not only a formidable political alliance, but a vibrant, diverse, and distinctly working-class intellectual culture. Beginning in the 1880s, this indigenous labor culture blossomed in an efflorescence of newspapers, books, pamphlets, lectures, discussions, libraries, and reading rooms dedicated to the noble cause and great question of labor. From the Knights of Labor to the Coast Seamen's Union, labor organizations with diverse and often unstable ideological interests were united in their commitment to education as both a means and an end of their organizational efforts, laying the groundwork for the triumphant labor movement of the early twentieth century.

Particularly influential among these organizations was the International Workmen's Association (IWA), founded by the young editor, printer, and union organizer Burnette G. Haskell in San Francisco circa 1883. Among the “especial declared objects” of the IWA were “to print and publish proper literature,” “to establish a labor library,” “to establish a lyceum for the discussion of labor topics,” “to circulate proper literature,” and “to educate each other by group meeting and discussion.”¹ As the IWA's objectives suggest, the development of a critical, articulate, and self-consciously

¹ “Now, Act!,” *Truth*, May 19, 1883.

working-class intellectual culture through alternative print media and educational institutions was at the very center of the labor drive of the 1880s—and of the lives of the union organizers and labor intellectuals who so dramatically shaped the early San Francisco labor movement.

While labor historians agree that a singular, deep, and articulate class consciousness characterized the culture of the early San Francisco labor movement, no labor scholarship has explicitly addressed the role of alternative print media and educational institutions in the development of class consciousness in San Francisco. Nor have the respective literatures of labor and book history traced the intertwined histories of labor newspapers, printing presses, literature, libraries, and working-class reading in nineteenth-century San Francisco despite promising historiographical developments that emphasize the cultural agency of working-class readers. In an effort to address this gap, this thesis will reconstruct the history of radical working-class print culture in San Francisco in the heady decade of the 1880s through a close reading of two seminal labor newspapers, *Truth*, established by Burnette G. Haskell in 1882, and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, founded in 1887 as the official newspaper of the powerful Coast Seamen's Union. Illuminated by other sources, including diaries, personal papers, and union records, these two newspapers reveal surprising ideological intersections, ambivalences, and contradictions within the labor movement itself and in relation to bourgeois and popular culture. In particular, contributors to *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*

explored the relationship between education, literary culture, and social change with an enthusiasm rivaling that of their elite cultural competitors.²

Inspired by the work of Michael Denning, this study will raise, if not resolve, two large questions, around which a host of other questions inevitably cluster: What practical and discursive role did print culture play in the San Francisco labor movement of the 1880s—and in the rise of a distinct, oppositional working-class culture? What do the products of that culture reveal about the complex and evolving “consciousness,” or collective imagination, of their producers and consumers in a time of rapid social change?³

By addressing the role and significance of print culture in the San Francisco labor movement in the formative decade of the 1880s, this study will have modest implications for the fields of labor and book history, making new connections between divergent disciplines. It will argue that working-class education—grounded in “radical reading”—was central to the development and objectives of the San Francisco labor movement, which was engaged in a critical project to restore, redeem, and transform national culture.⁴ While stressing the radicalism of the local labor movement, it will show that the line between labor and bourgeois culture in San Francisco was surprisingly ambiguous;

² See Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture: The Public Librarian and American Society, 1876–1920* (New York: Free Press, 1979), for a discussion of nineteenth-century library leaders’ faith in education as an antidote to social unrest.

³ In his *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (New York: Verso, 1987), Michael Denning raises similar questions about the role of the dime novel in the nineteenth-century working-class imagination.

⁴ In his *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1983), John L. Thomas examines the significant contributions of reformist writers George, Bellamy, and Lloyd to this redemptive project.

institutions and personalities occupied a multiplicity of seemingly contradictory positions, employing similar rhetorical strategies in the service of strikingly different social objectives.⁵ In its emphasis on the role of *serious* reading in the intellectual life of the San Francisco labor community, it will complicate the dichotomy of high and low culture that has informed even some of the most astute analyses of working-class reading in America, a dichotomy that the union organizers, labor newspaper editors, and radical intellectuals of the 1880s strategically upended. At the same time, it will explore the mostly unremarked tension between ideals and practices of reading *within* the labor community, as articulated and experienced by radical labor activists and working-class readers. Like the labor press itself, this study will serve a documentary function, opening a new and compelling chapter in American book history by chronicling the contributions of *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* to radical publishing in the United States. Finally, an analysis of the print culture of the San Francisco labor movement will cast a slanting light on Gilded Age culture in the city as a whole, revealing unexpected ideological convergences and departures around the themes of education, reading, and social change.

Literature Review

Most labor historians of San Francisco and California agree that working-class culture in late nineteenth-century San Francisco was characterized by an unusual degree of class consciousness, citing the extraordinary contributions of the labor organizations of

⁵ Thus, both the city librarian, Frederick B. Perkins, a vigorous censor and member of the Knights of Labor, and radical union organizer Burnette G. Haskell decried the increasing consumption of “trashy” literature.

the 1880s, including and especially the International Workmen's Association, to the rise and shape of the modern labor movement in California. Nonetheless, little critical attention has been paid to class-specific media and institutions, such as labor newspapers and libraries, in which the *question* of working-class culture was consciously engaged by radical intellectuals and ordinary workers alike. In the conventional narrative of organization, strikes, and political ascendance, the San Francisco worker as an agent of culture is conspicuously absent. At the same time, histories of booksellers, newspapers, and libraries in Gilded Age San Francisco neglect the contributions of the labor movement to the city's vibrant print culture, as well as the ambivalent relationship between working-class readers and mainstream cultural institutions, including the press and public library. While the larger literature of American book history includes studies of working-class reading and cultural consumption in the nineteenth century, the rich print culture of working-class San Francisco has been almost entirely ignored.

The elusive figure of the working-class reader stands at this unexpected intersection of labor and book history, marking a gap in the historical record—and the threshold of this study. Although histories of labor and print in Gilded Age San Francisco fail to reconstruct the cultural institutions and media that anchored working-class intellectual life, developments in book and the new labor history suggest that the voices of working-class readers need not be consigned, in the words of Robert Darnton, to “the vast silence that has swallowed up most of mankind's thinking.”⁶ While book

⁶ Robert Darnton, *The Kiss of Lamourette* (New York: Norton, 1990), 212, quoted in Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1.

historians have attempted to reconstruct the intellectual lives of ordinary readers through painstaking historical research, practitioners of the new labor history have taken a cultural turn, exploring workers' subjectivity through the triple lens of identity, consciousness, and experience.⁷ Together, these developments will provide a methodological and theoretical framework for this study.

A review of the literature of early San Francisco labor history reveals a consistent pattern of scholarly discourse. Against the historical backdrop of labor struggle and political ascendancy, the following themes emerge: the role of anti-Chinese racism in the consolidation of the nineteenth-century labor movement; the nature, scope, and influence of labor radicalism; the rise and significance of central labor federations; tension, resentment, and accommodation between skilled and unskilled workers; and the economic, social, and political bases for organized labor's success.⁸ Although Jules Tygiel and Peter Stearns explore constellations of ethnicity, work, family life, political allegiance, and community among workers in nineteenth-century San Francisco and members of the International Workmen's Association, the question of working-class

⁷ The new labor history emerged in the 1960s in response to the economic and institutional approach of earlier labor historians. Inspired by the work of British labor historians, particularly E. P. Thompson, it emphasizes the economic, political, and cultural agency of diverse working-class groups.

⁸ See Ira Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935); Robert Edward Lee, *Industrial Relations in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1900–1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960); Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Michael Kazin, "The Great Exception Revisited: Organized Labor and Politics in San Francisco and Los Angeles, 1870–1940," *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (1986): 371–402; and Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

intellectual culture and its role in the development of class consciousness remains largely uninvestigated in the field of San Francisco labor history.⁹ Similarly, scholars have carefully consulted a wide range of labor newspapers, including *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, for information about the San Francisco labor movement, without analyzing the discursive role of the labor press in the construction of working-class identity.¹⁰ While the fact of class consciousness is assumed by historians of San Francisco across the disciplinary spectrum, the cultural instruments of working-class identity—labor newspapers, printing presses, literature, libraries, and reading rooms—have faded into historical oblivion. Nevertheless, it was through such class-specific media and cultural institutions that Gilded Age and Progressive Era labor organizers cultivated “a sense of unity and purposiveness among their fellow workers,” expressing a “coherent vision of redeeming the republic” that fragmented after 1920, as pioneering labor historian David Montgomery has argued.¹¹ Following Montgomery, this study assumes that class consciousness in Gilded Age San Francisco cannot be fully understood without critically reconstructing the cultural instruments through which it was created, fostered, and expressed.

⁹ See Jules Everett Tygiell, “Workingmen in San Francisco, 1880–1901” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1977); and Peter N. Stearns, “Social Mobility and Class Consciousness: San Francisco’s International Workmen’s Association in the 1880s,” *Journal of Social History* 11 (1977): 75–98.

¹⁰ In *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Philip J. Ethington thoughtfully examines the role of the mainstream press in the formation of class consciousness in San Francisco. Nonetheless, he overlooks working-class cultural agency as expressed in and by the labor press.

¹¹ David Montgomery, “Labor and Republic in Industrial America: 1860–1920,” *Le Mouvement Social* 111 (1980): 202, 214.

From Kevin Starr to Carey McWilliams, local and regional historians have noted the remarkably rich and varied nature of literary and print culture in nineteenth-century San Francisco, where twelve newspapers were in operation by 1850, outpacing that venerable publishing center, London.¹² Despite a general scholarly appreciation of the complexity of the San Francisco print world, local and regional histories neglect the significant contributions of union organizers, labor intellectuals, and ordinary workers to the rich literary heritage of the “labor capital of the West.”¹³ In the history of Gilded Age San Francisco, two bright stars—print culture and the labor movement—have yet to be clearly connected, presenting an uncharted cultural constellation. Nonetheless, histories of San Francisco’s early booksellers, libraries, and newspapers hint at the class tensions and ambivalences underpinning the city’s literary and public culture, from the heterogeneous beginnings of the San Francisco Free Public Library to the manipulation of class identities in the daily press.¹⁴ This study will bring those ambivalences to the fore, contributing a new chapter to the book history of early San Francisco that illuminates both the intellectual world of the labor movement and the complex, labor-inflected print culture of the city as a whole.

¹² See Kevin Starr, *California: A History* (New York: Modern Library, 2005); and Carey McWilliams, *California: The Great Exception* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1949).

¹³ McWilliams, *California*, 127.

¹⁴ See Hilde V. Kraus, “A Cultural History of the Mechanics’ Institute of San Francisco, 1855–1920,” *Library History* 23 (2007): 115–28; Peter Booth Wiley, *A Free Library in This City: The Illustrated History of the San Francisco Public Library* (San Francisco: Weldon Owen, 1996); Ethington, *The Public City*; and Robert Ernest Cowan, *Booksellers of Early San Francisco* (Los Angeles: The Ward Ritchie Press, 1953).

The absence of working-class readers in the literature of San Francisco history presents the researcher with a daunting challenge: to recover the intellectual culture of ordinary men and women from a careful reading of heterogeneous primary sources, recalling forgotten voices from a historical void. While local and regional histories across the disciplines shed oblique light on the intellectual culture of the San Francisco labor movement, promising developments in book and the new labor history provide a methodological and theoretical framework for studies of working-class readership, print culture, and identity. In the field of book history, the pioneering work of Jonathan Rose suggests that the intellectual world of ordinary readers can be at least partially reconstructed from memoirs, newspapers, library catalogs, and other primary sources.¹⁵ On this side of the Atlantic, the work of Michael Denning provides a lens through which to view patterns of working-class literary consumption *and* interpretation, while that of Elizabeth McHenry makes new connections between newspapers, reading rooms, self-education, and cultural identity.¹⁶ Cultural historians John L. Thomas and Barbara Sicherman have explored the role of books and reading in nineteenth-century American life in new and resonant ways, whether by emphasizing the importance of three bestselling works in the development of an oppositional discursive tradition, or by analyzing four overlapping, yet discrete, ideals of reading.¹⁷ In the discipline of labor

¹⁵ See Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*.

¹⁶ See Denning, *Mechanic Accents*; and Elizabeth McHenry, "An Association of Kindred Spirits: Black Readers and Their Reading Rooms," in *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States*, ed. Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter, 98–118 (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007).

¹⁷ See Thomas, *Alternative America*; and Barbara Sicherman, "Ideologies and Practices of Reading," in *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 3, *The Industrial Book*,

history, the work of the new labor historians has opened up a rich field of inquiry into the cultural lives of working people, emphasizing workers' agency in the overlapping spheres of work, politics, education, and leisure.¹⁸ In particular, studies of diverse workers' cultures provide a lens through which to view the relationship between print culture and working-class identity in Gilded Age San Francisco.¹⁹

In the manifold spirit of the time and place it attempts to capture, this study is informed by a number of historiographical and theoretical developments in the new labor history, book history, nationalism studies, literary theory, and philosophy, including, prominently, the work of David Montgomery, Jonathan Rose, Michael Denning, Benedict Anderson, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Michel Foucault. Together, these developments encourage investigation into the cultural and intellectual lives of working people; provide a theoretical and methodological framework for histories of working-class reading; address the complex relationship between print culture and modern group identity; supply a philosophical background for understanding the San Francisco labor movement's

1840–1880, ed. Scott E. Caspar and others, 279–302 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

¹⁸ For an introduction to the new labor history, see Eric Arnesen, Julie Greene, and Bruce Laurie, eds., *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working-Class Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

¹⁹ See David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865–1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Herbert G. Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Keil Harmut, ed., *German Workers' Culture in the United States: 1850–1920* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1988); and Robert Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996).

extraordinary intellectual and political diversity; and offer insight into the ambivalent interaction of elite and oppositional discourses in Gilded Age San Francisco.

Inspired by the important work of British labor historians E. P. Thompson and Eric Hobsbawm, American labor historian David Montgomery has focused on the social, cultural, and intellectual lives of working people, identifying a distinctively working-class “mutualistic ethic” as the defining feature of the late nineteenth-century labor experience.²⁰ In his words, “the labour movement of the Gilded Age . . . was a moral crusade—an effluence of lectures, pamphlets, secret rituals, boycotts, parades, ceremonies, and parties, all designed to instill a practical sense of the ‘universal brotherhood of labor.’”²¹ By addressing the question of class from a cultural perspective, Montgomery’s pioneering work provided an alternative to the more narrowly economic approach of his predecessors, opening up a rich field of inquiry for a new generation of labor historians. Encouraged by Montgomery’s efforts, scholarship in the new labor history has traced the emergence of a distinctly working-class identity in the nineteenth century, rendering the difficult concept of class consciousness with historical nuance and analytical sophistication.²² Informed by the new labor historians’ demystified, historically specific approach to class consciousness, this study will examine workers’ self-perceptions on their own terms, as part of a dynamic, evolving, and often contradictory discourse that, ineluctably shaped by economic, social, and political realities, became a historical force in its own right.

²⁰ Montgomery, “Labor and Republic in Industrial America,” 204.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 204.

²² For a particularly nuanced discussion of the concept of class consciousness in historical practice, see Wilentz, *Chants Democratic*.

Like David Montgomery and the labor historians he influenced, Jonathan Rose and other British book historians have explored the neglected intellectual culture of the laboring classes, focusing on the distinctly working-class institutions in which “the articulate consciousness of the self-taught” was produced, experienced, and expressed.²³ In the *Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes*, Rose mines a wealth of primary sources, including memoirs, newspapers, and library catalogs, in order to reconstruct the rich intellectual world of British workers between the years 1760 and 1960, providing a methodological framework for the study of working-class cultural institutions and consciousness in America. In particular, Rose’s work suggests that the interior and ephemeral act of reading—and the intellectual world in which it takes place—can be tentatively inferred by another painstaking reading of primary sources. Encouraged by Rose’s efforts, this study will attempt to enact such a reading, providing a small glimpse into the obscured intellectual world of the San Francisco labor movement in the 1880s.

In *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*, Michael Denning reconstructs patterns of working-class reading and interpretation by tracing the history of the dime novel in America between the years 1840 and 1890. Denning’s work raises two large questions, which provide a point of departure for this study: “What can be learned about these popular narratives, their production and consumption, and their place and function within working class cultures; and, what can be learned from them, as symbolic actions, about working-class culture and ideology.”²⁴

²³ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 711.

²⁴ Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 3.

Transposed in another key, these questions will be asked of specifically working-class print media and their role in the cultural formation and consolidation of the San Francisco labor community. Moreover, Denning's appreciation of the allegorical nature of working-class reading against the symbolic backdrop of the republican decline in the nineteenth century resonates almost eerily with rhetorical patterns found in *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*. However, this study departs from Denning in its unembarrassed emphasis on serious or "improving" reading, which Denning dismisses as "tokens of self-improvement and self-culture" despite the passionate commitment of late nineteenth-century unionists to the intellectual and moral uplift of the working classes and the consequent transformation of national culture through education.²⁵ As this study will show, revolutionaries and reformers—and the object of their efforts, workers themselves—cannot be easily separated into discrete social categories in the historical context of Gilded Age San Francisco.

Benedict Anderson's breathtaking treatise on nationalism, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, has surprising and significant implications for the study of working-class print culture. Deeply influenced by the work of Walter Benjamin, Anderson draws compelling connections between the rise of the national community, the spread of print culture, and the apprehension of "homogeneous, empty time."²⁶ As the title of Anderson's work provocatively implies, community in the modern sense is an imaginary, or cultural, product made possible by

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 33. "[H]omogeneous, empty time" is the arbitrary time of the clock and calendar, steadily proceeding toward no end.

print technology. Of particular relevance to this study are Anderson's insights into the role of the newspaper in the development of modern group identities, of which "confidence of community in anonymity" is the defining—and paradoxical—feature: while consumption of the newspaper is an interior act, its daily, ceremonial occurrence in concert with thousands of anonymous others reassures the reader of his or her place in a national community.²⁷ Following Anderson, this study will explore the hitherto unexamined role of the labor press in the deepening consciousness of working-class identity *in* community in Gilded Age San Francisco. At the same time, it will argue that the use of allegory in the labor press subverted the apprehension of "homogeneous, empty time" implicit in the newspaper format, representing an alternative and apocalyptic vision of historical progress.

Although the work of Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin may seem an unlikely source of inspiration for a historical study of working-class print culture, it provides a philosophical framework for understanding the extraordinary intellectual and political diversity of the early San Francisco labor movement and its relationship to the city's vibrant working-class culture. Developed in order to describe the unique features of Dostoevsky's novelistic technique, the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony—or, "a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world"—aptly applies to the intellectual universe of the late nineteenth-century labor movement, in which radically divergent ideas were tested against and shaped each other.²⁸ This study

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 6.

will suggest that the polyphonic discourse of the early San Francisco labor movement, in which the voices of anarchists, socialists, and conservative trade unionists clamored, harmonized, and traded places, opened a creative space for the development of a distinctly rich intellectual culture grounded in class-specific print media and educational institutions.

Throughout his wide-ranging work, French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault has traced intricate webs of knowledge, power, and resistance, suggesting that resistance is never absolute nor monolithic, but plural, shifting, and contingent on the very power relations it disrupts. As outlined in the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault's thoughts on the discourses of resistance help to clarify the complex and often contradictory intellectual universe of the nineteenth-century labor movement in San Francisco: "Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses with the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy."²⁹ Following Foucault, this study will argue that the intellectual and moral vision of the San Francisco labor movement, though powerful, was neither internally consistent nor consistently antithetical to elite values. Rather than frustrating our understanding of San Francisco labor culture, these inconsistencies, contradictions, and convergences produce meaning in their own right, representing fault lines within the labor movement and Gilded Age society as whole.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 101-102.

Chapter Outline

Grounded in close readings of the labor newspapers *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, this study is organized into four chapters, or interconnected essays, on the theme of “radical reading” and its place in the San Francisco labor movement during the formative decade of the 1880s. Each chapter represents a tentative beginning in the history of working-class print culture in San Francisco, as well as an opening for future scholarship. The first part of this study (chapters 1 and 2) will focus on the *institutions* that shaped working-class reading, while the second part (chapter 3) will explore “radical reading” as a complex set of ideals and practices. Chapter 1 will present a cultural history of the San Francisco labor movement in the 1880s, focusing on the educational efforts of the San Francisco Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, International Workmen's Association, and Coast Seamen's Union. In particular, it will emphasize the contributions of a small but influential group of labor intellectuals led by the young union organizer, printer, and editor Burnette G. Haskell. Chapter 2 will present the intersecting histories of Haskell's *Truth* and the Coast Seamen's Union's *Coast Seamen's Journal*, San Francisco's most influential labor newspapers in the 1880s, emphasizing their role in the production of a distinct, self-conscious, and articulate labor community within the broader context of San Francisco print culture in the Gilded Age. Chapter 2 will also discuss the critical part played by the San Francisco labor press in the publication and distribution of suppressed literature, from socialist tracts to feminist novels. Chapter 3 will examine the role of reading, experientially and figuratively, in the cultural formation of the San Francisco labor community, focusing on radical reading as a working-class

alternative to bourgeois and popular literary culture that nonetheless drew on preexisting models. This chapter will argue that radical reading, as envisioned and practiced by the San Francisco labor community, welded self-improving, civic, and Christian traditions into a powerful critique of industrial society and a new vision of historical progress.³⁰ Finally, chapter 4 will show how the radical intellectual culture of the 1880s survived in the print media, educational institutions, and ethos of the powerful Progressive Era labor movement. At the same time, it will acknowledge the limitations of this study and suggest avenues for further research.

³⁰ Again, this study is indebted to Barbara Sicherman, who identified self-improving, civic, and evangelical models of reading in her “Ideologies and Practices of Reading.”

Chapter 1

“Educate! Agitate! Organize!”:

Foundations of Labor Culture

Led by a small, eccentric, and committed group of radicals, the union drive of the 1880s cast the shape of the San Francisco labor movement in the century to come. After the disastrous decade of the 1870s, the 1880s saw the revival and rapid growth of trades unionism in San Francisco; the emergence of successful city-wide labor federations; and, most importantly for this study, the establishment of specifically working-class media and cultural institutions, including *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, which helped foster an imagined community of producers dedicated to the fading ideals of a bygone republic and the revolutionary hope of the new industrial working class. As the motto of *Truth*—and epigraph of this chapter—suggests, education was at the forefront of the labor movement of the 1880s, both as an ideal and a practical endeavor.¹ Ironically, however, the extraordinary organizational successes of the ‘80s have overshadowed the educational ambitions and accomplishments of the labor unions of the period.

Preeminent among these were four labor organizations that transcended the narrow interests of individual trades to pursue a more radical—indeed cultural—agenda: the San Francisco Trades Assembly, the Knights of Labor, the International Workmen’s Association (IWA), and the Coast Seamen’s Union. As this chapter will show, these organizations were linked, not only by shared objectives and values, but also, and more

¹ See H. M. Hyndman, letter to the editor, *Truth*, July 21, 1883. Hyndman used *Truth*’s motto in his manifesto of the Democratic Federation of London.

concretely, by shared leadership, forming an imperfectly continuous organizational and cultural trajectory.

The young men and women at the forefront of the San Francisco labor movement in the 1880s were closely interconnected, personally, as friends, relatives, and lovers; politically, as organizers and activists; and literarily, as editors, printers, writers, lecturers, and librarians committed to the development of an oppositional, working-class intellectual culture. Yet, the links that connected the labor organizers of the '80s—and the unexpected intersection of radical unionism and literary culture their lives embodied—remain mostly unexplored. As in San Francisco labor history itself, familiar names will reappear throughout this study, serving as signs of the actual and intellectual intimacy of the early labor movement. Even an introductory glimpse reveals the surprising extent to which these men and women were involved with each other in the service of various and overlapping labor organizations, causes, and literary and educational projects.

Although he is most renowned for organizing the IWA—and later, the Kaweah Cooperative Colony—Burnette G. Haskell was also a printer, writer, lecturer, editor of the radical newspaper *Truth*, and labor press pioneer, with deep ties to the Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, and Coast Seamen's Union. Lesser known is his wife, Anna Haskell, typesetter for *Truth* and first woman Master Workman of the Progressive Assembly of the San Francisco Knights of Labor, whose diary provides an important source of information for this study. Many of the preeminent labor activists of the 1880s were regular guests at the Haskells' home, which was the frequent scene of intense and

sometimes explosive discussion and debate.² Among these friends were IWA members Sigismund Danielewicz, principal organizer of the Coast Seamen's Union and correspondent for *Truth*; P. Ross Martin, co-organizer of the West Coast sailors and future librarian of the San Francisco Nationalist Club; A. J. Starkweather, miner, socialist writer, and ardent colporteur; Charles F. Burgman, tailor, Knights of Labor lecturer, journalist, and manager of *Truth*; and Xaver Leder, sailor, poet, and founding editor of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*. As this incomplete list suggests, the labor activists of the 1880s were also serious contributors to the print culture of their city. At the same time, many of the lights of San Francisco's literary class participated in the labor movement, both locally and nationally. Notably, both the bestselling author of *Progress and Poverty*, Henry George, and the librarian of the San Francisco Free Public Library, Frederic Beecher Perkins, were politically active members of the Knights of Labor.³ Such overlapping political and literary commitments suggest that the lines between worker, labor activist, and cultural arbiter were much more flexible in Gilded Age San Francisco than the modern reader might at first suppose.

This chapter will trace the intellectual heritage of the San Francisco labor movement, sketching the history of the major labor organizations of the 1880s—the Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, IWA, and Coast Seamen's Union—with an

² See the diary of Anna Haskell, Haskell Family Papers, 1878–1951, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. All of the manuscript collections referenced in this study are housed at the Bancroft Library.

³ Published in 1879, *Progress and Poverty* argued that the private ownership of land necessarily created the conditions for widespread poverty in the industrial world. To eliminate poverty, it proposed that a single tax be imposed on all unused land. George's book enjoyed immense popularity among working-class readers.

emphasis on their contributions to working-class education through print culture. At the same time, it will begin to unravel the threads that linked the lives of the men and women at the forefront of the movement to educate and organize San Francisco workers in the Gilded Age.

The Economic and Political Background

Marked by economic depression, violent anti-Chinese agitation, and labor retrenchment, the 1870s were at once humiliating and ignominious years for the San Francisco labor movement.⁴ After the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, San Francisco was flooded with cheap goods and labor from the Eastern states, undermining local industries and dramatically increasing unemployment. As the only major metropolis in the state, San Francisco was the center to which displaced and increasingly desperate workers were inevitably drawn. The nationwide depression of 1873 and 1874 only accelerated the flow of immigration to San Francisco, where the job market was too small to absorb the influx of unskilled labor. A series of stock market panics in California in 1874 and 1875 anticipated the financial crash of 1877, when the value of the Consolidated Virginia Mines' shares dramatically collapsed. Coming directly on the heels of a terrible and ill-timed drought, the crash precipitated the worst depression the young state of California had yet experienced. The effects of the depression were perhaps most keenly felt in San Francisco, where the unemployed underclass swelled—and seethed. California labor historian Alexander Saxton estimates

⁴ For an account of the depression of the 1870s and its impact on labor, see Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California*, chapter 5. This brief history of the depression years is drawn from Cross' work, unless otherwise indicated.

that the unemployment rate in San Francisco in 1877 was between 20 and 25 percent.⁵ By the late 1870s, the weight of the unemployment crisis was too great for the city's already weakened economic, political, and social institutions to bear.

The financial crises that shook the local, regional, and national economy in the 1870s did not leave the San Francisco labor movement unscathed: trades unions foundered, while rabid sinophobia consumed the political energies of the white working class. In the 1860s, San Francisco workers had benefited from the geographic isolation, financial growth, and relative prosperity of their city and state, organizing trades unions and securing higher wages and shorter workdays.⁶ These gains evaporated in the 1870s, as large labor surpluses gave employers the upper hand to dictate wages and working conditions. As banks, mining companies, and farms collapsed, so did most of the labor unions that had been organized in the preceding decades. In their place rose the anti-Chinese clubs of the late 1870s, the most of notorious of which was the Workingmen's Party of California (WPC) led by the demagogic Denis Kearney.⁷ The combustible mix of widespread unemployment, populist anger, and anti-Chinese animus exploded in the sandlot riots of July 1877, which reached such a high pitch of violence that a number of Chinese San Franciscans were murdered. Two years later, Isaac S. Kallloch was elected mayor of San Francisco on the WPC ticket, as the Workingmen's Party achieved major electoral and legislative victories throughout the state. Although the WPC imploded soon

⁵ Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 106.

⁶ See Ira Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California*, chapter 4.

⁷ See Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, for a complete history of the anti-Chinese movement in California.

thereafter, its impressive, albeit temporary, success provided an important early lesson in labor politics for the next generation of labor leaders.

For San Francisco's white workers, collective memories of the high wages and social mobility of the Gold Rush period contrasted bitterly with the depression of the 1870s and the forces of mechanization, deskilling, and consolidation it accelerated. While these memories were inseparable from the Edenic mythologizing—whether of California or the early republic—that characterized white working-class ideology in general, the sense of loss they represented was founded in genuine and growing disparities. Echoing *Progress and Poverty*, the editor of *Truth* thus lamented the corruption of the new state, whose utopian promise had already been broken by land monopoly:

Though California is a young State; though she is a poor State, and though a few years ago she was a State in which there was less class distinction than any state in the Union, she can already boast an aristocracy based on the surest foundation—that of land ownership.⁸

By 1880, nearly 45 percent of San Franciscans were foreign born; of those who were native Americans, many had immigrated to California from other states.⁹ As Alexander Saxton has astutely observed, the economic and social traumas of the 1870s recapitulated the experience of displacement that most San Franciscans had already suffered as immigrants.¹⁰ Similarly, working-class disillusionment in the California dream echoed and intensified the sense shared by wage earners across the country that the democratic

⁸ “Monopoly,” *Truth*, April 21, 1883.

⁹ Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Social Statistics of the Cities*, compiled by George E. Waring, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887).

¹⁰ Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 16.

promise of the early republic had been betrayed by the twin forces of industrialization and monopoly.

The year 1881 marked the beginning of a halting economic recovery in San Francisco and California, which, stumbling between the years 1883 and 1885, rebounded confidently in 1886 and 1887.¹¹ Quickly taking advantage of improved economic conditions, labor activists in San Francisco began organizing workers in the building, manufacturing, maritime, metal, printing, and service industries. Launched by the San Francisco Trades Assembly in the first years of the decade, this campaign was sustained and carried forward by the Knights of Labor, IWA, and other federated labor organizations. For San Francisco workers, the 1880s brought wage increases, shorter workdays, and, inevitably, the bitter industrial conflicts through which these gains were won. In an 1890 article that appeared in the San Francisco *Examiner*, nineteen major labor unions were listed that had been organized in San Francisco in the 1880s, including the Coast Seamen's Union (1885), United Brewery Workers (1886), American Bakers Union (1887), and Carpenters and Joiners (1889).¹² The article omitted mention of the seven local assemblies of the Knights of Labor that had been organized in the same decade,¹³ as well as numerous small trade unions and what was perhaps the most significant labor organization of the 1880s, the IWA. In contrast, only three of the unions listed in the *Examiner* article had been organized in the 1850s or 1860s—the San

¹¹ See Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California*, chapters 8 and 9.

¹² *Examiner*, September 1, 1890, container 5, folder 7, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes, 1815–1960.

¹³ *Addresses of District and Local Assemblies*, vol. 1, Knights of Labor Records, 1886–1892.

Francisco Typographical Union, the Journeymen Shipwrights, and the Plasterers—representing the few lucky survivors of the depression years.¹⁴ In a sense, the San Francisco labor movement of the 1880s had been born anew from the ashes of the preceding decade.

The economic recovery of the 1880s, coupled with the successful organizational campaigns of the Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, IWA, Coast Seamen’s Union, and other labor organizations, dramatically improved the labor outlook in San Francisco and the state. Nonetheless, the depression of the 1870s had long-term industrial, political, and symbolic effects, accelerating the processes of mechanization, deskilling, and consolidation, reinforcing class identities, and solidifying the white working-class political bloc in California around the common cause of Chinese exclusion.¹⁵ The economic collapse of the ‘70s—and subsequent, if less severe, downturns—demonstrated that workers, even in the “exceptional” state of California,¹⁶ were dangerously vulnerable to the displacements of industrialization and the fluctuations of the capitalist market. San Francisco labor activists understood their organizational efforts as a critique of—and act of resistance against—the new industrial reality in California. Proposed by J. H. Thorner and Alfred Reed of the Coast Seamen’s Union, the following resolution of the 1885 labor convention posed a challenge to dehumanizing effects of industrial capitalism:

WHEREAS, The continued invention of machinery, the monopolization of

¹⁴ *Examiner*, September 1, 1890, container 5, folder 7, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

¹⁵ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*; Tygiell, “Workingmen in San Francisco;” Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*; and Thomas, *Alternative America*.

¹⁶ In his *California: The Great Exception*, Carey McWilliams famously argued that California history, including the history of the state’s labor movement, was exceptional.

natural resources, competition, and the concentration of capital are fast reducing the working classes to absolute slavery;
RESOLVED, That it is imperative that every branch of wage workers be organized and that when so organized the work of agitation, organization, federation, and education be unceasingly pursued.¹⁷

The prosperity of the 1880s failed to dispel the specter of unemployment and the grotesquerie of unchecked wealth, respectively figured as the tramp and the millionaire in the labor press.¹⁸ In fact, joblessness remained widespread in San Francisco until 1887.¹⁹ Even after 1887, the humiliating experience of unemployment continued to loom in working-class consciousness; emblematically, “An Old Salt,” a regular contributor to the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, invoked a swarm of tramps to illustrate the degradation into which labor had sunk in his lifetime:

When the slaves of Rome revolted under the leadership of Spartacus, they had no cause of complaint comparable with the wrongs of the starving and tramping millions of beggars in our country, where, within memory of many now living, and of whom the writer is one, there were none.²⁰

Despite the tangible economic gains of the 1880s, many working-class San Franciscans like “An Old Salt” continued to suffer from a profound sense of homelessness.

Throughout the 1880s, the cruel realities of displacement, exploitation, and unemployment belied the economic recovery on which labor’s successes crucially and ironically depended. As the Trades Assembly, IWA, Knights of Labor, and other labor organizations revived and spread unionism among San Francisco workers, their members

¹⁷ “The Labor Convention,” *Morning Call*, March 19, 1885, Personal Reminiscences and Memoranda of Burnette G. Haskell, carton 1, Haskell Family Papers.

¹⁸ See Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, for a lucid analysis of the figure of the tramp in the late nineteenth-century working-class imagination.

¹⁹ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, 151.

²⁰ An Old Salt, “The Federated Trades,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, May 9, 1888.

began to mount a critique of the emerging industrial order in which modern class identities were solidified. This critique was at the heart of the cultural and educational efforts of the labor organizations of the 1880s, providing a discursive framework for the labor literature and newspapers of the period. In the pages that follow, the cultural and educational project of the Trades Assembly, IWA, Knights of Labor, and Coast Seamen's Union will be drawn in greater detail, illustrating the extent to which education, agitation, and organization overlapped in these critical years of the San Francisco labor movement.

The Trades Assembly, 1878–1884

Founded in 1878 by organizers from the tailors' and printers' unions of San Francisco, the Representative Assembly of Trades and Labor Unions, or Trades Assembly, was the first trades union federation of major importance on the West Coast.²¹ Thanks largely to the efforts of the socialists who steered the assembly's course from 1881 to 1884, unionism experienced a major and lasting revival in San Francisco and the state. In addition to its concrete organizational accomplishments, the Trades Assembly introduced the surprising and potent combination of intellectual commitment, ideological diversity, and practical cooperation that characterized the San Francisco labor movement in subsequent years, serving, in the words of Alexander Saxton, as "a kind of socialist academy in trade unionism" for a generation of labor leaders.²² Included in the assembly's ranks were socialists S. Robert Wilson, Thomas F. Hagerty, and Charles F. Burgman, all of whom would become founding members of the International Workmen's

²¹ See Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement*, chapter 8, for a good introduction to the San Francisco Trades Assembly.

²² Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 164.

Association despite their initial hostility to the IWA's organizer, Burnette G. Haskell.²³ In fact, Trades Assembly president Frank Roney was the first to recognize Haskell's eccentric talent, encouraging the young editor to dedicate his newspaper *Truth* to the interests of labor.

The Trades Assembly made little progress during the first three years of its existence, until Irish socialist Frank Roney joined as a delegate of the Seamen's Protective Association in 1881.²⁴ (Foreshadowing the IWA's successful campaign to unionize San Francisco sailors four years later, socialists Roney, J. P. Devereux, S. Robert Wilson, A. J. Starkweather, and T. F. Hagerty organized the short-lived Seamen's Protective Association in 1881.)²⁵ Under Roney's leadership, the Trades Assembly made swift and certain strides towards unionizing San Francisco's white workforce; Ira Cross estimates that twenty-four trades were organized by the assembly between 1882 and 1883.²⁶ Moreover, members of the Trades Assembly would go on to found other influential labor organizations throughout the decade.

Despite these extraordinary feats of organization, Roney wrote that "spreading socialist propaganda" with his friends gave him the most "genuine pleasure" of his career.²⁷ Tellingly, he nested his presidency of the Trades Assembly, not between organizing campaigns, strikes, or political actions, but between two publishing events of seemingly modest significance:

²³ Frank Roney, *Frank Roney: Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1931), 388–89.

²⁴ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, 132.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 325.

²⁷ Roney, *Frank Roney*, 318.

When I became president of the Trades Assembly I wrote an earnest appeal to the laboring people of San Francisco to organize unions, which appeal, I believe, from its wide and judicious circulation did much to help in that way. Like other documents of similar character nothing remains of it but a memory. After I had completed my term as president, I wrote another appeal in the form of a report which was printed in the *Call*, the only local paper which gave the people accurate reports without exacting promises of reciprocal benefit.²⁸

As this passage from his autobiography suggests, Roney took seriously the power of the printed word, harnessing mainstream and independent media to spread the principles of unionism and socialism among San Francisco's workers. For Roney, print culture had a baldly instrumental use—to convey “such matter as would be advantageous to our organizations”²⁹—which in no way detracted from its deeper educational purpose. Most basically, he saw the Trades Assembly as an *educated* body of laborers who would represent, organize, enlighten, and uplift the working people of San Francisco:

I regard the existence of an intelligent and honorable body of representative laborers like this [the Trades Assembly] as of the greatest importance to the interests and continued well-being of the working community of a municipality so great in population as this. I hold the opinion that this body should occupy the position of progressive instruction in social economics to all our fellow laborers whether represented here or not.³⁰

In an 1882 address to the Trades Assembly, representative Charles F. Burgman, manager of *Truth* and future member of the IWA, similarly emphasized the importance of education in the economic and political emancipation of the American people:

All efforts should be concentrated toward a proper education of the masses, the establishment of labor literature, of labor lyceums, and of joint meeting places, in order to produce a more beneficial social intercourse. Capital guides the intellect of its offspring to oppress the masses. Why cannot labor itself direct the education

²⁸ Ibid, 352.

²⁹ Ibid, 387.

³⁰ “Report of President of Trades Assembly for term ending January 31st, 1882,” box 1, folder 16, Frank Roney Papers, 1870–1917.

of future generations, and prepare them for their complete emancipation?³¹

As these passages suggest, the Trades Assembly was indeed a “socialist academy,” not merely *post facto*, but originally, as it was conceived by its activist members. While remarkable today, Roney and Burgman’s appreciation of the Trades Assembly’s fundamentally educational purpose was not unusual in the overlapping contexts of Gilded Age labor culture and nineteenth-century attitudes towards education. As American economist and professor Richard T. Ely wrote in 1886:

To-day the labor organizations of America are playing a role in the history of civilization, the importance of which can be scarcely overestimated; for they are among the foremost of our educational agencies, ranking next to our churches and public schools in their influence upon the culture of the masses.³²

Like other cultural authorities of his day, Ely identified education as essential to the economic, social, and moral uplift of the masses. However, he departed from his genteel colleagues when he argued that the labor union itself was a vital instrument of working-class improvement, echoing the sentiments of Gilded Age labor leaders. Certainly, his words in defense of the educational character of labor organizations could have been uttered by the Trades Assembly’s socialist leaders.³³

To further the Trades Assembly’s educational mission, Roney initiated a number of cultural and educational projects that would be replicated by subsequent labor organizations with more lasting success. These efforts included the establishment of a

³¹ “Labor,” *Truth*, August 30, 1882.

³² Richard T. Ely, *The Labor Movement in America* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1886), 120.

³³ In fact, Ely’s work achieved popularity in San Francisco labor circles: his books were reviewed and excerpted in *Truth*, and his *French and German Socialism in Modern Times* sold at the newspaper’s offices.

committee of statistics (on which Charles F. Burgman served) to gather and publish information on Chinese labor; the recruitment of *Truth* as the Trades Assembly's official newspaper; and an aborted project to establish a central, cooperatively owned labor hall, or "headquarters of united labor for mental, physical, moral, social and political improvement," complete with "library, reading, bathing, and gymnasium rooms."³⁴ Additionally, the Trades Assembly introduced bills to the state legislature calling for the establishment of a California bureau of labor statistics and the dissemination of state-issued textbooks for schoolchildren.³⁵ Following the Trades Assembly's lead, the San Francisco Labor Council and Building Trades Council, powerful central labor federations established in 1892 and 1896, respectively, invested heavily in labor's cultural heritage, founding statistical bureaus, newspapers, libraries, reading rooms, and labor temples symbolic of working-class political, intellectual, and cultural solidarity in the Progressive Era.

Of particular importance for this study—and the cultural trajectory of the San Francisco labor movement—were Roney's efforts to launch an independent labor newspaper to publish sympathetic news of local, regional, and national labor organizations; spread the principles of unionism and socialism; and instill a sense of common identity and purpose in the working people of San Francisco. Although labor newspapers were not unfamiliar in San Francisco, publications such as the *Compositor*, *Daily Plebian*, *Industrial Reformer*, *South San Francisco Enterprise*, *Cooperator*, and

³⁴ "Report of Executive Committee on a Project for the Establishment of a Hall Association By the Assembly of Trades and Labor Unions," [ca. 1882], box 1, folder 16, Frank Roney Papers.

³⁵ "Trades Assembly," *Truth*, January 10, 1883.

Workingmen's Journal had failed to survive in the city's competitive newspaper market.³⁶ As Roney related in his autobiography:

I had long felt the need of a labor paper which we might call our own. It was an enormous tax upon my energy to write reports of meetings each night of their occurrence and then visit the newspaper offices, before going home to sleep for a few hours. It was even harder for me to see what I most desired to have published eliminated or so emasculated as to be of no value.³⁷

When a young lawyer for the Republican State Central Committee, Burnette G. Haskell, offered to dedicate his new weekly newspaper to the cause of labor, Roney convinced a hostile audience of Trades Assembly delegates—and future IWA members—to give Haskell an opportunity to redeem his disreputable past, eventually securing *Truth* as the official organ of the Trades Assembly. Roney's decision had profound consequences for the labor movement—and radical print culture—in San Francisco and throughout the entire West Coast. In addition to harnessing Haskell's extraordinary energies in the service of the labor movement, it served as a precedent for later labor organizations, including the Coast Seamen's Union, Building Trades Council, and San Francisco Labor Council, all of which established important, intelligent, and enduring labor journals within the next two decades.³⁸

³⁶ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*; and "San Francisco Typographical Union, No. 21: An Organization That Has Buildec and Is Building," *Labor Clarion*, September 4, 1908, reel 1, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

³⁷ Roney, *Frank Roney*, 387.

³⁸ The Coast Seamen's Union established the *Coast Seamen's Journal* in 1887; the Building Trades Council established *Organized Labor* in 1900; and the San Francisco Labor Council established the *Labor Clarion* in 1902.

The Knights of Labor, 1882–1888

Although the Knights of Labor played an indispensable role in the labor revival of the 1880s, relatively little is known about their organizational, cultural, and educational efforts in San Francisco. Records of the San Francisco Knights are scant, consisting of a small, artificial collection of ephemera and minutes gathered by Ira Cross, now at the Bancroft Library, and references to the Knights gleaned from other sources, including *Truth* and Anna Haskell's diary.³⁹ Nonetheless, the history of the Knights in San Francisco is important, complex, and surprising, especially in light of the order's influence on the city's burgeoning labor culture. More than any other national labor organization of the Gilded Age, the Knights were passionately committed to working-class education, building, in Robert Weir's words, "a public, literary culture with universalist pretensions in the hope that solidarity would effect social transformation."⁴⁰ In San Francisco and across the country, the Knights were engaged in a great redemptive project to restore and reinvent the ideals of the early republic through the twin instruments of organization and education, inspiring a mass intellectual movement for which labor served as the central question, ethico-political standard, and muse. Although a contributor to the *Coast Seamen's Journal* remarked that the Knights were "dead and will soon be buried" in 1888,⁴¹ their contributions to working-class intellectual culture in San Francisco were lasting and significant, reflected not only in the establishment and

³⁹ As far as I can determine, no labor historian has consulted Anna Haskell's diary for information about the San Francisco Knights, although she served variously as Master Workman and Worthy Foreman of Local Assembly 2999.

⁴⁰ Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil*, xviii.

⁴¹ An Old Salt, "The Federated Trades," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, May 2, 1888.

proliferation of labor newspapers, libraries, and lyceums, but in a paradoxical spirit of thought, at once conservative and radical, backward-looking and modern.⁴²

Established in 1869, the Holy and Noble Order of the Knights of Labor was a proto-industrial union of “a fraternal and educational character” open to workers across trade, gender, and class lines.⁴³ Asian Americans were excluded from membership, as were bankers, stockbrokers, barkeepers, gamblers, and lawyers (with the notable exception of Burnette G. Haskell).⁴⁴ Founded in Philadelphia, the Knights did not extend their reach to California until 1878, organizing District Assembly 53, composed of eight local assemblies, in San Francisco on September 3, 1882.⁴⁵ In his autobiography, Frank Roney attributed revolutionary aims to California’s founding Knights, but little evidence remains of their early history, due, in part, to the national organization’s policy of secrecy, which was not abandoned until 1881. An advertisement in the September 20, 1882, edition of *Truth* announced that there were 3,000 members of the Knights in San Francisco alone; according to Haskell, these numbers swelled to 5,000 by April of the same year.⁴⁶ After winning a major strike against railroad magnate Jay Gould in 1885, the Knights experienced spectacular growth across the country, San Francisco included.⁴⁷

⁴² A similar observation was made by Frederick Engels when he described the Knights as “a truly American paradox, clothing the most stubborn tendencies in the most medieval mummeries, and hiding the most democratic and even rebellious spirit behind an apparent, but really powerless despotism.” Kenneth Lapides, ed., *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions*, New York: Praeger, 1987, p. 141.

⁴³ E. C. Tully and W. B. Bailey, “Thoughts on Education,” *Truth*, October 1884.

⁴⁴ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, chapter 9.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ “The Knights,” *Truth*, April 15, 1882. The reader should bear in mind that these numbers may have been exaggerated.

⁴⁷ Weir, *Beyond Labor’s Veil*.

The following year, labor and populist third parties secured electoral victories in municipal races across the country, sustained by the Knights and the new spirit of working-class solidarity they inspired. In San Francisco, the Knights—and one of their local organizers, Burnette G. Haskell—backed the fledgling Labor Party, which nominated an unusually literary ticket, with William H. Hinton, union printer and former partner of Henry George, for mayor; Frederic B. Perkins, member of the Knights of Labor and librarian of the San Francisco Free Public Library, for assessor; and Frank Roney, former Trades Assembly president and Master Workman of Local Assembly 1390, for superintendent of streets.⁴⁸ As in the rest of the country, the San Francisco Knights' direct influence declined dramatically in the late 1880s, but the organizational victories, educational accomplishments, and intellectual spirit that marked their brief heyday had enduring significance.

As an entrée into the educational worldview of the San Francisco Knights, one might consider the unusual career of librarian Frederic Beecher Perkins. To students of the library movement in San Francisco, Perkins's membership in the Knights of Labor and nomination on the Labor Party ticket should come as a surprise. A member of the famed Beecher family,⁴⁹ Perkins was perhaps best known in San Francisco for his domineering administration of the public library, during which he purged “unclean”

⁴⁸ “The Labor Party's Platform,” *The Weekly Star*, [ca. 1886], container 5, folder 6, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes; “The New Labor Party,” *Daily Alta California*, September 28, 1886; and “Burnette G. Haskell's Record,” July 30, 1894, box 3, Haskell Family Papers.

⁴⁹ Perkins's uncle, Henry Ward Beecher, was a *persona non grata* in San Francisco labor circles for his social Darwinist and anti-exclusionist views. See Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 133–35.

books, including *Jack Sheppard*, *The History of Jonathan Wild the Great*, and some of Zola's novels, from the library's shelves.⁵⁰ (Indeed, an editorial in *Truth* attacked Perkins for restricting access to the library's catalog.)⁵¹ Yet, Perkins's labor sympathies make sense in the light of the Knights' philosophy of social transformation, which elevated education and its necessary precondition, leisure, as values of the first order:

The ultimate object of the order is the creation of a new state of society . . . The means taken to accomplish this is more the shortening of hours than the increase of wages. An hour a day less work means an hour a day for recreation and improvement to the workingmen.⁵²

The Knights sought the radical end of social, political, and economic revolution through the conservative means of education, which may explain the organization's ostensibly paradoxical character and wide appeal. In a fictitious dialogue between a worker and a Knight that appeared in *Truth*, the Knight asserts: "We believe that if the masses are educated up to a proper and humane standard that this will secure good government with all its blessings."⁵³ Like the public librarians and other reformers of the Gilded Age, the Knights identified education as the solution to the labor problem, although their analysis of the *causes* of poverty, degradation, and social unrest was fundamentally different—and distinctly working-class. For Perkins, the mission of the labor movement, as envisioned by the Knights, and that of the public library movement—"to help solve the

⁵⁰ Delia Haverland, "Frederic Beecher Perkins," *Pacific Bindery Talk* 8 (1935): 19–22; and F. B. Perkins, *Free Libraries and Unclean Books* (San Francisco: San Francisco Free Public Library, 1885).

⁵¹ *Truth*, "The Free Library," August 16, 1882.

⁵² "The Knights," *Truth*, April 15, 1882.

⁵³ "A Dialogue," *Truth*, October 18, 1882.

problem of urban and industrial America by a proper instruction of the masses”⁵⁴—were not only compatible, but part of the same reformist vision. Thus, a commitment to education linked the San Francisco labor movement of the 1880s, particularly the Knights, to many of the bourgeois reformist movements of the Gilded Age. As chapter 3 will demonstrate, this shared commitment was reflected in organized labor’s efforts to promote serious and improving reading among the working classes.

While it is impossible to reconstruct a comprehensive history of the Knights’ educational and cultural efforts in San Francisco, *Truth*, Anna Haskell’s diary, and other sources provide a glimpse into the intellectual world of the Knights, especially as it was experienced and constructed by the order’s radical wing. While Alexander Saxton observes that “Haskell devoted his columns to the service of the Knights with impartial enthusiasm,” the Haskells’ involvement in the San Francisco Knights, as organizers and educators, remains unexplored.⁵⁵ Haskell indeed endorsed the Knights in the pages of *Truth*, claiming that “no journal in California except TRUTH dares publish news about the Knights of Labor, for fear of monopoly’s whip,”⁵⁶ but his enthusiasm was hardly impartial; according to his wife’s diary, Haskell organized the Progressive Assembly of the San Francisco Knights in 1884 as a mixed assembly for local radicals committed to working-class education and print culture.⁵⁷ At least two members of the assembly founded and edited radical journals, Haskell himself and Master Workman M.

⁵⁴ Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*, 42.

⁵⁵ Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, 165.

⁵⁶ “Sir Knights,” *Truth*, August 9, 1882.

⁵⁷ Diary of Anna Haskell, December 5, 1884, vol. 9, Haskell Family Papers.

Wahrhaftig, who used Haskell's press to print his *Nihilist*, an anarchist magazine.⁵⁸ Anna Haskell, who served variously as Master Workman and Worthy Foreman of the Progressive Assembly, worked indefatigably for *Truth* as a typesetter, copier, and occasional contributor. The deep involvement of radicals like the Haskell family in the San Francisco Knights suggests that the local KOL was not as uniformly conservative as California labor historians, beginning with Ira Cross, have suggested.

Haskell believed that "the work of the Knights of Labor ought to be strictly confined to education of the working people";⁵⁹ at the same time, he argued that "the work of peaceful education and revolutionary conspiracy well can and ought to run in parallel lines."⁶⁰ Following Haskell's logic, the Progressive Assembly of the Knights of Labor might be seen as the educational complement of the revolutionary IWA. As such, it held open, bi-monthly educational meetings on a wide range of social, political, and philosophical questions, including "Is modern government social anarchy?" and "the future of the American woman."⁶¹ At a large memorial meeting for labor activist A. J. Starkweather, literary effusions, including orations in English and German, poetic recitations, and over half a dozen speeches, were a critical part of the Knightly spectacle, suggesting the importance of the literary voice to the intellectual and emotional life of San Francisco's radical Knights. While it might seem incongruous for a man of Haskell's revolutionary enthusiasms to wholeheartedly endorse and actively participate in

⁵⁸ Diary of Anna Haskell, March 13, 1885, reel 1, Haskell Family Papers.

⁵⁹ *Truth*, January 5, 1884.

⁶⁰ "The I.W.A.," *Truth*, September 15, 1883.

⁶¹ *Truth*, August 1884; and Diary of Anna Haskell, July 27, 1885, reel 1, Haskell Family Papers.

the literary and educational work of the KOL, the Knights' faith in the transformative power of education—and critique of industrial society—were shared by reformers and revolutionaries across a broad political spectrum, defining a patchwork oppositional culture in Gilded Age San Francisco and the nation as a whole.

The International Workmen's Association, 1882–1887

Despite its brief career and relatively small membership, the International Workmen's Association (IWA), founded by Burnette G. Haskell in San Francisco in 1882, had a lasting impact on the labor movement and radical intellectual tradition of the western United States, organizing dozens of unions in California, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, and even Hawaii.⁶² According to Haskell, the IWA grew out of the Invisible Republic, an “educational group” of like-minded radicals formed by himself in 1882 to “investigate basic principles.”⁶³ After a brief interlude as the Illuminati, this group was reorganized into the first Division Executive of the IWA, consisting of nine members, Burnette G. Haskell, A. J. Starkweather, S. R. Wilson, Thomas F. Hagerty, Thos Poyser, C. F. Burgman, J. H. Redstone, Chas Moore, and, after the first meeting, Sigismund Danielewicz.⁶⁴ Other prominent radicals soon joined the IWA, including W. C. Owen, P. Ross Martin, Alfred Fuhrman, and Xaver Leder, all of whom will be discussed in this

⁶² Although the IWA is referred to as the International *Workingmen's* Association in most secondary sources, including Cross' *History of the Labor Movement in California*, it will be called the International *Workmen's* Association in this study, as it was in *Truth* and on IWA membership cards.

⁶³ S.F. Central Committee Minute Book, 1884–1886, folder 7, International Workingmen's Association Records, 1882–1887.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

study.⁶⁵ As this chapter has shown, many of these radicals had been active in the Trades Assembly and Knights of Labor. In the years that followed, IWA activists would make decisive and disproportionate contributions to the San Francisco labor movement as union organizers and radical intellectuals.

The IWA's most stunning and significant accomplishment was the organization of the Coast Seamen's Union in 1885, which secured for the San Francisco labor movement a powerful foothold in the maritime affairs of the entire Pacific Coast for many decades to come. Yet, like the Trades Assembly and local Knights of Labor locals in which many of the IWA's members first studied labor organizing, the IWA was primarily concerned with the education of the working classes, which Haskell exalted as "the first and only duty" of all labor organizations whatever their ideological affiliations.⁶⁶ This commitment to education was reflected not only in the IWA's published statements, but also in the prosaic activities of its exceptionally literary members. Moreover, the ideological diversity of the IWA and its educational program presented new intellectual possibilities for the San Francisco labor movement, inspiring a rich, polyphonic, and sometimes contradictory discourse that flourished in the labor press of the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries.

Although its membership remained secret, the Division Executive of the IWA published the organization's statutes in the May 19, 1883, edition of *Truth*, which variously and simultaneously served as the organ of the Trades Assembly, Knights of

⁶⁵ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, 165; and the diary of Anna Haskell, Haskell Family Papers.

⁶⁶ "Unity," *Truth*, December 8, 1883.

Labor, and International Workmen's Association. This document begins with an invocation of the IWA's educational *raison d'être*: "For educational purposes; to aid the organization of the producing classes; to enroll our adherents and to ascertain their belief and opinions upon the various phases of the labor question, a division of the International has been established upon the Pacific Coast."⁶⁷ (It is worth noting the IWA's emphasis on gathering, rather than dictating, opinions on the labor question.) Unsurprisingly then, the nineteen "especial declared objects" of the IWA, as published in the May 19 edition of *Truth*, revolve around the themes of working-class education, print culture, and information gathering:

1. To print and publish proper literature.
2. To hold mass-meetings.
3. To systematize agitation.
4. To establish a labor library.
5. To establish a labor hall.
6. To establish a lyceum for discussion of labor topics.
7. To maintain the labor Press.
8. To protect members from wrongs.
9. To protect all other producers from wrongs.
10. To aid and assist all labor organizations.
11. To aid the establishment of unity and the maintenance of fraternity, between all labor organizations.
12. To aid and assist an alliance between the industrial and agricultural producers.
13. To encourage the spirit of brotherhood and inter-dependence among all producers of every state and land.
14. To circulate proper literature.
15. To educate each other by group meeting and discussion.
16. To ascertain, aggregate, classify and study our enemies, their habits and acts.
17. To secure information of the wrongs perpetrated against us and to record and circulate the same.
18. To arouse and maintain a spirit of hostility to and social warfare against, and ostracism of the capitalistic Press.
19. To prepare the way for the direction of the coming social revolution by an enlightened and intelligent public thought educated into a knowledge of the

⁶⁷ "Now, Act!," *Truth*, May 19, 1883.

wrongs perpetrated against the producers of the world, and knowing the way to secure their death—beyond resurrection.

As these objectives show, IWA leaders sought to build an “imagined community” of producers by fostering a self-consciously working-class intellectual culture through the instruments of education and print culture. While the IWA is better known for its organizational successes and revolutionary rhetoric, IWA minutes and other records suggest that members devoted much of their time to translating, publishing, and distributing labor literature. According to the *Western Watchman*, A. J. Starkweather was responsible for distributing over 50,000 pamphlets on the streets of San Francisco before succumbing to chronic tuberculosis, which he had contracted in the mines, while *Truth* claimed that the Central Committee of the IWA circulated over 10,000 radical circulars in a single month.⁶⁸ IWA members took their propagandistic work seriously; in the elaborately titled “Circular No. 8—Series B., 1883,” Haskell boasted that a successful letter campaign prevailing upon Lovell & Co. to publish an English translation of Stepniak’s *Underground Russia* was a “secret but most significant victory for the Association.”⁶⁹ These words echo the pride and pleasure Roney took in the propaganda campaigns of the Trades Assembly.

IWA members not only published and distributed radical texts, they also wrote them. Starkweather and S.R. Wilson, for example, collaborated on *Socialism; Evolution or Revolution*—“That Bold, Burning, Brilliant, and Blistering California Handbook of

⁶⁸ “Death of a Hero,” *Western Watchman*, December 13, 1884, Personal Reminiscences and Memoranda of Burnette G. Haskell, carton 1, Haskell Family Papers; and *Truth*, October 1884.

⁶⁹ “Circular No. 8—Series B., 1883,” folder 2, International Workingmen’s Association Records.

Justice”⁷⁰—published by Lovell & Co., to which Haskell contributed the preface.⁷¹ Simeon Stetson wrote *The People’s Power or How to Wield the Ballot*, a political tract that advocated electoral reform and non-violent revolution through the use of the ballot, and, according to *Truth*, “enjoyed a large sale among the working people.”⁷² Of course, Haskell, Burgman, Danielewicz, and others wrote extensively for *Truth* in various capacities, as polemicists, reporters, reviewers, and correspondents. And, after *Truth* collapsed, the IWA continued to play an active role in the city’s newspaper culture, appointing members to contribute “socialistic articles” to the *Call*, *Chronicle*, *Examiner*, *Post*, *Daily Report*, *Argonaut*, *Alta*, *Star*, and German newspapers.⁷³

In addition to supporting these propagandistic efforts, the IWA developed a formal “course of education” for its members.⁷⁴ According to *Truth*, each group of nine members served as a class and discussion group, for which the IWA assigned and supplied textbooks. Reflecting the San Francisco labor movement’s heterogeneous influences, the IWA syllabus comprised native texts by Starkweather, Wilson, and Stetson, along with selected works of Ferdinand Lasalle, Karl Marx, Stepniak, and Henry George.⁷⁵ Radical education was oral as well as textual: the IWA’s Committee on

⁷⁰ *Truth*, November and December 1884.

⁷¹ The history of New York’s Lovell & Co. is fascinating in its own right. According to Denning, in his *Mechanic Accents*, John W. Lovell published dime novels, as well as radical, socialist, and populist works. Haskell appears to have worked closely with Lovell & Co. in his effort to increase access to radical literature in the United States.

⁷² “A New Book,” *Truth*, June 30, 1883.

⁷³ S.F. Central Committee Minute Book, 1884–1886, folder 7, International Workingmen’s Association Records.

⁷⁴ “Circular No. 8—Series B., 1883,” folder 2, International Workingmen’s Association Records.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Agitation, led by Danielewicz, organized open discussion meetings on topics such as “The Labor Convention,” “latest notable events in the Labor Movement,” and “Legislation and Revolution,” which were so popular that a larger hall had to be rented.⁷⁶

In March of 1886, at the height of its popularity, the IWA opened its headquarters at 116 McAllister Street, provocatively located opposite city hall. The new headquarters included a labor library, collected and maintained by IWA librarian E. D. McKenley.⁷⁷ While the holdings of this library remain obscure, it is not far-fetched to assume that they included works found on the IWA syllabus, sold at *Truth's* offices, and recommended in Haskell's extensive list of labor literature, published weekly in *Truth*. As chapter 2 will demonstrate, many of the most important radical texts of the nineteenth century, including the *Communist Manifesto*, were unavailable to general readers, especially in English translation. In the context of this absence, IWA colporteurs, the IWA library, and *Truth* itself provided English-speaking workers in San Francisco with surprisingly broad access to an otherwise inaccessible world of knowledge.

As its published statements and educational activities reveal, the IWA drew on multiple, contradictory political philosophies to craft a surprisingly inclusive discursive tradition of its own. While Chester Destler identifies the regionally specific “ideology” of the IWA as “the old American faith in natural rights . . . grafted upon the Marxist program,” it was, in fact, far more complex, drawing on the heterogeneous ideas of anarchists, communists, revolutionary socialists, social democrats, feminists, utopians,

⁷⁶ S.F. Central Committee Minute Book, folder 7, International Workingmen's Association Records.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

producerists, populists, communards, American revolutionaries, and others.⁷⁸ As chapter 2 will show, the IWA's organ, *Truth*, accommodated a Whitmanesque multiplicity of voices. (Echoing Emerson, but in a rougher, Western accent, Haskell wrote, "We never see a consistent man that we don't want to kick him.")⁷⁹ In keeping with Haskell's appreciation of plurality, the IWA advocated the coalition of all radical and labor organizations whatever their ideological differences, dismissing the antagonism between anarchism and socialism as "a difference in practical detail, too small, it seems to us, to be worth the slightest disagreement."⁸⁰ Moreover, ideological differences were tolerated within the IWA's ranks; when Danielewicz vigorously protested the association's involvement in anti-Chinese agitation, other members of the Central Committee, including Haskell, "agreed that Danielewicz should at the [labor] Convention state his views as a socialist regarding the Chinese question," although they continued to advocate the adoption of a violently anti-Chinese resolution at the labor convention of 1885.⁸¹ Despite their differences, however, IWA activists were united in their commitment to working-class education and empowerment.

While the IWA itself was short-lived, reaching the peak of its popularity in 1886 and then sputtering out as Haskell pursued other projects, its influence on the intellectual culture of the San Francisco labor movement in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era would be difficult to overestimate. This influence was especially profound in relation to

⁷⁸ Chester McA. Destler, "Shall Red and Black Unite? An American Revolutionary Document of 1883," *The Pacific Historical Review* 14 (1945): 438.

⁷⁹ *Truth*, December 20, 1882.

⁸⁰ "An Explanation," *Truth*, March 15, 1884.

⁸¹ S.F. Central Committee Minute Book, November 22, 1885, International Workingmen's Association Records.

intellectual development of the Coast Seamen's Union, arguably the most powerful—and literary—labor organization on the Pacific Coast at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Coast Seamen's Union, 1885–

Founded on a stormy night in March 1885 by Sigismund Danielewicz and fellow IWA organizers, who enlisted a few hundred sailors to join the fledgling union after delivering fiery orations on the Folsom Street wharf, the Coast Seamen's Union represented the IWA's crowning organizational success, swelling to over 2,000 members by July of the same year.⁸² While union officers were democratically elected, the *de facto* leadership of the Coast Seamen's Union, until 1887, resided in an “advisory committee” whose members belonged to and were appointed by the IWA. (The first five members of this committee were Sigismund Danielewicz, P. Ross Martin, J. J. Martin, Martin Schneider, and, unsurprisingly, Burnette G. Haskell.)⁸³ By 1889—and despite the total failure of the seamen's first strike three years earlier—the *Morning Call* was congratulating the union of nearly 5,000 sailors on its swift ascent to regional importance: “Of the numerous labor organizations represented in the Federated Trades Council of the Pacific Coast, the Coast Seamen's Union, by virtue of its large membership and its complete ramification of the entire Pacific Coast, probably stands first and foremost.”⁸⁴ Members of the Coast Seamen's continued to play a disproportionately important role in the San Francisco labor movement well into the twentieth century.

⁸² Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California, 168-69*.

⁸³ Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California*, 168.

⁸⁴ “Our Seamen,” *The Morning Call*, February 17, 1889.

The Coast Seamen's Union's dramatic beginnings and stunning ascent fit well within the overarching narrative of its history and purpose, as crafted by the sailor-intellectuals who edited and contributed to the *Coast Seamen's Journal*:

The seafaring class is the most important factor in the development of the commerce of the world. There is no reason why its constituents, aided by the advantages of culture and education, and by the nature of their calling, should not become the heralds of the world's progress.⁸⁵

The Coast Seamen's Union's sense of historic calling may be attributed, in part, to its intimate early association with the IWA. Like the IWA—and the Knights of Labor and Trades Assembly before it—the sailors' union was envisioned as an *educational* and *moral* body of workers. As the *Coast Seamen's Journal* explained, “It has been, we think, quite generally realized that the organization of the seamen has been effected for the purpose of elevating the material, moral, and intellectual welfare of the craft . . .”⁸⁶ The purpose of the union, then, was not merely an improvement in conditions and wages, but the elevation of the sailor to his true place at the helm of history. (Because he was literally landless, the sailor served as a poignant and convincing representative for displaced workers everywhere.) Education, signified by the figure of reading, would be the instrument of the sailor's uplift—and, therefore, of the “world's progress.”

Like the Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, and IWA, the Coast Seamen's Union made major contributions to working-class education and print culture in San Francisco, printing and distributing radical literature, establishing a labor newspaper, and building a union hall within the first four years of its existence. With his boundless

⁸⁵ *Coast Seamen's Journal*, October 31, 1888.

⁸⁶ “Vol. II,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, October 31, 1888.

energy, Haskell was closely involved in the union's early affairs, including its educational efforts, serving on the IWA advisory committee and as the union's treasurer. According to the treasurer's ledger of the Coast Seamen's Union, kept by Haskell, the sailors had 100,000 circulars printed in a single month, in a city with a population of 235,959.⁸⁷ Between 1885 and 1887, the sailors devoted slightly more than 10 percent of union expenditures to the printing and purchasing of literature.⁸⁸ (In 1887, the union assigned two committees to investigate Haskell's printing bills; Anna Haskell suspected that former IWA member Alfred Fuhrman instigated the investigation "in the interest of his own [printing] office."⁸⁹ Whether or not Haskell was dishonest in his capacity as treasurer of the Coast Seamen's Union, it is interesting to note that a dispute over printing precipitated his fall from grace.) In the propagandistic profligacy of its early years, the Coast Seamen's Journal carried on the tradition of the IWA, strewing circulars, pamphlets, and other printed literature throughout San Francisco.

The union's most important educational and literary achievement was the establishment of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, a weekly newspaper produced exclusively by sailors, on November 2, 1887. Again, the IWA exerted a shadowy but powerful influence on this project; Xaver H. Leder, poet, sailor, and founding editor of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, was a member of the IWA and worked at Haskell's printing office, assuming management of its affairs when Haskell was away. In fact, it may be possible that Leder worked for Haskell and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* concurrently. Naturally,

⁸⁷ Coast Seamen's Union of the Pacific Coast, San Francisco, Treasurer's Ledger, 1885–1887; and Census Office, *Report on the Social Statistics of the Cities*, 1887.

⁸⁸ See Coast Seamen's Union of the Pacific Coast, San Francisco, Treasurer's Ledger.

⁸⁹ Diary of Anna Haskell, February 24, 1887, vol. 12, Haskell Family Papers.

given the pivotal role of Leder in its early publication, the sailors' newspaper echoed *Truth* in its educational emphasis, intellectual diversity, and radical vision. As the chapter 2 will reveal, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* contributed significantly to working-class intellectual culture in San Francisco, providing a literary forum and wide audience for the "voice of Labor."⁹⁰

Like Roney and Haskell, the leaders of the Coast Seamen's Union viewed the establishment of union halls as a crucial part of the labor movement's educational and cultural project. In its earliest years, the sailors' union shared the IWA's headquarters on McAllister Street.⁹¹ By the time the *Coast Seamen's Journal* was established, the union was renting offices at 513 ½ East Street, near the waterfront. In March of 1889, the Coast Seamen's Union proudly opened new headquarters at Mission and East Streets.⁹² The new Coast Seamen's Hall housed the offices of the president, secretary, and newspaper; a commodious hall for union meetings, lectures, and literary entertainments; store rooms; and, of course, a library.⁹³ In many ways, the hall served as the architectural equivalent of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, a working-class space where new ideas were transacted and identities formed. On March 20, 1889, the *Journal* celebrated the opening of the new headquarters with an encomium to the old hall, a transformative and ennobling place where sailors learned to "exchange our selfish interests for a common sympathy with the interests of all." Often let out to other unions for special events, the

⁹⁰ "Salutatory," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, November 2, 1887.

⁹¹ Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California*, 168.

⁹² See the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, March 20, 1889, for articles about the old and new headquarters.

⁹³ The contents of this library will be discussed in chapter 3.

Coast Seamen's Hall would provide an example of organizational stability and cultural independence for Progressive Era labor organizations.

Although Haskell was eventually driven from the Coast Seamen's Union, he maintained a special friendship with the sailors, entertaining them at his home, lecturing at the union hall, and providing much-needed legal services. When Haskell died in 1907, forgotten and alone, the Coast Seamen's Union gave him a sailor's funeral, burying him in the union plot at Mount Olivet Cemetery.⁹⁴ Haskell's end was fitting, since, in a sense he may have failed to perceive, the sailors' union represented the permanent realization of the IWA's vision. In Stephen Schwartz's words, the Coast Seamen's Union embodied a "highly-conscious form of unionism" that "went far beyond the immediate economic needs of its members, and sought to become the vehicle for the overall improvement of labor's role in society."⁹⁵ The early educational and cultural efforts of the union, under the direction and influence of the IWA, were instrumental in the continuing fulfillment of this ideal. At the same time, the Coast Seamen's Union represented a bridge between the visionary and ephemeral labor organizations of Gilded Age San Francisco and the established, politically powerful unions of the Progressive Era.

This chapter has traced the intellectual lineage of the San Francisco labor movement in the heady decade of the 1880s, from the Trades Assembly, through the Knights of Labor and the IWA, to the powerful Coast Seamen's Union, in which the

⁹⁴ Caroline Medan, "Burnette G. Haskell: California Radical" (master's thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1958), 58.

⁹⁵ Stephen Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea: A History of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, 1885-1985* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1986), 10.

ambitious vision of San Francisco's radical organizers was realized. The ideal of education as an instrument of social transformation harmonized this vision, and brought it into surprising, if imperfect, accord with other reform movements of the period. To further working-class education and consciousness, leaders of the Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, IWA, and Coast Seamen's Union established alternative print institutions, including and especially labor newspapers, printing presses, and libraries. In particular, Haskell's *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* exerted a profound influence on the intellectual culture of the San Francisco labor movement. In the chapters that follow, the influence of these newspapers, especially in relation to alternative print culture, working-class consciousness, and rhetorics of reading, will be explored in greater detail.

Chapter 2

“A Chapter in Human Heroism”:

The Labor Press

In the literature of San Francisco labor history, *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, and other labor newspapers have served as invaluable sources of information about the organization, development, ideology, and influence of the Gilded Age labor movement. For the most part, historians have sought extrinsic, secondary meanings in the products of the San Francisco labor press, ignoring their significance and complexity as texts. Labor newspapers, however, were not merely the byproducts of working-class social, cultural and political life; they were critical instruments in the “imagination” of working-class identity, providing a familiar public forum for new, suppressed, and often contradictory voices. For San Francisco workers, the labor press and other working-class print institutions represented an opportunity to participate in the civic and intellectual life of the city on their own terms—and often for the first time. Significantly, the rise of a vibrant labor press and the emergence of a confident, politically engaged, and consciously working-class labor community ran in parallel lines. Most likely, these developments exercised a mutual and complex influence. It is clear, however, that the tireless champions of the San Francisco labor press understood their journalistic efforts as part of a larger project to forge an enlightened class of producers who would, through political or revolutionary means, determine the course of world history. Helen Wilmans, a regular contributor to *Truth*, thus honored the men and women of the labor press: “If their history could be written it would make *a chapter in human heroism not excelled by*

any printed.”¹ Wilmans’s print metaphor for the development of the labor press points to the significance her radical contemporaries invested in the printed word as a sign and agent of transformation; for them, world history itself would unfold like a book, written by the worker.

Of the labor newspapers published in nineteenth-century San Francisco, Burnette Haskell’s *Truth* and the Coast Seamen’s Union’s *Coast Seamen’s Journal* were the most influential, ineluctably shaping the intellectual life of the local labor movement, while making significant contributions to radical print culture in the city, across the country, and around the world. As alternative cultural institutions, these newspapers fulfilled a number of complex functions, all of which served the ultimate objects of working-class education and unity: providing workers with a public forum and entrée into civic life; disseminating suppressed labor news and literature; preserving labor history; promoting serious reading among the producing classes; providing recreation; supporting the local, national, and international labor movement; advocating specific reforms; and building the institution of the labor press. For the great scholar of nationalism, Benedict Anderson, the newspaper is “merely an ‘extreme form’ of the book,” while book historian Elizabeth McHenry sees in the nineteenth-century African American press the characteristics of a library.² We shall see that the labor newspaper in nineteenth-century San Francisco simultaneously served the roles of the book, bookstore, publisher, library, and archives; in it, one finds the burgeoning print culture of a movement in condensed form. At the

¹ Helen Wilmans, “To Americans,” *Truth*, March 21, 1883; italics mine.

² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 34; McHenry, “An Association of Kindred Spirits.”

same time, the labor newspaper remained indebted to an older oral tradition, envisioning itself a literary and oral space, for reading *and* discussion. This chapter will tell the story of two of San Francisco's most important labor newspapers, *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, emphasizing their contributions, as institutions and texts, to working-class intellectual life, consciousness, and print culture in San Francisco and beyond.

The Print-Culture Context

As previously noted, the print culture of Gilded Age San Francisco was remarkably rich and varied. By 1880, the year in which this study begins, twenty-one daily newspapers competed for the attention of an avid reading public in San Francisco, where per capita newspaper circulation was the third highest in the nation.³ San Francisco's newspapers not only provided erratic employment to many of the literary luminaries of the West, including Ambrose Bierce, Mark Twain, and Henry George, they also introduced many of the distinctive features of the modern newspaper. In particular, the *Examiner*, under the leadership of William Randolph Hearst, innovated now-familiar newspaper features, such as the editorial, that would significantly influence the practice of journalism in the United States.⁴ San Francisco's printing and publishing industries were similarly well-established and thriving, employing 1,527 workers in 1880.⁵ Not coincidentally, the first trade union on the Pacific Coast was organized by San Francisco's printers; among the ranks of the Typographical Union were Mark Twain and

³ Ethington, *The Public City*, 309.

⁴ Starr, *California: A History*, 142.

⁵ Department of the Interior, Census Office, *Report on the Social Statistics of the Cities*, compiled by George E. Waring, Jr. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1887).

Henry George. (In 1888, Twain wrote a note of support to the new organ of the Typographical Union, which was reprinted in the *Coast Seamen's Journal*. George discussed his union membership in *Progress and Poverty*.)⁶ Like the newspaper, printing, and publishing industries, the world of bookshops and libraries in Gilded Age San Francisco was vibrant, diverse, and colorfully flecked by labor's influence. The most popular bookseller of nineteenth-century San Francisco, Patrick Joseph Healey, was a former shoemaker, teamster, and miner who took a very unpopular stand against Chinese exclusion, writing *A Statement for Non-Exclusion* in collaboration with Ng Poon Chew, the editor of a Chinese daily.⁷ The Mercantile Library, Mechanics' Institute Library, and Odd Fellows' Library were the city's largest subscription libraries; these competed with the San Francisco Free Public Library, opened in 1879, and innumerable private libraries established by churches, labor unions, clubs, and fraternal organizations.⁸ Thus, a large and highly specialized literary marketplace connected texts and readers in Gilded Age San Francisco, providing a forum for the public expression—and private experience—of new and diverse cultural identities.

Although print industries and institutions of almost every imaginable stamp thrived in Gilded Age San Francisco, they were not immune to the conflicts, social divisions, and dangers of the industrializing city. Many newspaper, printing, and publishing ventures, including George's *Evening Post* and Haskell's *Truth*, failed due to

⁶ "A Note from Mark Twain," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, November 7, 1888; Henry George, *Progress and Poverty* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1955), 315.

⁷ Cowan, *Booksellers of Early San Francisco*.

⁸ See Ray Held, *The Rise of the Public Library in California* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1979). Unfortunately, Held and others fail to document the history of labor libraries in San Francisco and California.

lack of funds.⁹ Booksellers and newspaper peddlers who sold scandalizing or radical literature assumed great personal risk: Warren E. Price, owner of the Paper-Cover Book Store, served a reduced prison sentence in San Quentin for selling books banned by the Censor of Public Morals, including works by Rabelais, Boccaccio, and Marguerite of Navarre, while the IWA's A. J. Starkweather was arrested repeatedly for blocking the street in the course of his duties peddling *Truth*.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the public library, under the directorship of Frederic Perkins, openly censored "immoral" fiction by Fielding, Zola, and others.¹¹ Despite the profound importance of revolutionary thought in the nineteenth century, readers would not find the works of Marx, Bakunin, and other revolutionary socialists on the public library's shelves.¹² Such censorship was sanctioned by the federal courts—an 1873 amendment to the postal code criminalized the mailing of "obscene" literature—and enforced by the cultural and penal authorities, as these cases anecdotally show.¹³

⁹ See Thomas, *Alternative America*, 58, for a brief account of the *Evening Post*, which George operated with his partner, San Francisco printer and future labor candidate William Hinton.

¹⁰ Cowan, *Booksellers of Early San Francisco*, 70–71; and "Death of a Hero," *Western Watchman*, December 13, 1884, Personal Reminiscences and Memoranda of Burnette G. Haskell, carton 1, Haskell Family Papers.

¹¹ Perkins, *Free Libraries and Unclean Books*.

¹² See *Catalogue of the San Francisco Free Public Library. Short Titles* (San Francisco: San Francisco Free Public Library, 1880–1884); and *Supplementary Catalogue of Books Added to the San Francisco Free Public Library since May 1884* (San Francisco: H.S. Crockett & Co., 1889).

¹³ See Paul S. Boyer, "Gilded Age Censorship, Repressive Campaigns, and Gradual Liberalization: The Shifting Rhythms of Book Censorship," in *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940*, ed. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway, 276–98 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

With newspaper owners and the Typographical Union pitted against each other, the newspaper business itself was rife with conflict, beginning in the 1870s and culminating in a successful citywide boycott of the San Francisco *Call* and *Bulletin* in 1886. The mainstream press's unfair coverage of the labor movement was a consistent theme in San Francisco's early labor press, and provided the impetus for Trades Assembly President Frank Roney's efforts to recruit the allegiance of Haskell's newspaper. In turn, the success of the labor movement—and labor newspapers—at the end of the 1880s inspired mainstream newspapers to adopt a more conciliatory, even congratulatory, attitude towards unionized workers, so much so that the *Coast Seamen's Journal* was praising the fairness of the *Examiner's* new labor column in 1889.

In many ways, conditions in late nineteenth-century San Francisco were ideal for the emergence of a strong labor press. A vibrant print culture employed many local workers and provided education and amusement to countless others. The proliferation of newspaper, printing, publishing, and bookselling operations offered workers and labor activists opportunities to learn the print trades.¹⁴ At the same time, the hostility of the mainstream press to the labor movement in general and the Typographical Union in particular in the 1870s and 1880s encouraged labor organizations to establish alternative, working-class newspapers that would give fair hearing to the voice of labor. In a city where the press, to paraphrase California historian Philip Ethington, represented the central medium of public life,¹⁵ labor newspapers were crucial to working-class civic

¹⁴ Haskell, for example, learned the printing business as a teenager, working as a proofreader for Dewey and Company. See Medan, *Burnette G. Haskell*, 2.

¹⁵ Ethington, *The Public City*, 309.

participation, providing a necessary backdrop for the development of labor politics. Moreover, radical literature in English translation was largely unavailable in Gilded Age San Francisco, compelling the IWA and other labor organizations to publish and disseminate socialist texts through the labor press as part of their overarching educational program. Finally, the 1880s witnessed a nationwide revival of labor newspapers, due, perhaps, to the cultural influence of the Knights of Labor. These and other factors, including the extraordinary dedication of Haskell and his associates, gave rise to the publication of *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, two masterpieces of nineteenth-century labor journalism.

Truth, 1882–1884

While Haskell's *Truth* was a financial failure, collapsing in 1884 after a three-year run, it made significant contributions to the print culture and intellectual life of Gilded Age San Francisco that have yet to be carefully analyzed. *Truth's* role as a publisher of radical literature, as well as its place in the national and international world of the nineteenth-century labor press, have been particularly neglected by scholars. While Caroline Medan has traced the intellectual evolution of *Truth* in her 1958 master's thesis, an overemphasis on Haskell's eccentric personality, wild exaggerations, and sudden ideological shifts in her work—and the labor literature in general—has obscured Haskell's real accomplishments as a newspaperman and printer. Moreover, the print-culture context in which *Truth* operated has been almost totally overlooked. Within this context, *Truth's* accomplishments come into sharper focus, particularly the journal's role in aggregating, publishing, and disseminating labor news and literature. In this capacity,

Truth provided working San Franciscans with unprecedented access to an extraordinary range of radical voices and traditions, building a sense of international working-class community that solidified the local labor movement.

As discussed in the preceding chapter, *Truth*'s efforts were single-mindedly directed at the education of the working classes, for which Haskell and his associates believed the labor press was uniquely suited. The supreme educational importance of the labor press was best conveyed by Charles F. Burgman, *Truth*'s managing editor, in his farewell address:

To counteract the tendency of the capitalistic press, the workers in the reform movements of the world consider it their first and foremost duty to publish and disseminate such literature as is best calculated to enlighten the builders of the world as to the true position they occupy under our modern development of civilization; and I maintain it as an undeniable fact that as an uncompromising educator the labor press, which has sprung up during the last quarter of a century, in the countries where capitalistic production has brought about irreconcilable conditions between employer and employed—master and slave—has done more, to arouse the producing classes to a sense of their duty than all the orations, essays, disquisitions, and books piled mountains high, delivered by our learned professors, have done for the last two hundred years.¹⁶

As a microcosm of the labor movement of the 1880s—and Haskell's career as a labor activist, editor, and printer—the brief history of *Truth* is wonderfully revealing. It was Haskell's uncle, B.G. Briggs, who started *Truth* on January 28, 1882, as an independent four-sheet daily. A rich San Franciscan with political aspirations, Briggs enlisted his twenty-four-year-old nephew to assume the editorship and management of the newspaper. In the first issue of *Truth*, Haskell outlined the newspaper's mission and "future course":

¹⁶ *Truth*, February 2, 1884.

We love our great city by the sea. We hope to see her thriving and populous, with broad, magnificent avenues, massive and lofty buildings, far-reaching parks, collected art galleries, thickly scattered libraries, and all other things that make this life we live worth the trouble and burden of living.¹⁷

Despite the extraordinary ideological and intellectual evolution *Truth* would undergo in the next three years, Haskell's original vision, with its eye for "all other things that make this life we live worth the trouble and burden of living," remained intact.

Soon after the establishment of *Truth*, Haskell attended a fateful meeting of the San Francisco Trades Assembly, at which he proposed that *Truth* be adopted as the assembly's official newspaper. Haskell's suggestion provoked the ire of the assembly's socialist delegates, who were disgusted by the former lawyer's corrupt backroom negotiations for the Republican State Central Committee.¹⁸ A farsighted Frank Roney eventually convinced Haskell's detractors to relent. By April of 1882, *Truth* was clearly representing the Trades Assembly's interests; on May 3 of the same year, it advertised itself as the "official journal of the League of Deliverance and champion of all the producing classes on the coast." *Truth* also acted as the unofficial organ of the local Knights of Labor, printing KOL news, statements, and addresses, and, beginning in May 1883, took up the cause of the International Workmen's Association, serving as the IWA's central communication medium. While Caroline Medan rightly observes that *Truth* advocated "the labor and anti-Chinese policy in 1882, the anarchist revolutionary policy in 1883, and the socialist policy in 1884," these positions significantly overlapped, with *Truth* devoting space to the words and works of anarchists, revolutionary socialists,

¹⁷ "Our Future Course," *Truth*, January 28, 1882.

¹⁸ Roney, *Frank Roney*, 388.

political action socialists, trade unionists, and labor reformers under the inclusive banner of working-class education and unity.¹⁹ Thus, Haskell saw no contradiction in printing excerpts from the Declaration of Independence, an address of the Sacramento Knights of Labor, the conclusion of the *Communist Manifesto*, and quotations from Saint-Just and Mazzini in a single edition of *Truth*, published on June 30, 1883.

At five cents a copy and two dollars a year, *Truth* comprised a wide variety of features designed to educate, amuse, and possibly mystify its readers, including editorials, interviews, printed orations, biographical sketches, labor addresses, constitutions and manifestos, socialist texts in English translation, romances, poetry, labor fiction, book and theater reviews, art notes, an occultist column (penned by the spirit Ashtoreth, for whom Haskell named his son), “street corner sermons” by Nathan the Essenean, and, of course, local and international news. Reflecting the influence of nineteenth-century story papers and other periodical genres, *Truth’s* variegated offerings were meant to bring together a community of readers—in pleasure and profit. Nonetheless, Haskell was scrupulous in his refusal to publish purely recreational or sensational works.²⁰

As early as March 11, 1882, Haskell claimed that *Truth* had 3,000 subscribers. Originally published on Wednesdays, the paper moved to Saturday publication on April 7, 1883, to meet readers’ demands for Sunday reading; after all, Sunday was the only day

¹⁹ Medan, *Burnette G. Haskell*, 10.

²⁰ Chapter 3 of this study will discuss the San Francisco labor press’ complex attitudes towards reading for pleasure.

off for most workers.²¹ By October of 1883, *Truth* was sold by twenty-three agents in cities across the country, including New York, Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Louisville, Pittsburgh, and Omaha, and was widely quoted in the national and international labor press. At the height of its popularity, John Swinton, H. M. Hyndman, and Henry George counted themselves among *Truth's* famous correspondents and subscribers.²² As it became increasingly beset by financial difficulties, *Truth* assumed a new monthly magazine format in May 1884, which it retained until its demise in December of the same year.

While Haskell's personality permeated *Truth* and defined its editorial voice, the journal represented the collective effort of a small literary circle of San Francisco radicals who supported *Truth* as managers, writers, correspondents, typesetters, newspaper peddlers, booksellers, and shareholders. The contributions of these radical print workers, many of whom were women, have been largely overlooked, due, in part, to the overwhelming force of Haskell's personality and the relative anonymity of the nineteenth-century newspaper format. Many of their names are familiar to historians of the San Francisco labor movement: Charles F. Burgman, business manager of *Truth* from March 1883 to February 1884 and a frequent contributor, was prominent in the socialist leadership of the San Francisco Trades Assembly, while Sigismund Danielewicz, the newspaper's Hawaiian correspondent, was a founding member of the IWA and the chief

²¹ In *Mechanic Accents*, Michael Denning observes that most nineteenth-century story papers targeted Sunday reading.

²² Swinton was an American journalist and publisher of the radical *John Swinton's Paper*; Hyndman was an English socialist and writer who founded the Democratic Federation of London, the first socialist party in England.

organizer of the Coast Seamen's Union. Other contributors are less well-known, including the women who played such an active and untraditional role in the operations of the newspaper. Among them was Haskell's wife, Anna, who did copying for *Truth* at the San Francisco Free Public Library and, beginning in February 1883, worked long hours setting type for the newspaper.²³ According to her diary, Anna also transcribed Burgman's oral translations of German texts for publication in *Truth*.²⁴ Beginning in 1884, Anna's sister, Helen Fader, conducted *Truth*'s bookselling operations, receiving and filling orders at the newspaper's offices.²⁵ Women also worked as correspondents and translators for the newspaper, including journalist Helen Wilmans, who wrote extensively for *Truth*, particularly on the themes of working-class reading and the labor press; her daughter and Burgman's wife, Florence Baker; "Miss Le Compte of Geneva," who translated Peter Kropotkin's *Aux Jeunes Gens* for the newspaper;²⁶ and "Miss K.," who translated Bakunin's *God and the State* for *Truth* at Le Compte's suggestion.²⁷ *Truth* thus represents a compelling, if overlooked, chapter in the history of women's contributions to radical print culture in the United States.

Of course, Haskell's IWA associates were involved in the operations and maintenance of *Truth*; these included the aforementioned Burgman, Danielewicz, and Starkweather (who braved arrest and a tubercular cough to sell *Truth* every day in front of the *Examiner*'s offices on Market Street), as well as William C. Owen, a London

²³ See the diary of Anna Haskell, 1883, vol. 8, Haskell Family Papers.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ "Books for Sale by Truth," *Truth*, July 1884.

²⁶ "A New Attraction," *Truth*, January 5, 1884.

²⁷ "Miss Le Compte," *Truth*, January 5, 1884.

lecturer and writer, as identified by his IWA membership card, who penned the Pacific Division's manifesto.²⁸ (It is fair to assume that other IWA members contributed to *Truth* anonymously.) While *Truth* was managed by Haskell and Burgman, it was owned cooperatively: according to its May 1, 1884 edition, "TRUTH is a paper conducted by a cooperative association of working people who have associated themselves together for the unselfish purpose of educating their fellow slaves in truth . . ."²⁹ As the newspaper's financial distress became more acute, Haskell began to solicit donations from fellow socialists and advertised public stock in *Truth* for five dollars a share. In the last year of its existence, *Truth* was maintained by its ardent supporters, a group of mostly penniless socialists, labor activists, and workers. As Anna Haskell's diary reveals in touching detail, *Truth* was the collective and sacrificial labor of an intimate coterie of friends, comrades, relatives, lovers, and business partners who shared their work, their bread, their revelries, and their grievances together.

Truth's many contributors were united in their commitment to the institution of the labor press, locally, nationally, and internationally. As the words of Haskell, Burgman, Wilmans, and others make clear, labor journalists of the 1880s believed that the labor press would serve as the preeminent instrument of working-class education, culture, and identity, laying the groundwork for social revolution. This elevated sense of purpose was shared by labor journalists across the country, notably Joseph R. Buchanan, editor of Denver's *Labor Enquirer*, and John Swinton, editor of New York's *John*

²⁸ IWA applications and membership cards, folder 3, International Workingmen's Association Records.

²⁹ The dates on which the ownership of *Truth* was transferred from Briggs to Haskell, and from Haskell to this cooperative association remain unclear.

Swinton's Paper, both of whom supported, advocated for, and contributed to *Truth*.³⁰ (Despite Haskell's protests, Buchanan went so far as to urge his own readers to contribute financially to the struggling newspaper.) To further their shared mission, labor editors widely reprinted articles from other labor and radical journals; in this way, they instantiated the community of worker-intellectuals they imagined and helped to build. After observing that articles translated from *Truth* appeared in over half of "the twenty foreign labor papers that come each week to my table," Haskell wrote: "No thoughtful article appears today in any labor journal of the world but it is seized upon by its brother journals in other lands and given by them to their readers and thinkers."³¹ Similarly, Haskell and his associates routinely reprinted articles and other features from local, regional, national, and international newspapers in their efforts to gather and disseminate labor news. These were often published without attribution, leading to accusations of plagiarism that failed to take into consideration the intensely fraternal culture of the Gilded Age labor press. It quite possible that *Truth's* anonymous and unattributed articles represented an anarchistic subversion of intellectual property; on the other hand, charges of dishonesty plagued Haskell throughout his life.

Whether subversive, dishonest, or both, *Truth* provided readers with unprecedented access to national and international labor journalism, forging a *local* community of radical intellectuals by connecting them to *distant* comrades through the

³⁰ According to Lillian Symes and Travers Clement, *John Swinton's Paper* was "the best edited and most reliable of America's early labor journals." *Rebel America: The Story of Social Revolt in the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), 126.

³¹ "The Labor Press," *Truth*, January 19, 1884.

common experience of reading.³² Benedict Anderson's brilliant observations about the nation-building experience of newspaper reading provide insight into this phenomenon.³³ Following Anderson's logic, every Sunday, readers of *Truth* knew—and were reminded—that the pages they studied were being or had been read by thousands of anonymous, yet alike, others. At the same time, the quotidian life of the newspaper as an object to be found on a streetcar or bought from a peddler downtown conveyed to readers that the “imagined community” in which they mentally participated was “visibly rooted in everyday life.”³⁴

Like the anti-Chinese racism that shadowed white working-class solidarity in San Francisco, hostility to the “capitalistic” press was the necessary corollary to labor press unity for much of the 1880s. As previously noted, the Gilded Age labor movement's distrust of the mainstream press was rooted, not only in perceived anti-labor bias, but in the concrete and bitter struggle between San Francisco's first union and her major newspapers. From its beginnings, *Truth* clearly positioned itself against the mainstream press, which, it argued, defended the interests of monopoly, while exercising a monopolistic control over the news. Haskell consistently and courageously attacked the suppression of labor literature and news by the mainstream press (variously called the “monopoly,” “capitalistic,” or “aristocratic” press), local governments, and other communication industries. Haskell's comments in a December 6, 1882, edition of *Truth* were typical:

³² One might ask why a community with such a cosmopolitan sense of identity was also so consistently and rabidly anti-Chinese.

³³ See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 33-36

³⁴ *Ibid*, 35-36.

Inquiry made at the Telegraph offices concerning the reason why certain dispatches from the East and Europe concerning labor and labor matters were not given to the press develops the fact that “the rules forbid it.” In plain English the Telegraphy monopoly declines to furnish labor news to the daily press . . . We are agitating and organizing. Now let us also educate. Let each reader take hold of this matter and strike one blow at this form of oppression, this suppression of news.³⁵

To fill this large gap in the news available to San Francisco readers, *Truth* reported extensively on local labor organizations, especially the Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, and IWA; gathered, translated, and reprinted labor-related articles originally published in other journals, of which Haskell made a comprehensive list; and sent or enlisted foreign correspondents to cover international news, including the 1883 trial of anarchist Peter Kropotkin in Lyons. Of *Truth's* coverage of Kropotkin's life and trial, Haskell wrote:

The aristocratic and monopoly press of this Republic, decline to publish information concerning the lives and deeds of the leaders of the labor cause. It is thus made doubly difficult for the people as a whole to properly appreciate and understand the present state of the labor contest in any land. But so general is the desire for information concerning the agitation and its leaders, that TRUTH has been to some expense and considerable expenditure of time and effort, heretofore to furnish the first obtainable news to be published in America concerning the affairs of our brother wage-slaves in Europe. Our articles have been widely copied and republished, and have met general approval. For some months we have been in receipt of inquiry after inquiry, concerning Prince Krapotkine, now under arrest at Lyons, France, for complicity in the recent alleged riots at Monceau-les-Mines, the true history of which was recently given in these columns. We present below for the first time in America a brief biographical and analytical sketch of this labor hero, this Prince of the Proletarians.³⁶

One wonders if *Truth's* financial difficulties, stemmed, in part, from such far-reaching journalistic ambitions.

³⁵ “Labor News,” *Truth*, December 6, 1882.

³⁶ “Krapotkine,” *Truth*, January 17, 1883.

Truth advocated few positions as consistently as unwavering hostility to the capitalistic press. Haskell and others urged readers to discontinue their subscriptions to San Francisco's mainstream newspapers and expressed angry bafflement at workers' continuing support of the dominant press. As will be discussed in chapter 3, this position was congruous with *Truth's* general ambivalence towards the working-class reading public, whose literary choices did not always meet labor intellectuals' standards for serious and improving reading. An article signed by the "K. of L." complained:

Strange as it may seem these wicked papers are largely supported by working men, who thus pay for circulating the moral POISON which keeps up the reign of robbery and ruin . . . If forty millions of toilers in our country would support only their papers, they would find themselves possessed of a voice whose utterances would COMMAND the laws and defeat all the schemes of jobbery and robbery that might ever be devised.³⁷

A similar undercurrent of anxiety about the loyalty of the working-class public ("the people") can be found in Helen Wilman's passionate encomium to the labor press:

Could the people who are now called upon to act, but know the history of our labor papers—the struggles of their proprietors in facing a world of iniquity in their determinations to be heard in behalf of justice, I think it would spur them on to a more desperate revolt. These men have denied themselves the common necessities of life; they have slept on their desks for want of a bed, and lived on ten cents a day, rather than move backward one inch before the capitalized element that sought their country's ruin. If their history could be written it would make a chapter in human heroism not excelled by any printed. These grand fellows—perfect bricks—every one of them, have held back the people's ruin; fighting step by step and gaining ground slowly. They have made themselves willing barricades before your breasts, O men who read these words; and now when you are bidden to come and stand beside them, bringing the weight of your full influence, how can you refuse?³⁸

³⁷ "Let Labor be True to Itself," *Truth*, April 7, 1883.

³⁸ Helen Wilmans, "To Americans," *Truth*, March 21, 1883

Despite these pleas, working-class readers continued to subscribe to the *Examiner*, *Chronicle*, *Call*, and other mainstream newspapers, withdrawing their support strategically—and temporarily—during the 1886 newspaper boycott. Although San Francisco workers, probably with Haskell’s help, organized the Loyal Brotherhood in 1882 “for the object of ‘decreasing and preventing the support by laboring men of the capitalistic press,’” their zeal does not appear to have been widespread.³⁹ Even Anna Haskell enjoyed mainstream newspapers, writing in her diary that she read the *Wasp*, *Household*, *Argonaut*, and *Sunday Chronicle* exclusively.⁴⁰ It might be argued that working-class readers in San Francisco belonged to overlapping, if antagonistic, reading publics: one, radical and self-consciously working-class, as imagined by the labor press, and the other, mainstream and metropolitan, as fashioned by the dominant newspaper industry. Ironically, *Truth* helped mobilize and build an intellectually and politically assured working-class community in San Francisco, which, in turn, persuaded a savvy mainstream press to take the labor movement seriously. As Anna Haskell predicted in 1884, “The newspapers noticed our meeting last night. They are changing—they used to never notice us one way or other. After that it was universal condemnation, soon—none will name us but to praise.”⁴¹

The most significant and overlooked role played by *Truth* in the print culture of the Gilded Age San Francisco might be described as extra-journalistic, consisting of the aggregation, translation, publication, and dissemination of labor and radical literature.

³⁹ “The Loyal Brotherhood,” *Truth*, November 15, 1882.

⁴⁰ Diary of Anna Haskell, January 12, 1884, vol. 9, Haskell Family Papers.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, December 16, 1884.

According to Elizabeth McHenry, African American newspapers before the Civil War served many of the functions of a library.⁴² Similarly, *Truth* acted as a labor library, archives, and bookseller, specializing in suppressed texts; simultaneously, it openly attacked local policies that limited or threatened intellectual freedom. As noted earlier in this chapter, public and private institutions in Gilded Age San Francisco practiced what would now be called censorship, actively and by omission. Glaring gaps appear in the catalogs of the San Francisco Free Public Library for the years 1880 to 1889, covering vast swaths of labor and radical culture in the United States. For example, not a single labor journal was included in the public library's substantial periodicals collection, while the works of Marx, Engels, Bakunin, and Kropotkin were conspicuously absent from library shelves.⁴³ (Not all works of socialism were banned: budding radicals would find selected works of Hyndman, Stepniak, and Proudhon, including the latter's famous attack on private property, at the public library.)⁴⁴ On the subject of the library catalogs themselves, *Truth* attacked librarian Frederic Beecher Perkins for charging seventy-five cents per catalog, thus making it difficult for poor San Franciscans to search for books in the library's collection.⁴⁵ In August of 1883, *Truth* claimed a constitutional victory against the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, whose members it threatened to blacklist for entertaining an ordinance that would criminalize the distribution of tracts, circulars,

⁴² See McHenry, "An Association of Kindred Spirits: Black Readers and Their Reading Rooms."

⁴³ *Catalogue of the San Francisco Free Public Library. Short Titles; and Supplementary Catalogue of Books Added to the San Francisco Free Public Library since May 1884.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ "The Free Library," *Truth*, August 16, 1882.

and other literature on public streets; the board eventually voted to kill the proposed legislation.⁴⁶ As these examples demonstrate, *Truth* served as a rare and impassioned voice against censorship in Gilded Age San Francisco, whether *de facto* or *de jure*. At the same time, it provided unprecedented access to radical texts suppressed or neglected by the city's mainstream cultural institutions.

According to the California labor historian Ira Cross, Haskell was “without doubt the best-read man” in the San Francisco labor movement, devouring “all the available labor and radical literature” as soon as he began courting the Trades Assembly in the spring of 1882.⁴⁷ Each and every edition of *Truth* overflowed with evidence of Haskell's extraordinarily wide reading in labor journalism, political economy, poetry, and literature, including quotations, excerpts, book reviews, reprints, and exuberant lists, reflecting the expansiveness and energy of the Gilded Age labor movement.⁴⁸ Published weekly in *Truth*, with additions and variations, beginning in February of 1883 (and reprinted in Appendix A of this study), Haskell's list of labor literature is a particularly stunning, if oddly neglected, document. In the April 28, 1883, edition of *Truth*, Haskell explained that this deeply researched list was unique in its kind:

This list of labor literature is the result of research extending over many years. It is the only thing of its kind ever published and it is valuable to every honest man, woman and child in the Republic. I would be obliged if the readers would supply any omissions noticed.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ “A Victory,” *Truth*, August 25, 1883.

⁴⁷ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, 158.

⁴⁸ In fact, Haskell's penchant for celebratory lists recalls the poetry of Whitman.

⁴⁹ “Labor Literature,” *Truth*, April 28, 1883.

At five cents a copy, Haskell's list represented an alternative catalog of radical works in various genres, including poetry, romance, history, political economy, and labor journalism, in English, French, German, and Italian.⁵⁰ At the same time, it served as a course syllabus for the autodidact worker. A broad spectrum of works by revolutionary socialists (Marx), political action socialists (Hyndman, Lasalle), anarchists (Stepniak, Proudhon), political philosophers (Mill, Spencer), single taxers (George), utopian cooperators (Ouida), feminists (Besant), historians (Brentano), novelists (Hugo, Sue), and poets (Whitman), reflected the ideological diversity and intellectual energy of the San Francisco labor movement in the 1880s, providing readers with a wide range of literary choices from which to formulate their political identities. Like much of Haskell's work, the list itself was both practical and utopian, serving as an inexpensive guide to the world of radical literature for San Francisco readers, an ideal outline for working-class education, and a visionary catalog for a labor library that did not yet exist.

While Haskell's list served as an invaluable bibliography of labor literature, San Francisco readers would struggle to find many of works represented therein: approximately three quarters of the books, pamphlets, articles, and journals recommended by Haskell were absent from the San Francisco Free Public Library's shelves.⁵¹ Again, *Truth* sought to remedy this gap by translating, printing, and

⁵⁰ Gilded Age San Francisco was home to a large community of German Americans, native-born and immigrants, who dominated the brewery industry and contributed significantly to the city's labor culture.

⁵¹ This figure is based on a comparison of Haskell's list with the catalogs of the San Francisco Free Public Library for the years 1880 to 1889. Unfortunately, catalogs for the Odd Fellow's Library, Mercantile Library, and Mechanics' Institute Library are unavailable for these years.

distributing otherwise unavailable labor literature, just as it reported hard-to-find labor news. In this sense, it served as a “virtual” labor library, to borrow Elizabeth McHenry’s formulation, bringing together rare texts in a single, ongoing collection, bound copies of which were for sale at the newspaper’s offices.⁵² Simultaneously, it served as an archives of the nascent labor movement, recording and preserving its history for future generations.

Perhaps *Truth’s* greatest publishing coup was the translation and publication of the *Communist Manifesto* in its editions of June 16, 23, and 30, 1883. In his introductory remarks, Haskell outlined the publication history of Marx and Engel’s celebrated call to arms:

This document which has played such an historical part in the Social Revolution was first adopted in London, and appeared in February, 1848,—a short time previous to the outbreak of the European Revolutions of that year. It was translated from the German, and then published in English, French, Italian, Flemish and Danish. The International Workingmen’s Society printed thousands of copies and scattered them broadcast. For many years the English edition of the Manifesto has been out of print. Hence we have resolved to translate and publish it, to the end that it may awaken and inspire American Workingmen with the importance of decisive action in their own behalf. The Manifesto is given in full, with exception [sic] of the measures proposed, which we omit for the reason that they are now out of date.⁵³

Other major successes included the translation and overlapping publication of two classics of nineteenth-century anarchism, Bakunin’s *God and the State*, printed in installments over a four-month period, between September 8, 1883, and January 12,

⁵² McHenry, “An Association of Kindred Spirits,” 113.

⁵³ “The Manifesto,” *Truth*, June 16, 1883.

1884;⁵⁴ and Kropotkin's *Aux Jeunes Gens*, which appeared in the January 5, 1884, edition of *Truth*. Written by "the founder of nihilism,"⁵⁵ *God and the State*—a fiery attack on church and state—would become Bakunin's most famous work.⁵⁶

Fascinatingly, *Truth* offered an alternative—and, one might argue, feminist—publication history of *God and the State*, noting that the well-known "Boston translation" of the work, made by Benjamin Tucker in 1883, "was made after Miss Le Compte announced her own."⁵⁷ According to *Truth*, the publication of Le Compte's translation was delayed because she "desired the work translated and placed on the market to be sold for the benefit of imprisoned labor martyrs in Russia."⁵⁸ More fascinatingly still, the original translation of *God and the State* that appeared in *Truth* in 1883 and 1884 was made, neither by Tucker nor Le Compte, but by a mysterious "Miss K." at Le Compte's urging.⁵⁹ An appeal to young members of the bourgeoisie to join the coming revolution, *Aux Jeunes Gens* was also translated exclusively for *Truth*, by Le Compte, on condition that proceeds from its sale be sent to "the French labor prisoners."⁶⁰

In addition to these texts, *Truth* printed unpublished or hard-to-find works too numerous to list completely. In his characteristically prolix style, Haskell boasted:

⁵⁴ Interestingly, Bakunin spent a brief sojourn in San Francisco after escaping from Siberia in 1861. See Edmund Wilson, *To the Finland Station* (New York: Noonday Press, 1993), 317–18.

⁵⁵ "God and the State," *Truth*, September 8, 1883.

⁵⁶ Paul Avrich, "Introduction to the Dover Edition," *God and the State*, by Michael Bakunin (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1970).

⁵⁷ "Miss Le Compte," *Truth*, January 5, 1884. See Avrich, "Introduction to the Dover Edition" for a brief publication history of *God and the State*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

In addition [to *God and the State*], we have secured and are now having translated some excellent essays on political economy by Herr JOHN MOST. Still more. We shall also have a large number of hitherto unpublished articles by Volney, Rousseau, St. Just, Robespierre, Madam Roland, Jefferson, Paine and Patrick Henry (period 1789), by Lord Byron (1820), by Simon Kanorski and Riga (1830), by Garibaldi, Mazzini and Bronterre O'Brien, Louis Blanc and Victor Hugo (1848), and by the living revolutionists and labor heroes and martyrs of to-day, both of America and Europe. Among these modern contributors may be mentioned Wendell Phillips, John Swinton, H. M. Hyndman, Henry George, Louise Michel, Pierre Kropotkin, Stepniak, Marx, Engels, Lassalle and Pyatt.⁶¹

The list continued, citing ancient Greek and Roman orations, a biography of the fifteenth-century English rebel Jack Cade, and other historical works. One will notice that many of the writers mentioned here also appeared on Haskell's list of labor literature; in this way, *Truth* provided not only a bibliography of labor literature to interested readers, but access to the texts themselves.

To further enhance access to radical texts—and, presumably, to raise much-needed revenue—*Truth* sold books, pamphlets, and bound newspapers at its main offices, located first at 608 Market Street and then at 1236 21st Street, and at its branch office in the bookshop of Michael Shea, located at 805 Market Street. As early as January of 1883, *Truth* was offering a free copy of *Progress and Poverty* to all new and continuing subscribers. Haskell's list of labor literature, first published in February of 1883, suggests that *Truth's* initial foray into the bookselling business was modest: the newspaper offered "The Hymn of Labor," commissioned and printed by Haskell himself, and bound copies of *Truth*, for forty cents and ten dollars, respectively, at its main offices. From there, *Truth's* bookselling business grew, selling books and pamphlets printed on Haskell's presses and by other publishers, notably New York's Lovell & Co.,

⁶¹ "New Attractions," *Truth*, August 25, 1883.

a publisher of dime novels and “Radical and Reformatory works in cheap and popular form,” with whom Haskell worked closely.⁶² An advertisement of November 3, 1883 listed the following books for sale, which, by now, should be familiar to readers of this study: Stepniak’s *Underground Russia* (twenty cents), George’s *Progress and Poverty* (twenty cents), Lasalle’s *Open Letter* (ten cents), Stetson’s *People’s Power*, Marx and Engels’ *Manifesto of the Communists* (five cents), and Bakunin’s *God and the State* (fifteen cents).⁶³ Of these, the last two were printed at *Truth*’s offices, presumably with Anna Haskell setting type. The bookselling business—and its list of offerings—continued to grow, with Helen Fader, Anna Haskell’s sister, assuming management of a “reorganized” department in July of 1884.⁶⁴ *Truth*’s bookselling efforts were part of a larger educational project to provide working-class readers with access to radical texts in various formats.

Despite—or, perhaps, because of—*Truth*’s extraordinary journalistic and publishing ambitions, the newspaper collapsed in December of 1884. *Truth*’s business manager, Charles Burgman, had resigned on February 2, 1884, after a series of quarrels with Haskell.⁶⁵ Haskell contacted his friends in socialist and labor journalism circles to request financial contributions, sold five-dollar shares of the newspaper to stockholders, reorganized and expanded his bookselling business, and spent eight thousand dollars of

⁶² “Take Especial Notice!” *Truth*, November/December 1884.

⁶³ “Books for Sale by Truth,” *Truth*, November 3, 1883.

⁶⁴ “Books for Sale by Truth,” *Truth*, July 1884.

⁶⁵ Diary of Anna Haskell, vol. 9, Haskell Family Papers.

his own money, all to no avail.⁶⁶ Anna Haskell's diary suggests that *Truth's* failure was a major, disillusioning blow to the paper's many contributors and friends:

That paper has been a regular octopus. It has all its friends in its clutches, sucking away their very life-blood. And the poor contemptible slaves that we are working for, when Truth goes—I will ask myself—“Are the slaves worth saving, are they fit for anything but slaves.”⁶⁷

Nonetheless, the Haskells carried on, operating a printing business under the auspices of the “Truth Publishing Company” with the help of the future editor of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, Xaver Leder. Though a financial failure, *Truth* would have a lasting influence on the print culture of the San Francisco labor movement, providing working-class readers with unprecedented access to radical texts and news, while building a sense of shared identity around the common experience of reading.⁶⁸

*Coast Seamen's Journal, 1887–1889*⁶⁹

Founded two years after the Coast Seamen's Union was organized, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* was the preeminent voice of labor in San Francisco in the late 1880s and 1890s. Although its polyphonic spirit, educational emphasis, and broad ambitions reflected *Truth's* influence, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* represented a major innovation in labor journalism in its own right. According to its editors, the journal was “beyond a doubt the first newspaper that has ever been published exclusively in behalf of the myriads who live upon the watery part of this globe of ours, the seafaring class.”⁷⁰ As

⁶⁶ “To Subscribers and Stockholders,” *Truth*, November/December 1884.

⁶⁷ Diary of Anna Haskell, February 14, 1884, vol. 9, Haskell Family Papers.

⁶⁸ Working-class reading, as a practice and ideal, will be the theme of chapter 3.

⁶⁹ The *Coast Seamen's Journal* changed its name to the *Seamen's Journal* in 1918 and the *West Coast Sailors* in 1937.

⁷⁰ “Salutatory,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, November 2, 1887.

such, it aimed to represent the interests and imagination of sailors around the world: “Although published by the Coasting Sailors of the Pacific Coast, their JOURNAL shall voice the appeals of all our brethren—those upon deep water as well as upon various coasts of the globe.”⁷¹ Not only was the journal “published exclusively in behalf” of the sailors, it was produced exclusively by them. Unlike *Truth*, then, it was a truly and uncompromisingly working-class newspaper.⁷²

While the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, like *Truth*, provided working-class readers with access to a wide range of radical expression, it particularly stressed the articulation a new voice, that of an educated and united seafaring class, whose members would become “the heralds of the world’s progress.”⁷³ In the “Salutatory” article of the journal’s first edition, found in appendix B, the word “voice” served as a unifying refrain: the capitalistic class will hate the “voice” of the sailors, which, albeit tiny, “bears within it the germs of a mighty trumpet of salvation”; in these historic times, the “voice of labor” compels the attention of modern literature and the daily press, yet little is known of the true conditions of seafaring life; to combat the romantic, “penny-novel” figure of the sailor in the public imagination, seamen “must raise our voices in our own behalf”; the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* will “voice the appeals” of the entire seafaring class, etc.⁷⁴ Like many other Gilded Age labor newspapers, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* provided education and entertainment to readers, publishing labor news, radical literature, and

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Readers will remember that Haskell was the only lawyer to have been admitted to the Knights of Labor. Many of *Truth*’s contributors, however, were workers, including Burgman (a tailor) and Danielewicz (a barber and sailor).

⁷³ *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, October 31, 1888.

⁷⁴ “Salutatory,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, November 2, 1887.

popular trivialities. At the same time and more profoundly, the journal cultivated a new working-class voice, one that was specifically and poetically inflected by the culture, craft, and melancholy life of the sailor. The founders of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* were deliberately aware of the symbolic parallels between the homelessness of the seafaring life and Gilded Age workers' general sense of displacement.⁷⁵ As articulated by the journal, the sailor was best equipped to represent the interests and convey the spirit of his entire class *by virtue of* his wandering and perilous existence. Thus, the sailor's voice served as a synecdoche for working-class expression in general, which, ennobled by education, would redeem the republic—and humanity itself.⁷⁶

The *Coast Seamen's Journal* was established on October 17, 1887, at the regular meeting of the Coast Seamen's Union and first issued on November 2 of the same year, with Xaver H. Leder, IWA member and Haskell associate, as editor. Fittingly, the idea of the journal was first discussed aboard a ship:

Two years ago X. H. Leder, the first editor of the JOURNAL, and Andrew Furuseth, at that time and for two years secretary of the Coast Seamen's Union, were delegated to proceed to San Diego to look after the interests of the union at that port. On the passage south in the steamer, stretched in their bunks, sailor fashion, smoking their pipes, they discussed the advisability of starting an official organ and upon their return to headquarters broached the subject to the union.⁷⁷

At the urging of Comrade E. P. Delpet, the sailors agreed that the newspaper would be exclusively produced by members of their craft. As noted, the founding editor of the journal, Xaver H. Leder, was a member of the IWA and employee of Haskell's printing

⁷⁵ These parallels were first noted in chapter 1.

⁷⁶ In the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, as in the revolutionary tradition itself, the ideas of redemption (return) and progress (improvement) coexisted.

⁷⁷ "Volume III," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, October 16, 1889.

business, as well as a sailor, poet, and German translator.⁷⁸ (It is quite possible that Leder learned the newspaper and printing trades from Haskell himself.) Another founding contributor to the *Coast Seamen's Journal* was seasoned labor activist Alfred Fuhrman, an IWA member, United Brewery Workers organizer, and Haskell rival who operated his own printing business.⁷⁹ Volney Hoffmeyer, former State Master Workman of the Knights of Labor and likely IWA member, served on the CSU committee to establish the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, along with Leder, Fuhrman, Furuseth, and John Haist.⁸⁰ Other contributing sailors were named in the first issue of the journal:

Comrades Trewen and Furuseth, two kindred spirits, philosophers of the stoic type; Comrade Mackay, from San Diego, cautious and logical; Comrades Crangle and McDonald, scrutinizing and ever ready for an argument; Comrade Fuhrman, the orator and organizer; Comrades George Lindell and Charles Lundquist, two humorists of a pleasant kind; Comrades Hendricksen and Wils; Comrade Edward Anderson, our first and faithful Patrolman, and many others whose names will surely appear if we don't hear from them in due time.⁸¹

After serving as business manager of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* for two years, W. J. B. Mackay assumed the editorship of the newspaper in April 1889. His business manager, Walter MacArthur, would edit the newspaper in the 1890s, resigning in 1913.

Because most of the original articles that appeared in the journal were either

⁷⁸ According to Anna Haskell's diary, Leder was often at the Haskell's home; one morning, her infant son upset his coffee cup.

⁷⁹ The contributions of German Americans, including Burgman, Leder, and Fuhrman, to the intellectual culture of the San Francisco labor movement cannot be overlooked. Readers will remember from chapter 2 that Fuhrman spearheaded a CSU investigation into Haskell's printing bills, perhaps in the interest of his own printing business, as Anna Haskell suggested. Whatever his motivations, Fuhrman would supersede Haskell as the most important San Francisco labor leader of the late 1880s.

⁸⁰ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, 155; and Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 19.

⁸¹ *Coast Seamen's Journal*, November 2, 1887.

anonymous or signed by nautically inspired pen names like “Dabnis,” “Black Joe,” and “An Old Salt,” it is perhaps impossible to link articles to their authors. What were Leder and Fuhrman’s pen names? Who was “An Old Salt,” the journal’s prophet? Whatever their identities, it is clear that these sailor-intellectuals were “‘more articulate’ than sailors in other American ports,” as California historian Carey McWilliams observed.⁸²

That special articulateness is unsurprising given the labor backgrounds of men like Leder, Hoffmeyer, and Furhman, who were educated in the radical “universities” of the Knights of Labor and the IWA in the early 1880s.

The *Coast Seamen’s Journal’s* “salutatory” article of November 2 represented a brilliant opening salvo into the public life of late nineteenth-century San Francisco, as mediated by the press. In it, an anonymous sailor (Leder perhaps) acknowledged the “immensity” of the journal’s ambitions, presenting a series of contrasts that would serve as recurring motifs in subsequent issues of the newspaper: between producers and parasites; between the “extreme hardship” of the seafaring life and its romantic depiction in popular literature; and, most importantly, between the erstwhile silence of the sailor and the enormity of his historical role in modern times. Like *Truth*, the journal was envisioned as a corrective to the distortion and absence of working-class representations in Gilded Age print culture. “Let us read, let us discuss, let us educate ourselves; let the results of our education be sent broadcast across the ocean”: the aims of the journal were thus formulated as a rallying cry.⁸³ As this exhortation suggests, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* would fulfill a number of roles in the burgeoning intellectual culture of the sailor:

⁸² McWilliams, *California*, 128.

⁸³ “Salutatory,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, November 2, 1887.

as a literary space for the publication, consumption, and dissemination of texts, as well as an oral space for their discussion, or collective interpretation. Again, these functions served the overarching objective of working-class education, which, in the pages of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, assumed an almost sacred significance.

The *Coast Seamen's Journal* was published on Wednesdays at five cents a copy and two dollars a year. On November 16, 1887, two weeks after its first issuance, the journal assumed a six-column format in response to its rapidly growing subscription list. According to the journal, its circulation had swelled to 1,900 subscribers, “outside of our regular seafaring subscribers,” by October 31, 1888.⁸⁴ (Counting “seafaring subscribers,” the total circulation of the journal was at least 4,000.) Designed to provide education and recreation to coasting and deepwater sailors, as well as their friends ashore, the journal offered local, regional, and international labor news, with a strong emphasis on the plight of the seafaring class; union news, by-laws, minutes, and resolutions, including the sailors’ temperance oath, known as the “Comet Resolutions”; poetry, both labor-oriented and sentimental; nautical literature and critiques of the same; a regular humor column; radical literature, including excerpts from Marx; book reviews and recommendations; serial installments of Marie Howland’s *Papa’s Own Girl*, a feminist novel; and, most fascinatingly, labor-inspired parables, allegories, apocalyptic exegeses, and prophecies, which will be discussed in greater depth in chapter 3. Diverging from *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* began to publish sensational stories of crime, sex, and infamy in 1888;

⁸⁴ “Volume II,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, October 31, 1888.

these appeared, quite incongruously, next to installments of *Papa's Own Girl*, a serious novelistic exploration of feminist and cooperative values.⁸⁵

The long-term success of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* may be attributed, in part, to its creative efforts to appeal to an increasingly wide audience, including women, as well as its responsiveness to and respect for its readers, a theme on which chapter 3 will elaborate. As the official organ of the Coast Seamen's Union, the first newspaper published exclusively by sailors, and the preeminent voice of radical, working-class San Francisco in the late 1880s and 1890s, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* appealed to multiple, overlapping audiences: the sailors of the Pacific Coast and those in the larger English-speaking world, working-class San Franciscans, labor activists, reformers, and radicals, including feminists, socialists, cooperatists, and Nationalists.⁸⁶ Thus, a quotation by Terence Powderly appeared in the same issue of the journal as an attack on the Knights of Labor, and a chapter from *Papa's Own* was juxtaposed with the scandalizing love letters of popular actress Louise Balfe. Underlying this heterogeneity of content, however, was a distinct style of thought, marked by specifically working-class interpretative techniques, models of reading, and expectations of historical change.

Like *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* published local, regional, and international labor news from a working-class perspective, filling a major gap in San Francisco's print culture after the collapse of Haskell's paper in 1884. According to the journal, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* and the *Pacific Union Printer*, established in 1888,

⁸⁵ According to her diary, *Papa's Own Girl* was one of Anna Haskell's favorite novels.

⁸⁶ Nationalism was an American reform movement inspired by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.

were “practically the only labor paper[s] published in the English language in San Francisco.”⁸⁷ With its large circulation and growing political influence (although the journal officially eschewed politics), the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* was by far the most popular, important, and ambitious working-class print medium of the late 1880s, as the mainstream *Morning Call* enthusiastically acknowledged in 1889:

Of the many labor journals published in this city none have been so successful as the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*. The manager and the editor, both thorough seamen, were elected from the ranks of the union, and are to be highly complimented on the success and position to which they have raised the paper. In its columns are to be found advertisers from every port on the Pacific Coast, which alone speaks well for its management.⁸⁸

The success of the journal was all the more extraordinary in light of the dangerous, humiliating, and cruel conditions under which Gilded Age sailors worked, in addition to the general financial, social, and geographical instability of seafaring life. While it published news of other crafts and labor organizations, including the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* devoted special attention to the afflictions of the late-nineteenth-century sailor, particularly shanghaiing (tricking, coercing, or kidnapping sailors to work aboard ships); crimps, unprincipled middlemen who recruited sailors, often by coercive means, for a large cut of their future wages (“blood money”); the boarding house system, in which sailors were enticed or compelled to lodge at overpriced boarding houses while ashore; criminal penalties for desertion; physical abuse, or “cruelty”; and use of alcohol to lull sailors into

⁸⁷ *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, January 2, 1889. Perhaps the other labor newspaper whose existence the journal dismissingly acknowledges with the word “practically” was the *People*, which made a very brief appearance on the newspaper scene in 1888.

⁸⁸ “Our Seamen,” *Morning Call*, February 17, 1889.

passivity.⁸⁹ The journal forcefully condemned these practices with heartbreaking accounts of the abuses inflicted upon individual sailors, as well as personal—and allegorical—attacks on cruel captains, traitorous scabs, greedy ship owners, swindling crimps, complicit boarding masters, and hypocritical do-gooders. Special ire was reserved for the San Francisco Shipowners' Association, founded in 1886 to break the CSU by blacklisting its members, and the Sailors' Home, owned and operated by the notorious Daniel Swannack under the auspices of the Ladies Seamen's Friends Society.⁹⁰ Since sailors themselves were painfully aware of the conditions under which they labored, one can assume that these accounts were largely directed towards the education of the journal's landlubbing readers. The journal's rhetorical success was evident not only in the union's increasingly sympathetic treatment by the mainstream press, but also in tangible political and legislative victories, including California Labor Commissioner John J. Tobin's 1887 investigation into working conditions on the waterfront, reprinted in the journal and sold at the newspaper's offices, and the federal maritime law reforms of the 1890s, specifically the Maguire Act of 1895 and the White Act of 1898.⁹¹

Like *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* positioned itself as the workers' alternative to the mainstream press and popular literary culture—as well as the general

⁸⁹ See Lance S. Davidson, "Shangaied! The Systematic Kidnapping of Sailors in Early San Francisco," *California History* 64 (Winter 1985): 10–17, for a pithy and poignant account of these abuses.

⁹⁰ According to the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, the Sailors' Home was a typical, for-profit boarding house disguised as a charitable institution. The journal was especially offended by the hypocritical religiosity of the Ladies Seamen's Friends Society, which ran the Sailors' Home on "temperance principles." "An Honest Move," November 23, 1887.

⁹¹ See the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, November 9, 1887; and Davidson, "Shaghaied!"

reader's alternative to sea novels, in which the hardships of seafaring life were obscured or sentimentalized. However, while the *Coast Seamen's Journal* sometimes criticized local and eastern papers for misrepresenting the sailor's character and demands, it did not share *Truth's* unremitting hostility towards the "capitalistic press," a coinage one contributor to the journal mocked:

It seems to be the particular hobby of many labor papers to keep up a continual howl against what is termed the capitalistic press. In most cases they are to a certain extent justified in doing so, but when they advise working people to support and read only labor papers they give advice which will not be followed, neither is it in our opinion good advice.⁹²

As this passage suggests, the editors of the journal understood that the popularity, if not the honesty, of the mainstream papers was unassailable; in consequence, they turned a necessity (continuing working-class support of the daily press) into a virtue (the advisability of reading the daily newspapers). The article ends by urging workers to read a weekly labor journal *and* a daily newspaper in order to "keep abreast of the times and be able to successfully cope with those who are antagonistic to them."

In addition to demonstrating workers' continued support of the daily papers (despite *Truth's* fiery jeremiads against the capitalistic press), the *Coast Seamen's Journal's* position reflected improved relations between the San Francisco labor movement and the mainstream newspapers in the late 1880s, a state of affairs that Anna Haskell herself predicted in 1884. In response to the organizational and political successes of the San Francisco labor movement in the 1880s—and the growing popularity of working-class media, especially the *Coast Seamen's Journal*—San

⁹² "The Capitalistic Press," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, November 21, 1888.

San Francisco's mainstream newspapers began to provide a forum for workers' voices in sympathetic features and labor columns. Hearst's innovative and opportunistic *Examiner* introduced its new labor column around 1889, receiving high compliments from the *Coast Seamen's Journal*: "The labor column of the San Francisco Examiner is a credit to that paper. The labor editor, M. McGlynn, has made this particular department an authentic and reliable source of information in matters of interest to labor in general."⁹³ In October 1889, E. Kim of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* happily reported that union leaders, like M. McGlynn, had joined the ranks of San Francisco's mainstream press:

Our daily papers have as leading writers a large number of men who have been in the ranks of unionism and know whereof they write. We seldom see a palpably false statement of any question that may arise between labor and capital unless the paper in question is financially interested, and then the other papers do not hesitate to denounce the falsehood.⁹⁴

As these passages suggest, the antagonism between the labor and mainstream press in San Francisco had mellowed by the close of the 1880s, in part, because the mainstream press had capitulated to readers' demands for faithful working-class representations in the news.

Following *Truth's* example, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* sought to fill a gap in San Francisco's print culture, publishing radical literature in addition to labor news. Among its radical offerings were English translations of Marx's "Capital and Labor," "Wages," and "The Working Day"; Shelley's "The Masque of Anarchy," a poem commemorating the Peterloo Massacre of 1819; Patrick Henry's "lost" oration, previously published in *Truth*; excerpts from *The Story of Labor*; and Marie Howland's

⁹³ "The Examiner's Labor Column," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, April 10, 1889.

⁹⁴ E. Kim, "Education Needed," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, October 2, 1889.

Papa's Own Girl, a novel that promoted cooperative enterprise as a vehicle for women's intellectual, economic, and sexual freedom. Like the works of Marx, *Papa's Own Girl* was unavailable at the San Francisco Free Public Library in the 1880s. According to Howland herself, the novel had been banned by the Boston Public Library and the Mechanics' Library of Philadelphia "on the ground of its immorality."⁹⁵ (One imagines that the leaders of the San Francisco Free Public Library shared their colleagues' concerns about the novel's potentially corrupting influence. Certainly, the *Coast Seamen's Journal's* promotion of *Papa's Own Girl*, like the novel itself, represented a challenge to conventional morality, sexual and economic.) In addition to these offerings, the offices of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* sold bound copies of the journal, affording a "general history of our Union and its doings in concise form," and, beginning in 1890, copies of Edward Bellamy's wildly popular utopian fantasy, *Looking Backward*.⁹⁶ In this way, the sailors' newspaper partially filled the role of its predecessor *Truth* in the dissemination of suppressed or hard-to-find literature.

While the *Coast Seamen's Journal* supplied working-class San Franciscans with labor and radical literature, serving as an alternative library, archives, and occasional bookseller, it did not aim to provide a comprehensive course in radical education, as did *Truth*, with its exhaustive lists, ambitious translations, innumerable articles and essays, and growing bookselling business. Instead, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* attempted to provide a working-class forum for the interpretation and discussion of the printed word, which had assumed such importance in the civic life of Gilded Age San Francisco. Thus,

⁹⁵ Marie Howland, "Author's Preface," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, January 4, 1888.

⁹⁶ *Coast Seamen's Journal*, December 7, 1887, and September 24, 1890.

many of the contributions to the journal consisted of ironic or allegorical *interpretations* of texts, among them a carefully glossed version of “The Masque of Anarchy,” an ironic adaptation of “The Raven,” a producerist reinterpretation of *Gulliver’s Travels*, and the elaborate Biblical exegeses of “An Old Salt.”⁹⁷ In “The Raving,” Poe’s classic poem was rewritten to mockingly castigate members of the anti-union Shipowners’ Association.

The poem begins:

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I waited weak and weary,
For a crew of scabs which Curtin promised me the day before,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone sneaking, scabbing outside my office door.
“‘Tis some drunken tramp,” I muttered, “sleeping at my office door,
Only this and nothing more.”⁹⁸

In a literary move typical of the sailors’ newspaper, the anonymous author of “The Raving” invoked a canonical text, rather than an oppositional treatise, to attack the injustices of industrial society. As expressed in and by the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, working-class consciousness was anchored in a style of thought, more than a set of doctrines or a body of literature. For this reason, perhaps, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* accommodated the radical and the mainstream, the serious, the sentimental, and the sensational; from *Truth* to the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, the emphasis had shifted subtly, from radical texts to radical readings—and readers.

Under the able editorships of W. J. B. MacKay, Walter MacArthur, and Paul Scharrenberg, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* prospered well into the twentieth century,

⁹⁷ In chapter 3, the journal’s allegorical turn will be discussed more fully in relation to Christian models of interpretation.

⁹⁸ “The Raving,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, February 29, 1888.

enjoying an extraordinarily long and influential career.⁹⁹ Until the establishment of the San Francisco Labor Council's *Labor Clarion* in 1902, the sailors' journal served as the principal voice of organized labor in San Francisco. In this sense, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* of the 1880s and 1890s served as a literary bridge between the radical, intellectually sophisticated, and organizationally unstable unionism of the 1880s, as represented by *Truth*, and the established, politically influential labor movement of the twentieth century, as embodied by the monumental "labor temples" erected in the 1900s and 1910s. As the Coast Seamen's Union flourished, so did its written, oral, and visual culture, expressed in parades, funerals, literary entertainments, lectures, orations, picnics, the union hall, and in the pages of the sailors' journal. As these expressions were integrated into the daily and ritual lives of unionized San Franciscans, the cultural burden borne by the nineteenth-century labor journal was, to a certain extent, relieved. While *Truth* and the early *Coast Seamen's Journal* anchored working-class San Franciscans in an imagined community of international workers through radical texts and readings, the vast cultural apparatus of twentieth-century unionism articulated working-class identities in the palpable, routine language of everyday life. Put another way, the architectural space of the twentieth-century labor temple had superseded the imagined space of the nineteenth-century labor newspaper.

⁹⁹ Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, 169. As noted, Mackay succeeded Leder as editor of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* in 1889. MacArthur presided over the newspaper in the 1890s and 1910s. He was succeeded by Scharrenberg in 1913. (Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*.)

This chapter has traced the intertwined histories of *Truth* and the early *Coast Seamen's Journal*, emphasizing their multiple, complex functions within the intellectual culture of the San Francisco labor movement, as well as their role in the imagination of working-class identities. Following Benedict Anderson and Elizabeth McHenry, it argued that *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* fulfilled the roles of labor publisher, bookseller, library, archives, and newspaper in a time when working-class print culture in San Francisco was still in its infancy. It emphasized *Truth's* accomplishments as a radical publisher within the context of San Francisco's restricted print culture, arguing that Haskell's short-lived newspaper provided workers in San Francisco and throughout the country with unprecedented access to labor news and radical literature. It then recounted the *Coast Seamen's Journal's* efforts to create and sustain a new, working-class voice, observing a shift in emphasis from texts themselves to their interpretation. In the chapter that follows, working-class reading, as an activity and trope, will be examined more closely, against the historical and cultural backdrop outlined in chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter 3

“Let us read, let us discuss, let us educate ourselves”:

Radical Reading and Working-Class Fraternity

So far, this study has examined the practical and ideological importance of working-class education to the San Francisco labor movement of the 1880s, as well as the complex role of the young labor press in the development of working-class culture and consciousness during that critical decade. It has linked the emergence of a confident, politically engaged, and self-conscious labor community at the end of the 1880s with the rise of working-class print institutions such as *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*. This chapter will investigate a larger and more equivocal set of connections, between the expansion of print and literacy in the nineteenth century, the emergence of new modes of reading, and the imagination of working-class identity, as revealed by the print media of the San Francisco labor movement in the 1880s. Similar terrain has been explored by historian Michael Denning in his pioneering study of dime novels in nineteenth-century working-class life.¹ This chapter will borrow and depart from Denning's work, analyzing neglected San Francisco sources with an emphasis on serious working-class reading as a cluster of alternative literary choices and a distinct interpretive framework that transcended the nineteenth-century dichotomy of “sensational” and “genteel” reading.² Inspired by the work of historian Barbara Sicherman, it will argue that serious working-class reading, as practiced and promoted by San Francisco labor activists in the 1880s,

¹ Denning, *Mechanic Accents*.

² In *Mechanic Accents*, Denning distinguishes between the “sensational” reading of the working classes and the “genteel” reading of elites.

integrated three nineteenth-century “models of reading,” the “evangelical,” “civic” and “self-improving,”³ representing an alternative and distinctly working-class literary praxis, which will be called “radical reading.” According to this model, self-improvement through reading had a necessary social context, the union as a community of working-class autodidacts, as well as a necessary civic purpose, the redemption of the republic through the educational uplift of the producing classes. In addition to these self-improving and civic functions, radical reading integrated earlier Christian models of interpretation, particularly the allegorical and the eschatological. Finally, while proponents of radical reading, like their elite contemporaries, disparaged sensational reading, they borrowed heavily from popular genres, reflecting their profound ambivalence towards the great expansion of recreational reading in the nineteenth century. Thus, radical reading did not represent the wholesale rejection of traditional, elite, or popular models, but rather, enacted their integration and reinterpretation in specifically working-class terms. In this sense, it bridged increasingly divergent literary traditions—those of Christian exegesis, genteel society, and popular culture—borrowing from each in order to build a new community of radical, working-class readers.

As this chapter explores radical reading as a model, or *ideal*, of working-class reading, it will attempt to reconstruct the actual *experience* of reading among workers in Gilded Age San Francisco, asking: What, where, how, and why did working-class San Franciscans read? Although this chapter will argue that the gap between labor activists’

³ See Sicherman, “Ideologies and Practices of Reading.” Sicherman identifies four nineteenth-century models of reading: the “evangelical,” “civic,” “self-improving,” and “cultural.”

vision of radical reading and actual working-class reading practices was not as large as Denning suggests, at least in Gilded Age San Francisco, it will explore the tension between labor intellectuals and the “masses” vis-à-vis the question of reading as an opening into the worldview of the former and the intellectual and recreational lives of the latter. While labor newspapers and serious, alternative works of political economy, utopian fantasy, and feminist fiction enjoyed real popularity among working-class San Franciscans, so did mainstream dailies, story papers, sentimental romances, sensational exposés, and other conventional and popular genres, suggesting that workers read more promiscuously than some reformers, whether elite or radical, might like. At the same time, older literary and oral traditions persisted alongside new genres and modes of reading, affecting the interpretive expectations of working-class readers, as well as the social contexts in which working-class reading took place. These observations suggest that the varieties of working-class reading in Gilded Age San Francisco, though distinct, were diverse and difficult to control. Nonetheless, as Denning has argued in the dime novel context, specifically working-class readerly attitudes and patterns of interpretation can be disentangled from the thicket of literary forms represented in the labor press and other working-class print media in San Francisco. More than just a curriculum of alternative texts, then, radical reading was an alternative practice of literary consumption and interpretation.

The Nineteenth-Century Print Revolution

The rise of working-class print institutions and media in Gilded Age San Francisco was not an isolated development. Technological innovations in the printing

and publishing industries, in tandem with growing literacy rates, effected a revolution in American reading in the nineteenth century, creating the material and social conditions for the rise of mass readership.⁴ A host of related factors worked together to dramatically increase working-class access to the world of print: the mechanization of the printing industry enabled the mass production of books and other reading materials—which in turn drastically decreased their relative cost—while the rise of the public school and library movements accelerated the expansion of literacy and education among the working classes. By 1880, basic literacy was as widespread as cheap reading materials were plentiful;⁵ the mass market for books had found its public.

Anecdotal evidence confirms the pervasiveness of working-class literacy, as well as the affordability of reading materials, in Gilded Age San Francisco. In their many discussions of working-class education, culture, and reading, neither *Truth* nor the *Coast Seamen's Journal* raised the issue of literacy as a factor in the educational standard of the working classes; in other words, basic literacy appears to have been universally assumed. At the same time, advertisements in both journals announced the sale of books, pamphlets, newspapers, and other reading materials at inexpensive prices. For example, *Truth's* offices sold Lovell & Company's popular edition of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* at twenty cents a copy in 1883.⁶ In 1876, labor leader Frank Roney earned

⁴ See Scott Caspar and others, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 3, *The Industrial Book*.

⁵ Carl F. Kaestle, "Seeing the Sites: Readers, Publishers, and Local Print Cultures in 1880," in *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 4, *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940*, ed. Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway, 22–48 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2009).

⁶ "Books for Sale by Truth," *Truth*, November 3, 1883.

between two dollars and three dollars and fifty cents a day as a cement layer's helper and iron molder, respectively;⁷ a twenty-cent book, then, would have cost the equivalent of a modest 6 to 10 percent of his daily pay. For coasting sailors, who earned a pitiful twenty-five dollars a month in 1885,⁸ Lovell's cheap edition of *Progress and Poverty* was still not out of reach, representing less than 1 percent of their monthly income. As these examples suggest, San Francisco workers were largely literate by 1880 and enjoyed relatively affordable, if not uncensored, access to a wide range of reading materials.

The revolutionary expansion of the print market in the nineteenth century was accompanied by a wild proliferation of cheap literature, often intended for and consumed by new and reputedly irresponsible audiences of readers, including urban workers, women, and children. According to Michael Denning, popular literature came in a variety easily digestible nickel and dime formats, the most common of which were the story paper, a newspaper specializing in the publication of serialized fiction; the cheap library, a series of pamphlets representing installments in a discrete fictional narrative; and, of course, the dime novel.⁹ Alongside these popular fictional forms thrived mainstream and specialized periodicals, including religious, ethnic, and labor newspapers, and other cheap, non-fictional genres targeted to ordinary readers. While bourgeois reformers extolled the transformative power of "self-improving" and "civic" reading, the proliferation of recreational, immoral, and subversive literature stoked anxieties about sexual and social disruption. As Barbara Sicherman explains:

⁷ Diary of Frank Roney, 1875–1876, folder 2, box 1, Frank Roney Papers.

⁸ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 7.

⁹ Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 10–12.

Clergymen, educators, and other cultural authorities voiced alarm at the dangerous conjunction of suspect new forms of print with mass consumption. The commercialization of what had once been a sacred activity and the loosening of reading from its earlier patriarchal and institutional moorings raised the specter of reading as an uncontrolled—and uncontrollable—activity.¹⁰

Many of these anxieties coalesced around what would be called “the fiction question,” which Denning broadly and helpfully defines as “the debates, moral panics, and attempts to regulate production that marked the nineteenth-century reaction to the flood of cheap stories and the marked increase in working-class reading.”¹¹ For example, as readers will recall from chapter 1, librarian Frederic Beecher Perkins purged “dirty” fiction, including novels by Fielding and Zola, from the San Francisco Free Public Library’s shelves, defending his efforts in *Free Libraries and Unclean Books*. In this 1885 pamphlet, Perkins echoed the sentiments of his genteel contemporaries, arguing that a public library’s “office as to amusement is of very minor importance.”¹² Perkins reserved special contempt, not only for prurient fiction, but also for newspapermen and their “interminable, sensational, scandal-mongering lawsuit and crime reports.”¹³ Tellingly, the extraordinary growth of these two genres, the newspaper and the novel, was directly linked to the expansion of reading in the nineteenth century. As this chapter will show, Perkins’s anxieties about recreational reading were also shared by San Francisco’s labor leaders; after all, Perkins was a politically active member of the local Knights of Labor. However, as labor leaders promoted self-improving and civic reading,

¹⁰ Sicherman, “Ideologies and Practices of Reading,” 283.

¹¹ Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 47.

¹² Perkins, *Free Libraries and Unclean Books*, 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.

they combated efforts to censor radical literature, challenging their elite contemporaries' narrow (and, one might argue, political) definitions of obscenity.

While book and cultural historians have linked the explosion of cheap fiction in the nineteenth century to the rise of mass readership and elite anxieties about recreational reading, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the complex relationship between the nineteenth-century print revolution, the rapid spread of socialism, and the rise of an increasingly literate working class, vis-à-vis the question of reading.¹⁴ Surely, the proliferation of cheap literature coupled with rapidly rising literacy rates facilitated the dissemination of socialist ideas in Europe and the United States—and provoked alarm about the revolutionary dangers of working-class literacy. In his 1885 novel *Germinal*, Emile Zola captured the hope and fear inspired by the new, radicalized working-class reader: Etienne, a young mechanic who leads a tragic miners' strike, consumes socialist literature with a passion and voracity bordering on madness.¹⁵ (Fittingly, Haskell recommended the soon-to-be published *Germinal* in the October 1884 edition of *Truth*.) Nonetheless, in contemporary efforts to reconstruct and redeem popular reading, serious working-class reading has been too often dismissed, as if the suspiciously neat dichotomy of improving and recreational reading had simply been turned on its head, privileging the latter. As an addendum to these accounts, this chapter will attempt to restore radical working-class reading to its rightful place in nineteenth-century American book history.

¹⁴ For example, there is no index entry for “socialism” in the otherwise compendious *History of the Book in America*, vol. 3, *The Industrial Book*.

¹⁵ See Emile Zola, *Germinal*, trans. Peter Collier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 145, 164–165; and Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau, *The “Dangerous” Potential of Reading: Readers and the Negotiation of Power in Nineteenth-Century Narratives* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 33–44.

The Power and Dangers of Reading: Labor Perspectives

Despite the debates that swarmed around reading as a social, political, and philosophical problem akin to “woman” or “labor,” the transformative power—and potential dangers—of reading were indisputably accepted by cultural authorities and critics across the social spectrum. As Barbara Sicherman argues:

Virtually all contemporary commentators viewed reading as a potent technology. If they did not always concur on its goals and consequences, they agreed that when correctly practiced, reading had almost unlimited potential for good, and, when improperly done, . . . corresponding potential for harm.¹⁶

It is possible that this faith in the transformative power of reading was inherited from an earlier time, when the written word was more often invested with a mysterious and sacred significance. Whatever its origins, faith in the power of reading—and fear of its misuses—was shared by labor leaders in Gilded Age San Francisco, providing an important theme in the two major labor newspapers of the 1880s, *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*. In this “great age of the autodidact,” to borrow Sicherman’s phrase, reading and discussion served as the primary instruments of self-improvement and collective uplift for the San Francisco labor community; thus, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* adjured its readers in its first edition, “Let us read, let us discuss, let us educate ourselves; let the results of our education be sent broadcast across the ocean.”¹⁷ While San Francisco labor leaders passionately encouraged self-improving and civic reading among the working classes, sometimes at great personal sacrifice, their attitudes towards recreational reading were far more ambivalent, ranging from disdain to cautious

¹⁶ Sicherman, “Ideologies and Practices of Reading,” 283.

¹⁷ “Salutatory,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, November 2, 1887.

approval. In the San Francisco labor press, this ambivalence found expression in many forms, including radical reinterpretations of obscenity, contradictory statements about the actual practice of working-class reading, and the creative appropriation of popular literary genres.

For Gilded Age cultural elites, reformers, and radicals, reading—as a tool of self-improvement and civic integration—was an essential solution to the labor problem, which Victor Hugo defined as “the great question of the day.”¹⁸ In response to the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, an editorial in the *American Library Journal* suggested that working-class reading would restore social harmony *if* directed by institutional authorities like public schools and libraries: “Light is always the one cure for darkness, and every book that the public library circulates helps make . . . railroad rioters impossible.”¹⁹ Edited by Melvil Dewey—with Perkins serving as an associate editor²⁰—the *American Library Journal* clearly represented the opinions and interests of the late nineteenth-century “library elite.”²¹ As library historian Dee Garrison argues, “A corollary of the argument that ignorance and violence went hand in hand was the belief that the [public] library could blunt the impact of class consciousness which was growing in proportion to the rate of immigration, the number of strikes, and the intensity of economic distress.”²²

While cultural elites like Dewey argued that working-class ignorance fueled labor unrest and, therefore, represented a major threat to the status quo, radical labor

¹⁸ “Victor Hugo,” *Truth*, July 7, 1883.

¹⁹ Editorial, *American Library Journal* 1 (1887): 395–96.

²⁰ *American Library Journal* 1 (1887): 387.

²¹ Dee Garrison, *Apostles of Culture*. In particular, see chapter 2 for an analysis of the genteel social background of late nineteenth-century library leaders.

²² *Ibid.*, 45.

intellectuals in San Francisco and across the country believed that working-class education would actually *overturn* the established social order. Moreover, radicals linked the great social and political upheavals of the nineteenth century to structural corruption and injustices, not to working-class depravity. As Helen Wilmans, a regular contributor to *Truth*, wrote in a review of W. Stanley Jervons's *The State in Relation to Labor*:

The English people are devouring this book by the thousands; reading it, pondering over its pages, learning deep lessons of philosophy, gathering hope and inspiration from its pages . . . Apropos, we quote from stirring words of Louis F. Post: "The rabble are not dangerous," a French statesman of the Bourbon stripe once said, "till they begin to read" . . . As long as the rabble did not read they would not think; as long as they did not think they were not to be feared. But they are reading now. Go where you will, on ferryboat, in street car, in factories and workshops at the lunch hour, and you find men with papers in their hands. A few years back these same men ate and traveled in stolid inactivity of brain as well as body. But now they read and think of what they read. They read and think and talk in a voice that has the ring of the coming tempest in it. Their torpid brains have stirred to life, their listless minds have roused themselves to healthful activity, and the fruit of it is nearly ripe. "The rabble are not dangerous until they begin to read!" Very true. The "rabble" in the United States of America have begun to read.²³

As this passage suggests, labor intellectuals, like their elite contemporaries, appreciated the extraordinary power of reading; for them, however, working-class reading would hasten social unrest to its inevitable and tempestuous end. In this sense, they echoed the sentiments of European contemporaries like Zola, who saw in working-class reading a living, uncontrollable seed of the revolutionary future.

The status of reading in the nineteenth century was as problematic as it was powerful. As literary critic Ana-Isabel Aliaga-Buchenau has argued, American and European elites regarded mass literacy as an effective tool of social stabilization with a

²³ Helen Wilmans, "A New Book," *Truth*, November 8, 1882.

nonetheless “dangerous potential” for personal and collective harm, if irresponsibly wielded.²⁴ In the United States, the extraordinary growth of popular literary culture, emblemized by the dime novel, sparked deep concerns about the dangerous potential of purely recreational reading, especially for women and the working classes. In particular, these anxieties revolved around the “immoral,” or sexually corrupting, potential of titillating literature, as well as the addictiveness of novel reading. In her diary, radical labor activist Anna Haskell expressed a prevailing ambivalence about compulsive novel reading:

I feel sometimes as if I ought not to read novels, I get so wrapt up in them that I feel as if I can't put the book down. I get in a kind of fever, trying to get to the end, but still it is the only excitement I have, and the only thing that really amuses me.²⁵

Corresponding with the nineteenth-century expansion of the reading public and the anxieties it provoked was a radical constriction of the definition of obscenity, as historian Paul Boyer observes.²⁶ Routinely, institutional authorities (Bakunin's “God and the State”) launched charges of obscenity against works with politically radical content, including Marie Howland's *Papa's Own Girl*, a feminist socialist novel that was published in popular weekly installments in the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, and had been banned by the Boston Public Library and the Mechanics' Library of Philadelphia “on the ground of its immorality.”²⁷ The *Coast Seamen's Journal's* support of *Papa's Own Girl* was not coincidental. In the 1880s, San Francisco labor activists generally allied

²⁴ See Aliaga-Buchenau, *The “Dangerous” Potential of Reading*.

²⁵ Diary of Anna Haskell, June 8, 1884, vol. 9, Haskell Family Papers.

²⁶ Boyer, “Gilded Age Censorship, Repressive Campaigns, and Gradual Liberalization,” 277.

²⁷ Marie Howland, “Papa's Own Girl,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, January 4, 1888.

themselves with the feminist movement, while challenging institutional definitions of obscenity and the conventional sexual and social morality that underpinned them.

However, the *Coast Seamen's Journal's* defense of Howland's novel was rhetorically indebted to self-improving and civic models of reading, which held titillating literature suspect:

We are extremely happy to see many of our comrades leave port with such healthful literature as Bebel's "Woman," "Conventional Lies, Paradoxes," etc., and it is with the fervent desire to cultivate the taste for just such literature as will lead the reader out of the narrow circles of custom and prejudice, into the realms of free and independent thought, that we publish Mrs. Marie Howland's story entitled "Papa's Own Girl." We feel assured this story (unlike the trashy sensational novels which to a great extent crowd the literary market, leaving either a most lamentable impression or else none at all upon the minds of the people), will open for the reader a new world of thought, in which he will soon learn to move with ease and infinite pleasure.²⁸

As this passage shows, the editors of the *Coast Seamen's Journal* promoted *Papa's Own Girl* as an example of serious, self-improving literature, contrasting it with the "trashy, sensational novels" so widely available. In this way, they challenged the *definition* of obscenity that prevailed among cultural elites, but not the *concept* of obscenity itself. At the same time, they did not divorce improving reading from reading for pleasure; in fact, "infinite pleasure" would be the reward for the serious reader's hard intellectual labor. The editors of *Truth* performed a similar discursive operation in their 1884 defense of Zola, whose oft-censored stories they recommended and published:

A friend suggests that Zola's more modern stories which expose every detail of modern bourgeois family life with such hideous and disgusting plainness, are the best possible means of propaganda for the cause of real reform, and that Zola in

²⁸ "Our Story," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, January 4, 1888.

pursuing this course, does it as a reformer and that it is not a money making scheme based upon the general societary demand for indecent literature.²⁹

In this passage, *Truth* contrasted Zola's stories with "indecent literature," distinguishing between legitimate realism, justified by its reformist intent, and obscenity for the sake of "money making" and personal amusement. Thus, *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* invoked the concept of obscenity in defense of radical literature condemned as obscene, using genteel discourse against itself. In this way, San Francisco labor intellectuals, crafted an oppositional discourse from within, borrowing liberally from accepted models of reading.

While *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* defended radical and reformist works of fiction that had been deemed obscene by cultural authorities, they shared elite concerns about the dangers of irresponsible reading. In particular, contradictory statements about the actual practice of working-class reading in the San Francisco labor press suggest that labor intellectuals themselves felt profound ambivalence about the rise of popular literature in the nineteenth century, revealing a gap between the ideal and practice of working-class reading whose extent is hard to measure. In *Truth*, different contributors argued that the bulk of working-class reading was both serious *and* trivial. For example, an article of October 4, 1882, taken from the New York *Truth*, asserted that self-improving reading was on the rise among the laboring classes:

No better evidence can be had of the depth of the present labor movement and of the impression it has made among the working classes than the fact that of the last two years the demand in the large city libraries for works on political and social economy has been steadily on the increase. Where some time ago such books were left to moulder on the shelves untouched and unread except by the poorer

²⁹ "Emile Zola," *Truth*, January 26, 1884.

university students, they are now in almost constant use by mechanics, artisans, and men accustomed far more to manual than to mental labor. The doctrines of Adam Smith, Stuart Mill, Fourier, Proudhon, Laveleye, Blanqui and George are read with avidity, and when the list of authors is exhausted the student asks why such and such another writer is not represented.³⁰

Two weeks later, in a fictitious dialogue between a wage worker and a member of the Knights of Labor, working-class reading was dismissed as superficial:

Go into our libraries and look over the shoulder of most readers; you will find there, that books which are read most are novelettes and romances, the offsprings of shallow-brained authors; while books which arouse thought and spur action remain neglected on the shelves.³¹

Shortly thereafter, Helen Wilmans, in an article of November 8, 1882, to which this chapter has already referred, depicted San Francisco workers as avid and serious readers, who hungrily consumed newspapers during their few spare moments, at work on their lunch breaks and on public transportation.³² In his role as editor of *Truth*, Haskell noted that reformist and socialist works, like Stetson's *The People's Power* and Starkweather and Wilson's *Socialism; Evolution or Revolution*, sold well among San Francisco's working classes. Nonetheless, in 1899, he told an audience of the Oakland Nationalist Club that workers "have neither the time nor the inclination to read novels," including Bellamy's bestselling *Looking Backward*.³³ As these examples show, *Truth's* radical contributors, in their complex and sometimes contradictory role as reformers, advocates, and members of the working class, at once praised and decried the character of working-

³⁰ "A Sign," *Truth*, October 4, 1882.

³¹ "A Dialogue," *Truth*, October 18, 1882.

³² Helen Wilmans, "A New Book," *Truth*, November 8, 1882.

³³ See "A New Book," *Truth*, June 30, 1883; "New Books," *Truth*, November 3, 1883; and "The New System," *Oakland Enquirer*, July 9, 1889, Personal Reminiscences and Memoranda, Haskell Family Papers. Readers will recall from chapter 1 that Stetson, Starkweather, and Wilson were members of the IWA.

class reading. They were consistent, however, in their concerns about the stultifying effects of purely recreational reading, particularly of cheap fiction, echoing the sentiments of cultural authorities like Perkins.

Like *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* deliberately and consistently promoted serious reading, while warning of the dangers of sensational and fantastic literature. In its salutatory article of November 2, 1887, the journal depicted itself as a serious and truthful alternative to the “penny novel,” in which the hard realities of life are obscured:

It is true that the Sailor's life has been, almost from time immemorial, the object of thousands of literary efforts; but those stories of a fantastic type, written in a highly romantic strain, amid the cosy and comfortable surroundings of the author's study, have, if anything, only resulted in rendering still more obscure the true condition of our craft, and in making the sailor an object of envy rather than one worthy of assistance and moral aid. But who indeed could possibly give the desired and correct information, short of ourselves, who are part and parcel? No one. Our task, then, becomes plain. Webs of romance must be unwoven; mirages of a rosy and fantastic hue must be destroyed. That penny-novel type of a Sailor-hero has held sway over the minds of the people too long. We, who have been chained by dire necessity to a continual life upon the ocean, must raise our voices in our own behalf. The stories told in these columns will surely lack the fantastic sound of sea novels. They are not published to tickle your imagination, but to arrest the thought of such men and women who are in search of Truth, and for the establishment of Justice, and who agree with us that Sailors have a right to aspire to as high a moral and mental standard as any other craft or class.³⁴

While *Truth* dismissed cheap fiction as mind-numbing and infantilizing, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* launched a more profound critique of the underlying *ideological* character of such literature in its extraordinary opening edition. To the editors of the sailors' journal, purely recreational reading was dangerous to all classes, not only because it lulled the mind into inactivity, but, more importantly, because it wrapped the “dire” material conditions of working-class life in “webs of romance.” In response, the *Coast*

³⁴ “Salutatory,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, November 2, 1887.

Seamen's Journal was imagined as a sort of anti-dime novel, an ambitious literary effort to demystify the sailor's life.

In contrast to *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* expressed nearly unqualified approval of its seafaring readers' literary choices, happily observing and cultivating a taste for "healthful literature," such as the work of German socialist August Bebel, among San Francisco's sailors.³⁵ (Readers should recall that all of the contributors to the journal were sailors themselves.) Indeed, the journal's critique of romantic sea novels was mostly directed at "landlubbing" readers, who represented the comfortable classes in the its symbolic lexicon. In this way, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* reversed the conventional formula in which bourgeois educators would reform and uplift the laboring masses, as indicated by the journal's provocatively titled 1889 article, "Education Needed. Why Not Enlighten the Employer on the Labor Question? A False Idea of Unions."³⁶ The journal's contributors envisioned their reformist task as dual: to enlighten the seafaring class as to the noble nature of their craft and social calling, and to educate landlubbers, employers, and other representatives of bourgeois authority on the central social, political, and philosophical problem of the day—the labor question—from the uniquely perspicacious perspective of labor. As the San Francisco *Morning Call* explained the surprisingly literary *raison d'être* of the Coast Seamen's Union in 1889: "But it is to fight the evils resulting from 'the glowing accounts,' and lay before 'shore

³⁵ "Our Story," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, January 4, 1888.

³⁶ E. Kim, *Coast Seamen's Journal*, October 2, 1889.

people' the true facts of hardships, dangers, etc., of the seafarers' life at sea and on shore that the present organization of nearly 5,000 seamen exists."³⁷

Despite their professed disapproval of dime novels and other recreational literature, both *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal* borrowed heavily from popular genres, including romances, mysteries of the city, crime stories, and titillating tales of sexual disgrace, sometimes appropriating them for radical ends—and sometimes, in the case of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, reproducing them outright, presumably to satisfy less sophisticated readers. As Denning has argued, labor papers' simultaneous critique and appropriation of "trashy" fiction indicates a profound ambivalence on the part of working-class leaders to the emergence of mass literary culture in the nineteenth century.³⁸ At the same time, the labor press's abiding engagement with popular culture represents a tacit acknowledgement of the appeal of dime novels and other cheap fiction to working-class readers. While it is impossible to know, *Truth's* financial failure and the *Coast Seamen's Journal's* lasting success may indeed be related to nineteenth-century readers' demands for the sort of literature that both newspapers openly decried.³⁹ At the same time, working-class readers' taste for popular fiction did not necessarily preclude an interest in serious works of political economy, like *Progress and Poverty*, and reformist fiction, like *Looking Backward* and *Papa's Own Girl*.

While *Truth* condemned shallow, sensational, and mind-numbing fiction, it published a variety of serialized features that injected radical political content into

³⁷ "Our Seamen," *Morning Call*, February 17, 1889, San Francisco Public Library.

³⁸ Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 42.

³⁹ Here, failure and success are defined in practical terms.

popular forms, including the dime novel and story paper, creating new and sometimes strange literary pastiches. Among these was “Utopia! A Social Romance Written for TRUTH,” published serially in the spring of 1883. According to *Truth*:

The writer [of “Utopia”] by means of psychometry visits in company with a spirit named “Psycho,” a planet distant in space millions of miles from Earth, but having similar characteristics. They find there in existence a perfect civilization the result of development from the savage state. The scene is then made to turn backward and the course and progress of this development is unrolled before the eyes of the two travelers.⁴⁰

As this apparently deadpan summary suggests, “Utopia” married a number of diverse literary and cultural influences, including science fiction, spiritualism, and utopianism, while presenting an alternative vision of the perfect society in familiar serial form. (The theme of time travel is also found in Edward Bellamy’s immensely popular *Looking Backward*.) *Truth* also recommended labor fiction, or “Romance,” in its regularly published reading list;⁴¹ this category included works such as *Mysteries of the People*, a socialist novel by Eugene Sue, the father of the first dime novel genre, the (usually titillating) mysteries of the city. However, even in desperate financial circumstances, *Truth* refused to publish apolitical, purely recreational literature, whether fiction or poetry, to draw in more subscribers. For the first generation of San Francisco labor intellectuals who built *Truth*, radical working-class culture—sustained by alternative print institutions—would be fundamentally antagonistic to the tastes and values of a literary marketplace determined by the dictates of profit. It is no wonder, then, that *Truth* struggled and ultimately failed to survive in the competitive context of the nineteenth-

⁴⁰ “Utopia! A Social Romance Written for TRUTH,” *Truth*, April 14, 1883.

⁴¹ See appendix A.

century print culture market. Here was another danger presented by recreational reading: that, like the “octopus” of Anna Haskell’s imagining, it would devour and spit out all serious intellectual enterprise.⁴²

As previously noted, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* presented itself as an authentic, working-class alternative to dime novels, outstripping *Truth* in its profound critique of the ideological character of popular fiction. Given that Xaver Leder, founding editor of the sailors’ newspaper, was a member of the IWA and close associate of Burnette G. Haskell, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*’s original antagonism to “trashy” novels is unsurprising. Like *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* recommended and offered examples of serious labor literature, notably Marie Howland’s *Papa’s Own Girl*, which was published in weekly installments in the journal from January 4, 1888 to July 10, 1889, to the delight of readers. After the editors of the journal announced their intention to discontinue serial publication of *Papa’s Own Girl* in June of 1888 to make room for additional local news, they received enough letters from disappointed subscribers to convince them to reverse their decision within a week, indicating the popularity of Howland’s novel among the journal’s primarily working-class audience.⁴³

Like “Utopia,” *Papa’s Own Girl* represented an oddly compelling pastiche of popular genres and radical influences, weaving two stories of deception, disgrace, and redemption against a backdrop of feminist, socialist, and cooperative ideas. While the influence of popular literary genres, particularly women’s serials, is obvious in *Papa’s Own Girl*, Howland challenged the sexual morality underlying such fiction, liberating her

⁴² See the Diary of Anna Haskell, February 14, 1884, vol. 9, Haskell Family Papers.

⁴³ “To Our Readers,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, June 20, 1888.

heroines, the middle-class Clara Forest and the working-class Susie Dykes, from the familiar and tragic narrative of female disgrace. In a striking reversal, the humiliations of unwed pregnancy and divorce create the very conditions for economic independence, personal freedom, and domestic happiness for the novel's heroines. To readers of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, *Papa's Own Girl* had an ideological *and* purely recreational appeal: while it promoted progressive and radical values, it provided the excitement, titillation, and satisfaction of a popular women's serial. (In fact, it may be possible that the sensational elements of the story accounted for much of its popularity.) For the editors of the sailors' journal, the publication of literature like *Papa's Own Girl* represented and, at the same time, helped resolve their ambivalence towards cheap fiction and the rise of mass literary culture.

Unlike *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* did not maintain a position of absolute hostility toward purely recreational literature. In addition to radical verse by Leder and others, it published romantic and sentimental poetry, such as "What is a Woman Like?" and "To My Mother," extolling traditional domestic virtues and pleasures.⁴⁴ The journal's weekly humor column, "B'O'S'N's Locker," was almost totally devoid of political content and often included racist caricatures and cartoons. By December of 1888—and still under the editorship of poet and IWA member Xaver Leder—the journal had begun to publish sensational reports of crime, vice, and illicit sex under headlines such as "Prado's Crimes," "Infamy in Iowa," "Hoyle Murder," "Burning with Loves,"

⁴⁴ See *Coast Seamen's Journal*, July 4, 1888; and August 1, 1888.

“Flagellation,” and “Morphine for Ladies.”⁴⁵ These appeared, quite incongruously for modern readers and, perhaps, for the editors of the newspaper themselves, next to labor news, installments of *Papa’s New Girl*, predictions of revolutionary apocalypse, and editorials in favor of the establishment of public kindergartens. While the inclusion of such literature may have compromised the original vision of the journal’s radical founders, it probably reflected the “uncontrollable” literary tastes and reading lives of the *Coast Seamen’s Journal’s* working-class readers, who appeared to enjoy, in addition to Bebel’s socialist works, the popular literature deplored by bourgeois reformers and labor radicals alike.

Radical Reading: A New Model

Thus far, this chapter has explored responses in *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* to the great expansion of print culture in the nineteenth century vis-à-vis the perceived power and dangers of reading. This section will identify and describe a new and indigenously working-class model of reading—radical reading—which emerged in the 1880s as a defining factor in the print culture of the San Francisco labor movement. By necessity, this is a retrospective effort that, to a certain extent, imposes current modes of thought on the past; Gilded Age labor intellectuals did not explicitly articulate radical reading as a new ideal of literary consumption and interpretation that drew from preexisting models. It is important to remember that these men and women were, first and foremost, labor *activists*, who would have agreed with Marx: “The philosophers have

⁴⁵ See *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, December 19, 1888; December 26, 1888; January 9, 1889; and June 19, 1889.

only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it.”⁴⁶ However, they saw labor education, through disciplined reading and discussion, as an essential part of their efforts to radically transform industrial society. At the same time, they shared a widespread cultural obsession with reading, including a faith in mass literacy as a powerful social force for good, anxieties about the dangers of irresponsible reading, and a longing for a time when the written word was anchored in sacred texts. Working with the attitudes and rhetorical tools at hand, San Francisco labor intellectuals built a powerful new framework in which to read and interpret texts that was not without its own internal contradictions.

In “Ideologies and Practices of Reading,” Barbara Sicherman has identified four “models of reading” in nineteenth-century America: the “self-improving,” “civic,” “evangelical,” and “cultural” or “cosmopolitan,” all of which were distinguished from the suspicious practice of “reading for pleasure.” The first three models reflected fundamentally *ethical* approaches to reading in a time of cultural disorientation: self-improving and evangelical reading would uplift the individual, intellectually and spiritually, while civic reading would preserve (or restore) the health of the body politic.⁴⁷ As Sicherman argues, these models of reading often overlapped in nineteenth-century discussions about the responsible uses of print culture. For Sicherman and others, nineteenth-century “ideologies of reading” were elite discourses, while working-

⁴⁶ Marx, Karl, “Theses on Feuerbach,” in *The German Ideology*, part one, with selections from parts two and three and supplementary texts, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, ed. C. J. Arthur (New York: International Publishers, 1999), 123.

⁴⁷ Labor intellectuals rejected “cosmopolitan” reading, or reading for the sake of intellectual refinement, divorced from political concerns. Might not cosmopolitan reading simply be reading for pleasure for the educated elite?

class reading was an *object* of bourgeois concern, rather than an independent discourse in its own right. However, San Francisco labor intellectuals, in their commitment to forging a radical fraternity of workers through education, viewed reading as a weighty problem with profound ethical, social, and political implications, adopting elements from self-improving, civic, and religious models, as well as popular literary forms, to create an alternative and distinctly working-class model of reading. In other words, San Francisco labor activists and intellectuals (who were themselves workers, with a few exceptions) took an active, important, and surprising part in nineteenth-century debates about working-class reading, introducing a new voice that borrowed from and challenged established and popular models.

In a time when higher education was out of reach for the masses of ordinary people, self-improving reading assumed great importance as an essential vehicle of educational and vocational advancement. For this reason, institutions that provided affordable access to books and other printed materials, like libraries, served a fundamentally educational purpose, as Perkins argued in *Free Libraries and Unclean Books*. Though Henry George's literary career was extraordinary, his educational *bildungsroman* was typical of an ambitious young workingman in nineteenth-century San Francisco. Completing his formal education at the age of thirteen, George read widely and copiously at the libraries of the San Francisco Mercantile Library Association and the What Cheer House in his spare time.⁴⁸ Similarly, Burnette G. Haskell, who briefly attended the University of California, studied history and political economy at the

⁴⁸ Charles A. Barker, "Henry George and the California Background of 'Progress and Poverty,'" *California Historical Society Quarterly* 24 (1945): 97–115.

Mercantile Library and Mechanics' Institute in the 1870s and 1880s, becoming, in Ira Cross's assessment, the "best-read man" in the San Francisco labor movement.⁴⁹ (One imagines George and Haskell literally, as well as figuratively, crossing paths.) These anecdotes reflect the critical role self-improving reading played in the educational and intellectual lives of working-class San Franciscans.

Truth, the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, and other working-class print media and cultural institutions, like the IWA and Coast Seamen's Union libraries, were part of this self-improving tradition. As such, they were envisioned as educational institutions that provided working-class San Franciscans with access to otherwise inaccessible worlds of radical and reformist thought. A contributor to *Truth*, for example, compared the newspaper to a university: "Take TRUTH for six months and read it carefully and at the end of that time you will know more science and have a deeper insight into human affairs than your master's son will get in four years at college."⁵⁰ For San Francisco labor intellectuals, however, the goal of self-improving reading was neither the intellectual refinement nor personal advancement promised by a university education. Instead, self-improving reading was necessarily grounded in the collective experience and needs of the labor union as a fraternal body of autodidacts. In this way, the nineteenth-century model of self-improvement was reconciled with—and transformed by—the ideal of working-class fraternity.

⁴⁹ See the Diary of Burnette Gregor Haskell, box 3, 1878–1879, Haskell Family Papers; and Cross, *History of the Labor Movement in California*, 158.

⁵⁰ *Truth*, April 5, 1884.

If self-improving reading was consistently encouraged by *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, it was always in the service of a larger civic purpose, the redemption of the republic through the elevation of labor. Thus, self-improving reading, as envisioned by the San Francisco labor press, was *necessarily* civic reading. The *Coast Seamen's Journal's* repeated use of the third person in its calls for working-class education expressed this ideal of civic reading as the reconciliation of self and community:

Let us hope, let us work, let us think, let us be brothers in the future as we were in the past, let none of us be misled by the “false light” of individual ambition, but let our united ambition be exerted in behalf of the entire craft.⁵¹

And, of course, the salutatory article in the first edition of the sailors' journal to which the title of this chapter refers beautifully invokes this theme.⁵² According to Denning, the dichotomy of “mutualism” and “self-advancement” represented a “genuine ideological antimony in producer manhood,” which certain genres and interpretations of cheap fiction sought to reconcile.⁵³ In the print culture of the San Francisco labor movement, the model of radical reading resolved this contradiction by welding self-improving and civic reading into an ethical whole, using rhetorical tools borrowed from bourgeois culture. While the great American labor historian Herbert G. Gutman has argued that working-class cultures in the Gilded Age “were sustained by norms that shared little with the industrialist and his culture,”⁵⁴ examples from working-class print culture in San

⁵¹ “Labor Papers, Copy, One and All,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, September 5, 1888.

⁵² See appendix B.

⁵³ Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 170.

⁵⁴ Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America*, 242.

Francisco suggest that labor intellectuals, in fact, recycled many bourgeois norms and ideals, transforming them into a profound critique of industrial society.

Not only were the models of self-improving and civic reading mutually inclusive, they were necessarily tied to specific texts distinguished by their seriousness of purpose and oppositional political content. As chapter 2 argued, these radical and reformist texts, sanctioned and made available by labor organizations like the IWA, formed a sort of alternative curriculum for the self-taught worker struggling to understand his identity in relation to the world. Fortunately, *Truth*, the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, Anna Haskell's diary, and other records provide insight into the outlines and specific content of this labor curriculum—and, less clearly, into workers' subjective responses to specific texts. Haskell's list of labor literature, published weekly in *Truth* and reprinted in appendix A, represents, perhaps, the most ambitious and comprehensive list of radical literature available to Gilded Age readers. As Haskell himself claimed:

This list of labor literature is the result of research extending over many years. It is the only thing of its kind ever published and it is valuable to every honest man, woman and child in the Republic.⁵⁵

Anna Haskell's diary, on the other hand, serves as a profoundly personal commentary on the labor literature recommended and made available by *Truth*, reflecting, if not replicating, the tastes of ordinary readers in the cultural milieu of the Gilded Age San Francisco labor movement. An avid reader, Haskell created a wonderfully detailed account of her reading life, recording her responses to specific texts, whether radical, canonical, or "trashy." Among her favorites were Laurence Gronlund's

⁵⁵ B. G. H. [Burnette G. Haskell], "Labor Literature," *Truth*, April 28, 1883.

Cooperative Commonwealth; Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady*, which she mistakenly attributes to Willa Cather; Marie Howland's *Papa's Own Girl*; Eugene Sue's *Mysteries of the People*; Charles Reade's *Foul Play*; Madame d'Herrionette's *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman*; Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni*, *What Will He Do With It?* and *Harold, The Last of the Saxons*; and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.⁵⁶ Some of these books are treatises of political philosophy (*Cooperative Commonwealth* and *A Woman's Philosophy of Woman*); others are works of fiction strongly influenced by radical or reformist thought (*Papa's Own Girl*, *Mysteries of the People*, and *Looking Backward*); and the rest are semi-sensational, mid-brow novels without obvious political content (*The Law and the Lady*, *Foul Play*, and Bulwer-Lytton's novels.) Of these, Haskell reserved special praise for two reformist novels that integrate radical, self-improving, civic, recreational, and even sensational elements: *Papa's Own Girl* ("One of the best books I have ever read") and *Looking Backward* ("Oh—it is fine, dear me—if only we were living under such a system than in this hard work-a-day poverty-stricken world").⁵⁷ It would be difficult to classify this list of beloved books according to any of the models proposed by Sichertman or Denning. Like that of her working-class contemporaries in San Francisco, Anna Haskell's reading thus complicates the dichotomy of sensational and self-improving reading that has informed much of the scholarship on nineteenth-century literary culture and consumption.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Diary of Anna Haskell, Haskell Family Papers.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, April 14, 1885, and April 5, 1888.

⁵⁸ See Denning, *Mechanic Accents*, 33.

Scattered evidence from the *Coast Seamen's Journal* suggests that San Francisco's sailors largely shared Anna Haskell's literary tastes, enjoying explicitly socialist works (August Bebel's *Woman and Conventional Lies, Paradoxes*), reformist fiction (*Papa's Own Girl, Looking Backward*), and the conventional sea stories of William Clark Russell, Frederick Marryat, and Richard Henry Dana to which the *Coast Seamen's Journal* itself served as an alternative. The union's library was stocked with donations reflecting members' wide, even promiscuous, reading. The collection included the popular and highly circulating *Youth's Companion*, an utterly conventional story paper for young people, and a set of radical works bequeathed by New York bookseller Julius Bordollo, who sold a "complete labor library" for five dollars, consisting of "Thirty Standard Works by 24 authors, viz. Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Marx, Hyndman, Krapotkin, Reclus, Bebel, Rogers, Annie Besant, Gronlund, George; speeches of the Anarchists and history of trial, etc."⁵⁹ The newspaper passionately promoted *Looking Backward*, which was variously compared to the Declaration of Independence, the Bible, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and sold at union headquarters for an affordable forty cents.⁶⁰ And, the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, like *Truth* before it, was suffused with the literary and philosophical influence of Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, a book read by "tens of thousands of laborers" otherwise unversed in economic theory.⁶¹

These examples suggest that many San Francisco workers were serious readers of radical and reformist works, including labor newspapers; however, their self-improving

⁵⁹ "\$5.00 Complete Labor Library," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, September 5, 1888.

⁶⁰ E. Kim, "The Work Ahead," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, August 28, 1888; and An Old Salt, "The Work to Do," *Coast Seamen's Journal*, December 18, 1889.

⁶¹ Richard T. Ely, *The Labor Movement in America*, 284.

and civic literary habits did not preclude a taste for conventional literature, like *The Law and the Lady* and *Youth's Companion*. Moreover, reformist fiction that combined oppositional political content with popular literary devices, like *Papa's Own Girl* and *Looking Backward*, appears to have been favored by San Francisco's working classes over works of political economy and purely recreational novels. Thus, while there was a significant overlap between the ideal of working-class reading, as imagined by San Francisco labor leaders and intellectuals, and its actual practice, working-class readers did not sacrifice the pleasures of recreational reading to the values of individual and mutual improvement.

In addition to integrating self-improving and civic literary models and promoting specific texts, radical reading borrowed from Christian models of reading and interpretation, which were deeply embedded in American culture. While Sicherman designates religious readerly models as “evangelical,” the term is too narrow—and too specifically Protestant—to fully describe Christian attitudes towards reading and interpretation in the nineteenth century. This chapter will thus refer to evangelical reading as, more broadly, Christian reading.⁶² In the San Francisco labor context, the influence of Christian models of reading was expressed in two major ways: in a faith in the transformative or conversionary power of reading, which has already been discussed, and in allegorical and eschatological approaches to interpretation. Additionally, Christian

⁶² And, of course, Christian exegesis is ultimately and fundamentally indebted to Jewish exegesis. Another debt—that of the San Francisco labor movement to Jewish culture—remains enigmatic. Danielewicz was Jewish, invoking his religious identity in defense of the Chinese. Ironically, the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, which owed its existence to Danielewicz's earliest organizing efforts, often used anti-Semitic language and imagery.

motifs and themes consistently appear in *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, lending credence to Gutman's argument that all varieties of Gilded Age "labor reform" were indebted to Christianity for ethical, rhetorical, and philosophical inspiration.⁶³

Denning has identified allegory as an oppositional and specifically working-class approach to reading and interpreting dime novels in the nineteenth century. Readings of *Truth* and, especially, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* confirm this superficially implausible thesis. Strangely, however, Denning fails to connect allegorical readings of dime novels to preexisting Christian modes of interpretation, despite the important place of allegory in the Christian exegetical tradition. This chapter will attempt to make the link between radical working-class and Christian models of reading, arguing that San Francisco labor intellectuals borrowed from Christian, as well as bourgeois and popular, literary models to build and reinforce their critique of industrial society. In their appropriation of Christian interpretive strategies, local radicals were not alone: both *Progress and Poverty* and *Looking Backward* were profoundly indebted to the Christian tradition, in style and substance—and in apocalyptic historical expectation. As readers will recall, these two books were widely read among San Francisco workers.

Surprisingly, given its role in the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*, *God and the State*, and other anti-religious works, *Truth* was suffused with Christian rhetoric and imagery, including references to Jesus—and the hypocrisy of his followers among the "loafing" classes—allegorical interpretations, and messianic predictions. The figure of Jesus was invoked as a workingman and radical, "the Chieftan of his Class" and the

⁶³ Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America*, 90.

world's "First Labor Martyr."⁶⁴ Similarly, contemporary radicals, including San Francisco labor organizers and Russian anarchists, were alternately compared to the prophets, apostles, three wise men, and early Christian martyrs. The following passage is typical, not only in its use of explicitly Christian analogies, but also in its allegorical approach to reading world history:

Vox Clamens in Deserto. We are the apostles of the New Revolution, the Heralds of the Twentieth Century. Like the Voice crying in the Desert we appeal to all men and women, alternately by threat by tears and by supplication. But where in the elder world the star that guided the Wise Men to Bethlehem was that of Faith, here in the present day of mightier energies we have to compass on our voyage to the humble spots where Truth lies hidden, the full noontide splendor of the sun of science.⁶⁵

In another extraordinary article, *Truth* used an allegorical (or, more specifically, typological) device to suggest that the eminently secular figure of Gracchus was the precursor of Christ *and* the nineteenth-century populist.⁶⁶

A Noble Roman. Horatius Gracchus, the Ancient Socialist. His Words and Deeds. The Pre-cursor of Jesus Christ as a Friend of the Laborers. The Sand-lotter of Ancient Rome! The Land for the People! That was the Slogan of the Hero of Old Rome.⁶⁷

Finally, contributors to *Truth* interpreted Biblical passages and historical events eschatologically, as signs or prophecies, not of the Last Judgment, but of the coming revolution, as in the following article, attributed to "Jesus Christ":

Oh! Thoughtless, Brutal and Sleeping Man! Why Heed Ye Not the Prophecy? . . . Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted. Blessed are they that

⁶⁴ "The God," *Truth*, September 20, 1882; and "Jesus Christ," *Truth*, April 28, 1883.

⁶⁵ "At last," *Truth*, July 7, 1883.

⁶⁶ In Biblical exegesis, typology is a form of allegorical interpretation in which Old Testament figures (e.g., David, the prophets, etc.) are understood as prefigurations or "types" of Christ.

⁶⁷ "A Noble Roman," *Truth*, June 9, 1883.

hunger and thirst, for they shall have their fill. Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.⁶⁸

In this passage, the kingdom of heaven stands for the post-revolutionary world, in which the suffering poor and their defenders will be rewarded. (Similarly, Bellamy wrote: “*Looking Backward* was written in the belief that the Golden Age lies before us and not behind us, and is not far away.”)⁶⁹ As these examples show, *Truth* borrowed specifically Christian thematic, rhetorical, and interpretive devices, including allegory and eschatology, in its radical “readings” of sacred scripture and world history.

In the *Coast Seamen's Journal* of the mid- to late 1880s, the influence of Christian models of reading and interpretation was even more profound. As in *Truth*, the historical Jesus was invoked, again and again, as a precursor of the persecuted labor radical of the present day:

To whom is all this display of wealth and devotion dedicated [at the churches of the rich]? It is to “One” whom, if He were in their midst to-day, would not be recognized by them. They would treat Him as He was treated when He was on this earth. They would call Him an agitator, a socialist, an anarchist. He would, however, receive the benefit of modern Christian civilization. Instead of nailing Him to the cross they would hang Him on the gallows.⁷⁰

Similarly, “An Old Salt” argued that Jesus taught communism—not that those who suffer meekly will be rewarded in the next life. Moreover, he likened the monopolist's greed to the original sin that “brought sin and death into the world,” over which the coming

⁶⁸ “The God,” *Truth*, September 20, 1882.

⁶⁹ Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1967), 313.

⁷⁰ W. J. M. [W. J. Mackay], “Christmas Greetings,” *Coast Seamen's Journal*, December 21, 1887.

revolution would triumph.⁷¹ In another article, the words of Jesus on the cross, according to the gospels of Mark and Matthew, are uttered by a sailor who has been beaten, starved, and chained by his abusive captain: “My God! My God! Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me!”⁷² In this way, “An Old Salt” and others invoked scriptural sanction to condemn capitalist abuses and, more broadly, capitalism itself.

The *Coast Seamen’s Journal* published elaborate, yet carefully explicated, parables and allegories on labor-related themes, confirming Denning’s thesis that allegory represented a specifically working-class approach to reading and interpretation in the nineteenth century. These included IWA member W. C. Owen’s “Gulliver Shackled”—“An Allegorical Description of the Social Condition of Modern Industry and of Various Proposed Methods for Relief”—in which the bound Gulliver stands for organized labor, temporarily restrained by the “Lilliputian” forces of capitalism.⁷³ In a similar vein, and even more explicitly interpreted for the reader, is “What Is It?” an “Allegorical View” of the much-resented boardinghouse system by “Simple”:

This No. 2 dog (shipping master) guards the exit of the avenue as securely and as faithfully as does his brother, Dog No. 1 (boarding master), the entrance, and in order to pass through this gate Jack is compelled, albeit with a grind of his teeth, either to mortgage the next three months of his life, or to stay right where he is, breadless and friendless, besides losing his clothes and whatever he may possess in the way of mementoes from his folks at home.⁷⁴

⁷¹ An Old Salt, “Man’s Duty to His Fellow Man,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, October 23, 1889.

⁷² “A Tale of Woe,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, March 13, 1889.

⁷³ W. C. O. [W. C. Owen], “Gulliver Shackled,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, January 11, 1888.

⁷⁴ Simple, “What Is It?” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, February 15, 1888.

Such allegories provided working-class readers with a model for interpreting complex texts in specifically laborist terms—and of relating larger historical currents to their own lives, struggles, and emerging sense of collective identity. At the same time, allegorical interpretation, rooted as it was in the Christian exegetical tradition, represented a comfortingly familiar approach to understanding texts for most Gilded Age readers.

The *Coast Seamen's Journal* of the mid- to late 1880s is distinguished by its use of millennial prophecies and other varieties of eschatological interpretation to explicate the all-important role of labor in world history, again in familiarly Christian terms. Eccentric as it may seem, the following passage, from an article by “An Old Salt,” typifies the journal’s eschatological approach to reading a variety of religious and secular texts in relation to historical events:

Among the most notable predictions of modern times are those of Mrs. Abbie Marsh in this country at or near the beginning of the century. That of Nostradamus I [of] France in the Fifteenth century, and that of the Vision of Washington, at Valley Forge, in the darkest days of the Revolution, all of which have been published in the JOURNAL . . . But that which concerns us most is the vision of Washington. It notes first the war of 1812. It next refers to our civil war, but its most mysterious and ominous warnings are found in the words, “The dark shadowy angel placed a trumpet to his mouth and blew three distinct blasts, and taking water from the ocean sprinkled it upon Europe, Asia, and Africa. From each of those countries arose thick black clouds which joined into one, and throughout this mass gleamed a dark red light, by which I saw hordes of armed men who, moving with the cloud, marched by land and sailed by sea to America which country was presently enveloped by the cloud, and I saw the vast armies devastate the whole country.” If this prediction needs confirmation it may be found in the xxxviiiith chapter of Ezekiel where the prophet foretells the invasion of this country by hordes of semi-barbarians from Asia and Africa. This together with the prophecies of Daniel and Isaiah foretell the destruction and overthrow of Monarchy can be found explained in a work by S. D. Baldwin, A. M., and published by Appleton & Co., Cincinnati, O. What can be more certain than the fact that the period when these predictions are to be fulfilled is at hand? Is it not evident that we have come near to the time when wars shall be no more. When

the metaphor of Zion and the Lamb shall be realized. “When every one shall sit under their own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make them afraid.”⁷⁵

Jammed with obscure secular and scriptural references, such apocalyptic prophecies regularly appeared in the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* throughout the 1880s. By bringing together so many seemingly unrelated authors, events, and traditions, these prophecies deliberately suggested that the labor perspective—and the labor perspective alone—could make sense of the apparently arbitrary tumult of history. Put another way, everything, from the predictions of Nostradamus to the private sufferings of a solitary sailor, was connected by the great event to come.

Again and again, contributors to the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* interpreted texts and events as signs of the coming revolution, which would restore labor to its rightful and honored place in the republic. (This revolution was not necessarily imagined as a bloody one.) In this way, they represented themselves as prophets and “heralds of the world’s progress,”⁷⁶ especially equipped due to their class position to correctly interpret and predict history itself, understood as a great book unfolding toward a predetermined end. In an age when texts were becoming increasingly alienated from religious functions and meanings, as Sicherman has argued, this eschatological approach to interpretation helped restore the sacred significance of texts by representing them as signs and prophecies of the coming age. In the articulation of their prophetic vision, the labor intellectuals of the

⁷⁵ An Old Salt, “Prediction and Experience,” *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, January 16, 1889.

⁷⁶ *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, October 31, 1888.

1880s thus affirmed and enacted Henry George’s words: “Lo! here, now, in our civilized society, the old allegories yet have a meaning, the old myths are still true.”⁷⁷

Winding its way from the great expansion of print in the nineteenth century to eschatological readings in the labor press, this chapter has examined ideals and practices of reading in the intellectual culture of the 1880s San Francisco labor movement. It has briefly described the technological, social, and cultural changes that created the conditions for widespread literacy and the rise of popular literary culture in the nineteenth century, arguing that working-class San Franciscans enjoyed affordable, if restricted, access to reading materials by 1880. Following Sicherman and others, it observed that the print revolution of the nineteenth century was accompanied by a faith in the power of directed reading to transform the individual and society—and by profound anxieties about the misuses of reading, especially by new and reputedly irresponsible classes of readers. In San Francisco, the power and dangers of reading were widely acknowledged across the social spectrum, by genteel critics, cultural authorities, labor intellectuals, and workers. In particular, labor intellectuals and activists shared elite anxieties about the dangers of recreational reading, while borrowing liberally from popular genres to create a radical, working-class print culture of their own. Similarly, labor intellectuals invoked the *concept* of obscenity—contrasting serious reformist novels by Howland and Zola with truly “trashy” fiction—in defense of radical literature deemed obscene by cultural

⁷⁷ Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, 564.

authorities. In this way, they recycled preexisting literary models, forms, and values to build a new framework for working-class reading.

The second part of this chapter identified and described “radical reading” as a new model, or ideal, of working-class reading that emerged within the print culture of the 1880s San Francisco labor movement. While Gutman has argued that working-class culture in the Gilded Age was essentially antagonistic to prevailing bourgeois and “industrialist” values, this chapter observed that radical reading was, in fact, significantly indebted to familiar self-improving, civic, and Christian models of reading, which it incorporated into a new and fundamentally oppositional discourse. This chapter also suggested that the ideal of radical reading, as promoted by labor intellectuals, and actual practices of working-class literary consumption overlapped more than the work of Denning and other book historians allows; San Francisco workers enjoyed a wide range of self-improving, socialist, sentimental, and sensational works, especially radical and reformist novels like *Looking Backward* and *Papa’s Own Girl*. Finally, this chapter argued that the model of radical reading was strongly informed by Christian approaches to interpretation, especially allegorical and eschatological exegesis; nonetheless, this religious debt has been largely neglected. In particular, contributors to the labor newspapers *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* used Christian imagery, complex allegories, and messianic predictions to give the labor movement a religious sanction and establish the inevitability of the competitive system’s collapse. In this way, they re-sacralized the written word by interpreting its various manifestations as signs of the eventual triumph of labor.

Chapter 4

Conclusion: Looking Forward

By the close of the 1880s, most of the radicals who had helped make San Francisco the “headquarters of unionism in the West” were already beginning to fade into the margins of the labor movement.¹ Burnette and Anna Haskell, with the support of many of their friends in the IWA, had turned their energetic attention to two projects: the Kaweah Colony, a utopian community in Tulare County based largely on Laurence Gronlund’s *Co-operative Commonwealth* (1884), and the local Nationalist movement, inspired by Edward Bellamy’s bestselling novel *Looking Backward* (1888). In the 1890s, both the colony and the Haskells’ marriage collapsed, as Burnette became an increasingly desperate and marginal political figure.

Like Haskell, other fixtures of the Gilded Age labor movement were condemned to obscurity and exodus in later years, as if in ironic proportion to their accomplishments. Around 1888, the Representative Council of the Federated Trades and Labor Organizations of the Pacific Coast branded former Trades Assembly president Frank Roney a “traitor to the labor cause” in retaliation for his outspoken opposition to a brewery boycott. The following decade, “unemployed and forgotten,” Roney left San Francisco, eventually finding work at the Mare Island Navy Yard in Vallejo.² In 1889, Xaver Leder resigned as editor of the *Coast Seamen’s Journal*, thereafter disappearing from the historical record; the same year, the Coast Seamen’s Union dissolved the IWA

¹ “San Francisco is Center of the Labor Union Movement,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 14, 1917, container 5, folder 21, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

² Roney, *Frank Roney*, 536, 541.

advisory committee that had exercised such a powerful influence over the union's affairs.³ The chief organizer of the Coast Seamen's Union, Sigismund Danielewicz, boldly leapt into oblivion after delivering a poignant and enormously unpopular defense of the Chinese at the 1885 labor convention in San Francisco.⁴ According to labor historian Alexander Saxton, this brave defender of the Chinese working class—and organizer of the most powerful union on the Pacific Coast—was last noted in 1910, migrating east in search of work, a forgotten and penniless wanderer.⁵

Despite their estrangement from the labor movement they so crucially helped to build, most of the labor leaders and intellectuals of the 1880s maintained a passionate engagement with radical print culture and the values of education, improvement, and fraternity on which it was based. More specifically, they continued to write, edit, publish, collect, and organize labor, radical, and reformist literature. Haskell, unsurprisingly, started a Kaweah Co-operative Colony journal, *The Commonwealth*, in 1888, to which IWA members W. C. Owen, James J. Martin, and P. Ross Martin all contributed.⁶ In addition to the newspaper, the colony had a library and one of the best printing presses in California.⁷ In the late 1880s, IWA member and *Truth* contributor W.

³ These developments probably represent a larger effort on the part of the sailors' union to restrict or purge the IWA's influence.

⁴ *Daily Report*, December 3, 1885, container 5, folder 2, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

⁵ Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy*, xvi.

⁶ Programme of the Fourth Public Reception of the Nationalist Club of San Francisco, October 7, 1889, vol. 3, carton 1, Haskell Family Papers; and *The Commonwealth*, May 24, 1889, vol. 4, carton 1, Haskell Family Papers.

⁷ Ruth R. Lewis, "Kaweah: An Experiment in Cooperative Colonization," *Pacific Historical Review* 17 (1948): 429–41.

C. Owen started his own Nationalist magazine, *The California Nationalist*.⁸ His IWA comrade, P. Ross Martin, who had been active in the organization of the Coast Seamen's Union a few years earlier, also devoted his intellectual energies to the new Nationalist cause, serving as librarian of the Nationalist Club of San Francisco, which Haskell had organized around 1889.⁹ Three days before the great earthquake of 1906, Haskell wrote to Frank Roney that he was preparing a "History of the Labor Movement and of the Labor Men of our Own Times."¹⁰ (Unfortunately, Haskell's notes and manuscript—if they ever existed—have been lost, destroyed, perhaps, in the fires that followed the quake.) Roney's autobiography, penned at the urging of California labor historian Ira Cross and published in 1931, happily survives, serving as an invaluable, if impressionistic, history of the nineteenth-century labor movement in San Francisco.¹¹ In addition to his autobiography, Roney wrote a series of labor histories for publication in *The Citizen* and other Progressive Era newspapers.¹² Finally, though much of his later career is obscure, Danielewicz remained committed to the alternative press, writing for the anarchist newspaper *Free Society* in San Francisco at the turn of the century.¹³ As these biographical anecdotes show, radical print culture continued to play an important

⁸ Vol. 4, carton 1, Haskell Family Papers. (Readers will recall that Nationalism was a popular American reform movement inspired by Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward*.)

⁹ Programme of the Third Public Reception of the Nationalist Club of San Francisco, September 21, 1889, volume 3, Haskell Family Papers.

¹⁰ Burnette G. Haskell to Frank Roney, April 15, 1906, box 1, folder 1, Frank Roney Papers.

¹¹ See Frank Roney, *Frank Roney: Irish Rebel and California Labor Leader*.

¹² See clippings from *The Citizen*, 1916, container 5, folder 19, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

¹³ Blaine McKinley, "The Quagmires of Necessity: American Anarchists and the Dilemmas of Vocation," *American Quarterly* 34 (1982): 503–23.

role in the lives of the men and women who helped build the institutional and cultural life of the San Francisco labor movement in the 1880s, even after they had severed ties with the movement itself.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Haskell, Roney, Leder, Danielewicz, and other radicals were succeeded by a new and more conservative generation of labor leaders, men like Patrick H. McCarthy, president of the Building Trades Council and mayor of San Francisco from 1910 to 1912, and Andrew Furuseth, a Norwegian sailor who steered the course of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific until 1936, vigorously opposing the influence of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).¹⁴ These men presided over the great expansion and consolidation of organized labor's political and industrial power in San Francisco during the Progressive Era, which coincided, not accidentally, with McCarthy's twenty-four-year career as president of the Building Trades Council from 1898 to 1922. As organized labor in San Francisco became an increasingly powerful constituency in the city and the state, the radicalism of its early years was undeniably diluted in the waters of political necessity. Nonetheless, the educational emphasis, literary influences, and ideals of reading that distinguished the print culture of the 1880s survived in the cultural institutions and media of the Progressive Era labor movement. In a strange irony, the relatively conservative, politically savvy trade unionists of the Progressive Era fulfilled the promise of the 1880s,

¹⁴ See Kazin, *Barons of Labor*.

transforming the educational and literary ethos of radical organizations like the IWA and the Coast Seamen's Union into a tangible and permanent reality.¹⁵

While a detailed history of the print culture of the Progressive Era labor movement in San Francisco is beyond the scope of this study, this chapter will briefly describe the Progressive Era institutions, media, and projects in which the cultural inheritance of the 1880s was most profound, including and especially labor temples, libraries, and newspapers. It is hoped that such an outline, however skeletal, will encourage further study of working-class print culture in Progressive Era San Francisco. As it presents this rough sketch, this chapter will also trace the spirit of the Progressive Era labor movement—characterized, in Michael Kazin's words, by a “blend of civic reformism, egalitarian vision, romantic class consciousness, and anti-Asian fervor”—back to the radical labor culture of the Gilded Age.¹⁶

Interwoven with this narrative of cultural continuity and triumph will be a belated and necessarily inadequate consideration of some of the implications, limitations, and absences inherent in this study. These questions, suggestions, and silences tend to drift toward two artificially isolated poles—those of gender and race. In addition to acknowledging the well-documented relationship between anti-Asian racism and labor solidarity in San Francisco, this study has pointed to a perhaps unexpected affinity

¹⁵ Alexander Saxton makes a similar point, albeit in a more sinister register: “Like Burnette G. Haskell half a generation earlier, Tveitmoie was drawn through socialism and syndicalism to the romantic aesthetic of violence. But whereas Haskell . . . could content himself with make-believe, Tveitmoie turned the games to reality.” (*The Indispensable Enemy*, 245.) Tveitmoie was the editor of the Building Trades Council's newspaper *Organized Labor*.

¹⁶ Kazin, *Barons of Labor*, 170.

between the Gilded Age labor and feminist movements. Other studies might well consider the implications of Anti-Asian racism and feminist sympathies in relation to the construction of white working-class male identity in San Francisco, as well as the relationship between gender and race in the imagination of white working-class men. However, this approach begs a whole new set of questions: How did Asians and Asian Americans define *themselves*, as workers and outsiders, in their own literary products and reading lives? Similarly, how did working-class women negotiate their double identity—as women and workers—through the varieties of radical, bourgeois, and popular print culture available in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era?

Labor Temples and Libraries

Since the early 1880s, when Trades Assembly president Frank Roney spearheaded an unsuccessful effort to build a central, cooperatively owned labor hall, the establishment of labor temples as centers of working-class politics, education, and leisure had been one of the cornerstones of the San Francisco labor movement's larger cultural project. For Gilded Age labor organizations like the Trades Assembly, however, the construction of independently owned labor temples remained prohibitively expensive. For this reason, most trade unions and local assemblies of the Knights of Labor rented outside facilities like the Irish American and Turn Verein halls for a few hours every week to hold meetings, lectures, and special events.¹⁷ Exceptionally, however, the IWA, Coast Seamen's Union, and United Brewery Workers opened permanent rented headquarters, complete with lecture halls and libraries, in the 1880s, providing a model

¹⁷ The print culture of San Francisco's many ethnic associations, including the Turn Verein, represents a compelling topic for future study.

for future labor organizations.¹⁸ By establishing stable, alternative places for working-class education and recreation, these labor organizations paved the way for the labor halls and temples of the Progressive Era, which would serve as productive centers of working-class culture.

The 1900s and 1910s witnessed the proliferation of labor halls and temples throughout San Francisco. Opened by the Building Trades Council in 1908, the Building Trades Temple at 14th and Guerrero Streets was one of the largest and most impressive labor halls in the city. In size and facilities it remained unrivaled, until the San Francisco Labor Council dedicated the San Francisco Labor Temple in 1915. The construction of a labor temple represented a massive, complex, and long-term undertaking, which Gilded Age radicals could only anticipate; the three-story Building Trades Temple, for example, cost \$250,000 to build and boasted an auditorium with a seating capacity of 3,000.¹⁹ Even the more modest halls of the individual trade unions included an impressive range of facilities. The following description of the Carpenters Hall, dedicated in 1908 by the four San Francisco locals of the Carpenters Union, is typical: “The new home of the carpenters’ unions contains in the basement a large billiard hall, reading room, library, tool room and cigar stand, and a banquet hall that will accommodate nearly 300 persons. Another hall is large enough for 500.”²⁰ In addition to these amenities, ladies’ parlors,

¹⁸ The headquarters of the IWA and Coast Seamen’s Union are discussed in chapter 1. According to the San Francisco *Examiner*, the headquarters of the United Brewery Workers, organized by IWA member Alfred Fuhrman, included a “well-stocked library and reading room for its members” *Examiner*, September 1, 1890, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes, container 5, folder 7.

¹⁹ Kazin, *Barons of Labor*, 101.

²⁰ “Carpenters New Home Dedicated,” *San Francisco Call*, March 15, 1908.

employment bureaus, gymnasiums, and newspaper offices were typical features of the new labor halls of the 1900s and 1910s.

Labor organizations built, understood, and invoked these structures as concrete symbols of working-class identity and power. According to an article in the “New Labor Temple Edition” of the *Labor Clarion* outlining the San Francisco Labor Council’s plans to erect a temple:

Someone has said that “Society will always reproduce in its architectural aspects the status of its people, and thus manifest its *moral* condition in bricks and stones.” The new labor temple will be such that organized labor of San Francisco need not be ashamed of having such a rule applied, because the new temple is to be one in every respect worthy of men and women whose efforts it will represent.²¹

Echoing the values of the Gilded Age labor movement, the *Labor Clarion* stressed the “moral” significance of the new labor temple as an architectural figure for the San Francisco labor community as a whole. Much like the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* of the 1880s, the labor temples and union headquarters of the Progressive Era embodied and promoted fundamentally ethical self-improving and civic values, while providing recreation to weary workers. At the same time, they concretized working-class identities, transforming the imaginary communal space of the newspaper into the brick and mortar reality of a home.

The educational and literary values of the Trades Assembly, Knights of Labor, IWA, and Coast Seamen’s Union survived in a key institution of the Progressive Era labor movement, the union library. Nonetheless, the history of labor libraries in

²¹ “Labor’s New Home in the City,” *Labor Clarion*, March 1, 1912, reel 1, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes (italics mine).

California has been totally neglected, as noted in the introduction to this study. A preliminary review of primary sources reveals that libraries were maintained by the following San Francisco labor organizations in the 1900s and 1910s: the Barkeepers' Union; Brewery Workers' Union; Building Trades Council; Electrical Workers' Union; Carpenters' Union; Cooks' Union; Helpers' Union; Labor Bureau Association; Musicians' Union; Plumbers, Gas and Steam Fitters' Union; Retail Clerks' Union; San Francisco Labor Council; Sailors' Union of the Pacific; Stablemen's Union; and Waiters' Union. While this survey is in no way comprehensive, it shows, remarkably, that even relatively insignificant trade unions like the Helpers established their own libraries in the Progressive Era.

Scattered evidence also suggests that labor organizations cared deeply about the collections, administration, and comfort of their libraries, while expressing an active interest in the direction of the public library system. The Waiters' Union, for example, established a fund for the "purchase of books" in 1911, appointing no fewer than five members to serve as directors of its new library.²² In 1914, the powerful Building Trades Council passed a resolution "calling for the establishment of libraries and reading rooms in labor temples throughout the state," which had been proposed by Olaf Tveitmoe, the editor of its newspaper, *Organized Labor*; four years earlier, the council had started collecting books and other materials for its new library, to be installed in the Building

²² "Federation Approves Shorter Workday," *San Francisco Chronicle*, June 11, 1911; and "Labor Appeals for Sentenced Woman," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 8, 1911.

Trades Temple.²³ At the same time, the San Francisco Labor Council vigorously and consistently opposed the city's solicitation of Carnegie philanthropy for the purpose of expanding its public library system, arguing that accepting such a gift would be unethical in the light of Carnegie's "cruel, heartless, and degrading policy toward his employees, as witness the tragedy of Homestead."²⁴ The council's opposition to Carnegie philanthropy, coupled with the abiding interest of its members in the establishment of labor libraries, suggests that working-class San Franciscans in the Progressive Era, much like their Gilded Age forbears, simultaneously participated in and challenged the culture of reformism and philanthropy that characterized bourgeois civic life. It remains for future studies to explore the specific contours of the relationship between working-class and bourgeois culture vis-à-vis the question of reading in the Progressive Era.

Labor Newspapers

As this study has shown, the IWA and Coast Seamen's Union went to great expense to establish and build the labor press in San Francisco in the 1880s. While *Truth* collapsed after a relatively brief run, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* flourished into the Progressive Era, due, in part, to its willingness to accommodate a variety of literary tastes—for improving *and* recreational works. The resignation of IWA member Xaver Leder from the editorship of the sailors' paper in 1889 fittingly marked the close of the decade to which this study is dedicated. Under the leadership of W. J. B. Mackay and

²³ "McCarthy Wins in Building Council," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 25, 1914; and "Labor Approves Library for Union and Council," *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 14, 1910.

²⁴ "Carnegie's Gift Not Wanted," *San Francisco Call*, July 13, 1901. See also Peter Booth Wiley, *A Free Library in This City*.

Walter Macarthur, the *Coast Seamen's Journal* thrived in the 1890s, serving as the preeminent labor newspaper in the city.²⁵ Its representative role in working-class life reflected the increasing political and economic influence of the sailors' union at the close of the nineteenth century. A rival labor paper was not established until 1894, when the San Francisco Labor Council and the Building Trades Council jointly founded the *Voice of Labor*, edited by M. McGlynn, future labor editor for the San Francisco *Examiner*. The *Voice of Labor* enjoyed a six-year run, folding as plans were developed to establish independent newspapers for both labor councils. In 1900, the Building Trades Council founded *Organized Labor*, edited by Olaf Tveitmoe; two years later, the San Francisco Labor Council elected Joseph J. O'Neill to edit its new organ, the *Labor Clarion*.²⁶

Together with the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, *Organized Labor* and the *Labor Clarion* acted as the triumvirate of the San Francisco labor press in the Progressive Era, commanding large working-class audiences and shaping public policy in the city and throughout the state. By 1915, *Organized Labor* alone had a subscription rate of 50,000, in a city with a population of just over 400,000 men, women, and children.²⁷ (In contrast, this study has estimated that the *Coast Seamen's Journal* had approximately 4,000 subscribers in 1888.) As one of the major voices of working-class voters in the state, *Organized Labor* played an active role in California politics, endorsing statewide legislation, including a series of propositions that would have reformed the state tax

²⁵ See Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*.

²⁶ Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California*.

²⁷ Kazin, *Barons of Labor*; and Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, vol. 2. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913.

system to allow counties to impose Henry George's single tax.²⁸ (In this case, literature and politics literally intersected.) Like the San Francisco labor movement as a whole, the Progressive Era labor press was distinguished by growth, consolidation, and impressive political confidence. Nonetheless, it remained profoundly indebted to the struggling, alternative Gilded Age print institutions on whose shoulders it stood.

For the student of the Gilded Age labor movement, even the most cursory review of Progressive Era labor newspapers reveals a strikingly familiar voice. This voice accommodated diverse and sometimes contradictory rhetorical traditions, including those of scientific socialism, bourgeois reform, and Biblical apocalypse. As labor historian Michael Kazin describes *Organized Labor's* editor, Olaf Tveitmoe, "He wove together quotations from Karl Marx, the Bible, Henry George, and his countryman Henrik Ibsen into hyperbolic editorials on subjects from the Golden Rule to the imminent and bloody downfall of world capitalism."²⁹ Tveitmoe's editorials thus recalled the allusive, polyphonic style of *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*. As Kazin's observation suggests, the political and literary influences that swayed the Progressive Era labor press remained strikingly similar, too; in addition to Henry George, Karl Marx, and the Bible, contributors invoked Abraham Lincoln, Edward Bellamy, and Shelley in support of a wide range of leftwing and populist causes, including public education, Asian exclusion, and women's suffrage.³⁰ Indeed, future scholarship might explore the relationship

²⁸ Kazin, *Barons of Labor*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Contrastingly, Saxton interprets Tveitmoe's multi-voicedness outside of the rhetorical context of the San Francisco labor movement, as a sign of personal intellectual limitation: "[H]e [Tveitmoe] remained an alienated seeker pouring into the columns of

between the labor and feminist movements in Progressive Era San Francisco, as expressed in the labor press.³¹

As this study has suggested, the diversity of literary voices and political traditions accommodated by the Progressive Era labor press had its origins in the polyphonic discourse of the Gilded Age labor movement, as fashioned by a small cadre of radicals who organized the San Francisco Trades Assembly, IWA, Coast Seamen's Union, and local assemblies of the Knights of Labor. This discourse, in turn, was rooted in a larger intellectual culture—democratic yet exclusionary, self-improving yet cooperative, progressive yet apocalyptic—of which the work of Henry George was perhaps most exemplary. The clamoring of the multitudes heard in the pages of *Truth* and *Organized Labor* carried with it a spirit of democracy and great historical expectation. Sadly, this study has left the real contradiction at the heart of this polyphony unexamined: the violent absence of Asian and Asian American voices in a discourse otherwise characterized by freedom, optimism, and diversity.³² On a similar note, it remains to be seen whether women, as contributors and readers, continued to play an important role in the Progressive Era labor press in San Francisco.

his journal the passion of a frustrated intellectual life. He tried endlessly to fabricate some coherence from the turmoil around him." *The Indispensable Enemy*, 245.

³¹ In a departure from the *Coast Seamen's Journal's* usual editorial stance, an article of April 30, 1889, attacked women's suffrage as a cynical ploy by men to undermine the sexual morality of women. Does this article represent the beginning of a change in working-class men's attitudes towards the "woman question"?

³² Of course, the "indispensability" of anti-Chinese racism to the consolidation of the California labor movement is Saxton's theme in his masterful *The Indispensable Enemy*. However, Saxton does not perceive a real contradiction between the intellectual openness and racial exclusivity of white working-class culture in California. In fact, he sees anti-Chinese racism as absolutely central to the construction of white working-class identity in the new state.

Based on evidence from *Truth* and the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, this study has argued that the San Francisco labor movement of the 1880s fashioned a new ideology of reading that drew from preexisting self-improving, civic, and Christian models of literary interpretation. A cursory review of Progressive Era labor newspapers suggests that this ideology of reading continued to inform the cultural life of the San Francisco labor movement well into the twentieth century. While *Truth* functioned as a labor library by printing and circulating radical literature, newspapers like the *Voice of Labor*, *Organized Labor*, and *Labor Clarion* focused on the provision of news, opinion, and literary entertainment from a distinctly working-class perspective. (Presumably, the large and established labor libraries of the Progressive Era filled the role once assumed by *Truth*.) Nonetheless, Progressive Era labor newspapers continued to champion self-improving reading, passionately discussing radical, reformist, canonical, and popular works, within the civic context of an increasingly solidified labor community.

In addition to promoting self-improving and civic reading, Progressive Era labor newspapers were suffused with Biblical allusions, Christological imagery, and labor-inflected allegories, demonstrating a continuing debt to Christian models of reading and interpretation. The *Voice of Labor*, for example, featured a regular column titled "Bible Teaching Up to Date," in which J. Alfred Kinghorn-Jones provided allegorical interpretations of Biblical passages from the perspective of the working poor:

Just before this part of John's dream he had beheld "a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given to them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth." The "beasts of the earth" that are

now giving the toilers Hell, are the monopolists and corporations; their power is only held by the gold standard medium of exchange . . .³³

In fact, it is possible that the influence of the Christian rhetorical tradition was even more profound in the Progressive Era labor press. It is this writer's hope that future studies will explore more deeply the interpenetration of radical and religious literary traditions in the reading lives of workers in San Francisco and across the country.³⁴

While the Progressive Era labor press continued the tradition of radical reading established in the 1880s, it assumed new cultural functions in keeping with the changing status of the white working-class community in San Francisco. As this chapter has noted, the role of the labor press in the publication of radical literature was deemphasized in the Progressive Era, although newspapers like the *Voice of Labor* continued to oppose government censorship of socialist works like *Told in Whispers*.³⁵ At the same time, the Progressive Era labor press became increasingly involved in the project of imagining and preserving San Francisco labor history, publishing innumerable histories of the local labor movement and the individual unions of which it consisted. The "Labor Day Edition" of the 1908 *Labor Clarion*, for example, included histories of over a dozen local unions and labor organizations, penned for the journal by union members.³⁶ Efforts such as these not only helped preserve San Francisco labor history for future scholars, but also, and more importantly perhaps, created a common history and heritage—a collective past,

³³ J. Alfred Kinghorn-Jones, "Bible Teaching Up to Date," *Voice of Labor*, June 13, 1896, reel 1, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

³⁴ What influence, for example, did Jewish models of reading exercise on local labor movements in which the Jewish presence was more important?

³⁵ See "Come Let Us Reason Together," *Voice of Labor*, May 9, 1896, reel 1, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

³⁶ *Labor Clarion*, September 4, 1908, reel 1, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

as it were—for the city’s newly imagined working-class community. Like the labor temples and libraries of the Progressive Era, the labor press represented the institutionalization of working-class consciousness, the concretization of an *idea* of community developed by the radicals of the Gilded Age. If the radicals of the 1880s were the architects of working-class identity in San Francisco, then Progressive Era labor leaders like McCarthy, Furuseth, and Tveitmoe were its builders.

Towards a Cultural Historiography of San Francisco Labor

In the Labor Day edition of the 1908 *Labor Clarion* to which this study has already referred, an anonymous historian recounted the origins of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific as if they were enshrouded in a distant and forgotten past. In fact, merely a generation had passed since Danielewicz and his IWA comrades had first organized San Francisco’s sailors. Nonetheless, this anonymous seafarer acknowledged the historical distance that had already opened up between himself and the union’s origins, identifying a problem inherent in this study, as it is in the very practice of history. Distinguishing between two historiographical practices, one coldly factual and the other warmly evocative, he wrote, “It is one thing to describe the conditions of the seamen and contrast these conditions with those obtained by the power of organization; it is quite another thing to grasp and, as it were, materialize, the spirit that animated the organization and of which the improvement in conditions is but a partial, and indeed a vague and incoherent expression.”³⁷ He concluded that, lacking an appreciation of the *spirit* of the Coast Seamen’s Union’s achievements, “the history of that work becomes merely so much ‘fact

³⁷ “Sailors’ Union of the Pacific: A Defender of the Rights of Those Who Sail the Seas,” *Labor Clarion*, September 4, 1908, reel 1, Ira Cross: California Labor Notes.

and figure,' a history intelligible, it may be, to cold reason, but affording neither stimulus to the heart nor comfort to the soul."³⁸

A closer look at these words—and their historiographical resonances—provides an apt conclusion to this study. First, it is interesting to note that “the improvement in conditions” is identified as the “incoherent expression” of the organization of the sailors’ union, rather than its justification or end. Perhaps to the disbelief of skeptical readers, the author thus suggests that the material achievements of the sailors’ union were the incidental *effects* of higher ethical and even spiritual aims. Given the penury in which San Francisco’s sailors suffered before the organization of the Coast Seamen’s Union, the anti-materialism of this statement is indeed extraordinary. Nonetheless, if the author is taken at his word, it is not unreasonable to consider these non-material aims as a point of departure for the study of the spirit of the San Francisco labor movement, as this study has done. Second, the author’s emphasis on the *spirit* of the union’s history, in contradistinction to the discrete facts of which that history inadequately consists, suggests that a cultural approach to the study of labor history in fact best represents the attitudes, aims, and accomplishments of the Gilded Age labor organizations like the Coast Seamen’s Union. In other words, culture—its meaning, problems, and production—was at the very heart of the Gilded Age labor movement. Third and finally, the author, echoing the sentiments of the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* of the 1880s, embodies the value of history, quite literally, in the “heart” and the “soul” of the suffering reader. The labor

³⁸ Ibid.

intellectuals of the 1880s would agree: not only should history illuminate and challenge, it must also encourage, inspire, and console.

Appendix A:

Labor Literature

Compiled by "B. G. H.," or Burnette Gregor Haskell, the following list of labor literature appeared in *Truth* on April 28, 1883. This list was published weekly in *Truth*, with variations, beginning on February 21, 1883. Typographical and spelling eccentricities have been retained.

LABOR LITERATURE

This list of labor literature is the result of research extending over many years. It is the only thing of its kind ever published and it is valuable to every honest man, woman and child in the Republic. I would be obliged if the readers would supply any omissions noticed.

B. G. H.

Poetry.

Songs of Insurrection, by Walt Whitman.
The Iron Harp, by A. J. H. Duganne.

Music.

The Hymn of Labor, words by RALPH WALDO EMERSON, music by J. N. E. WILSON; for sale ONLY at this office, price 40 cents.
Ca Ira, the celebrated French Revolutionary hymn.
La Carmignole, the Anthem of the poor.
La Marseillaise, composed by Roget de Lisle in 1791.

Romance.

The Mysteries of the People, by Eugene Sue.
Les Miserables, by Victor Hugo.
The Man Who Laughs, by Victor Hugo.
'93, by Victor Hugo.
Sunrise, by William Black.
The Coming Race, by Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton.
Alton Locke, by Charles Kingsley.
Yeast, by Charles Kingsley.
Peacemaker Grange, by Samuel Leavitt.
Richard's Crown, by Anna D. Weaver.
The Palace of Infamy, or the Slave Women of England, by G. W. M. Reynolds.

Ca Ira, An American novel giving a full history of the Paris Commune, bound in cloth by Wm. Dugas Traminell: Wavery Hall, Georgia.

History.

WORKS, of WENDELL PHILLIPS.

Histoire de l' Internationale, by E. Villetard.

Die Deutsche Social Demokratie, by Mehring.

History of Co-operation in England, by G. Holyoake.

Conflict of Labor and Capital, by G. Howell.

The Association, etc. (Workmens' Palace of Guise), by Jean Baptiste Andre Godin.

Realization of Communism, by the Icarian Community; address for copies, Corning, Iowa.

The People's Reader, by Dr. George G. Stiebeling.

History of Civilization, by Buckle.

International Address, by William B. Greene.

English Tyranny and Irish Suffering, A. Meriwether.

Nihilism, by W. L. Kingsland, in the New Englander, 1878, v. 37, p. 553.

Articles upon Anarchy and Authority by M. Arnold in Cornhill Magazine, 1867-8, v. 17, pp. 30, 239, 745; v. 18, pp. 91, 239; in Every Saturday, v. 5, pp. 131, 262, 301; v. 6, 139, 257; in New Eclectic Magazine, v. 1, 291.

Confessions of an Anarchist, Proudhon; in the Eclectic Review, 1849-50, vol. 91, page 157.

TRUTH, bound volume for the year 1882; Only ten copies for sale: Price \$10.00 each.

For sale at this office. Containing a full history of the labor movement of the year and over 300 essays on labor topics from the mastor minds of the world.

Political Economy.

SALUT! Being the Constitution of the Labor Republic of America, published by the S. F. Section of the S.-L. Party; by "Ashtoreth." Distributed free.

Progress and Poverty, by Henry George.

The Irish Land Question, by Henry George.

Unsettled Questions in Political Economy, by John Stuart Mill.

On Labor, by W. T. Thornton.

Capital, by Karl Marx; extracts from, translated by Otto Weydemeyer, New York, 1877.

Das Kapital, by Karl Marx.

Sartor Resartus, by Thomas Carlyle.

Labor Catechism of Political Economy, by O. Ward.

An Open Letter, by Ferdinand Lassalle.

Communism, a conservative pamphlet reprinted from the Unitarian Review, by R. Heber Newton.

What is Property? by P. J. Proudhon.

True Civilization, by Josiah Warren.

Liberty and Morality, by W. S. Bell.
 Munera Pulveris, Fors Clavigera, Time and Tide, Unto this Last, and Art of Political
 Economy, all by John Ruskin.
 Der Kapitalismus und Socialismus, by Schaffle.
 Politische Oekonomie, by Adolf Wagner.
 Politics for the People, by F. D. Maurice.
 Lectures on Social Questions, by J. H. Rylance.
 Taxation—Who Bears It—Who Ought to Bear It, etc., by Chas. Bradlaugh. 25c.
 Landlords—Tenant Farmers and Laborers, by Mrs. Besant. 5c.
 The English Land System, by Mrs. Besant, 5 c.
 Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, “ ”
 The Land—How to Make it Feed the People, Chas. C. Catell. 5 c.
 All About the English Land System, Chas. C. Catell. 5 c.
 The Social Means of Promoting Temperance, by G. J. Holyoake. Fifteen cents.
 Working Class Representation, by G. J. Holyoake. Five cents.
 The Logic of Cooperation. “ ”
 The Policy of Cooperation. “ ”
 Human Sacrifices in England, by Moncure D. Conway. Fifty cents.
 Leo Muller’s Monetary System. Five cents.
 The Money of Nations, etc., Warwick Martin. 50 c.
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FRANCE,—L' Intransigeant, Paris.

Revue du Movement Social, Rue d' Alesia, 64, a Paris.

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Labor Enquirer, 370 Larmier St, Denver, Col.

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 Union Advocate, Columbus, Ohio.
 Labor Standard, Patterson, N. J.
 People's Advocate, St. Louis, Mo.
 Truth, Chicago, Ill.
 The Carpenter, Philadelphia, Pa.
 Cigarmaker's Journal, New York.
 Buchdrucker Zeitung, New York.
 Our Organette, Indianapolis, Ind.
 American Statesmen, Marblehead, Mass.
 Journeyman Builder, Cleveland, Ohio.
 Laborer's Advocate, Rochester, N. Y.
 Fireman's Magazine, Terra Haute, Ind.
 Granite Cutter's Journal, Westerly, R. I.
 Enterprise, Glassboro, New Jersey.
 Workingmen's Friend, Leavenworth, Kas.
 Herald, McKeesport, Pennsylvania.
 Progress (organ C. M. prog. Union) N. Y.
 The Carpenter, 613 Callowhill St., Phila.
 Vedette, Washington, D. C.
 The Irrespressible, Wheeling, W. V.
 St. Louis Union, St. Louis.
 The Word, Princeton, Mass.
 People's Advocate, Marne, Iowa.
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Journals Affiliated with the Labor Cause.

Rocky Mountain Howitzer, Greeley, Col.
 Justice, 252 Broadway, N. Y.
 American Sentry, 113 Liberty St., N. Y.
 Pacific Pilote, (German) 36 13th St. City.
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Democratic Standard, Eureka, Cal.
Shiawassee Greenbacker, Laingsburg, Mich.
The Radical Review, Chicago, Illinois.
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Journals Friendly to Labor.

Minnesota Tribune, Minneapolis, Minn.
Times, San Jose, Cal.
Report, San Francisco.
Patron, San Francisco, Cal.
Press, 60 Seneca St. Utica, N. Y.
Mercury, 916 Main St. Dallas, Texas.
Corry Telegraph, Corry, Pa.
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Labor World. 5th Chestnut St. Philadelphia.

Appendix B:

“Salutatory”

The following “Salutatory” article was published in the first edition of the *Coast Seamen’s Journal* on November 2, 1887.

With a feeling of natural pride, we venture to present to the public this opening issue of the COAST SEAMEN’S JOURNAL—beyond a doubt the first newspaper that has even been published exclusively in behalf of the myriads who live upon the watery part of this globe of ours, the seafaring class.

In taking this step, we do not lend ourselves to any delusion; we fully conceive the immensity of our task. Descendents, as we are, of the “House of Want,” and pupils of such grim teachers as extreme hardship and continuous toil, we have even now a woeful apprehension of the scolding, cuffing and general illtreatment which this offspring of ours is to receive, especially at the hands of that class of parasites who have grown corpulent and lazy on the hard earnings, the ignorance and the proverbial generosity of the Sailor. How they will hate its voice; how they will endeavor to stifle it; how they will employ each conceivable soothing charm to rock it to sleep again—for its voice, tiny and insignificant as it may seem, is a menace to their objects, a death-message to their very existence. It bears within it the germs of a mighty trumpet of salvation for the seafaring class.

If the pen be mightier than the sword, then it shall be the main object of the JOURNAL to point out to those who would wield their pens in behalf of Justice a grander and sublimer field for operation than they could possibly conceive. In these times of a historic stamp, when the vivid spectacle of a gigantic mental evolution finds its expression particularly in the convulsive struggle of the Producers of all countries, compelling modern literature, and especially the “daily press,” to recognize even more frequently the voice of Labor, and to analyze with an eye of scrutiny and a spirit of extreme eagerness each new phenomenon and each particular phase of the Labor movement, it does indeed seem singular that so comparatively few facts regarding the cause and condition of the Sailor have been gathered upon the horizon of public analysis.

It is true that the Sailor’s life has been, almost from time immemorial, the object of thousands of literary efforts; but those stories of a fantastic type, written in a highly romantic strain, amid the cosy and comfortable surroundings of the author’s study, have, if anything, only resulted in rendering still more obscure the true condition of our craft, and in making the sailor an object of envy rather than one worthy of assistance and moral aid. But who indeed could possibly give the desired and correct information, short of ourselves, who are part and parcel? No one. Our task, then, becomes plain. Webs of romance must be unwoven; mirages of a rosy and fantastic hue must be destroyed. That penny-novel type of a Sailor-hero has held sway over the minds of the people too long. We, who have been chained by dire necessity to a continual life upon the ocean, must raise our voices in our own behalf.

The stories told in these columns will surely lack the fantastic sound of sea novels. They are not published to tickle your imagination, but to arrest the thought of such men and women who are in search of Truth, and for the establishment of Justice, and who agree with us that Sailors have a right to aspire to as high a moral and mental standard as any other craft or class. Although published by the Coasting Sailors of the Pacific Coast, their JOURNAL shall voice the appeals of all our brethren—those upon deep water as well as upon various coasts of the globe. The Sailors' cause is one which admits of no division. As long as the moral condition of the Deep-water Sailor is such as to render him a wretched slave, morally, mentally, and physically, who bows in silent submission to the caprices and brutalities of unprincipled captains and greedy landsharks; so long as he may be overworked, underfed, beaten, swindled and driven out of their vessels and forced upon our coast to enter into the most bitter competition for bread with ourselves, just so long will our struggle be worse than futile.

Let us have a craft of intelligent men. We here, upon our coast, who have more advantages, who have the privilege of observing, at least to some extent, the progressing strides of Culture and Science, we should see to it that a glimpse of light fall also upon the midocean. Let us read, let us discuss, let us educate ourselves; let the results of our education be sent broadcast across the ocean. This is the task of our Union—surely one worthy of all the energy and all the good will within us.

“Sail on, oh Union, strong and great!
Our hearts, our hopes, our prayers, our tears,
Our faith triumphant o'er our fears,
Are all with thee.”

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