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“It’s in the Blood”: American Working-Class Identity and Memory within Transformations of Capitalism

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“It’s in the Blood”: American Working-Class Identity and Memory within
Transformations of Capitalism

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An Honors Thesis
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Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*. 1920, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.
<https://www.imj.org.il/en/collections/199799>

“But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.”

- Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, 1940.

“Oh, why does it seem the past is always better /
 We look back and think / The winters were warmer /
 The grass was greener / The skies were bluer /
 And smiles were bright.”

- Gladys Knight, 1974.

In the last few decades of the 20th century, capitalism underwent a major transformation. The structured form of regulated Keynesianism became replaced with a decentralized and globalized economic structure called neoliberalism. This had mostly to do with advances in telecommunications and shipping technologies, capital flight to cheaper industry in developing nations, and a precipitous decline in the power and density of organized labor. Much scholarship has been dedicated to studying the broad national economic implications of such a shift, particularly as it pertains to one of the primary symptoms of this secular transformation: deindustrialization. Globalized neoliberalism meant that the industry of many Western nations — particularly the United Kingdom and the United States — began to collapse when faced with international markets and capital flight. In the U.S. the practical consequences on the ground included a sweep of plant closings, shuttered factories, union decertification drives, and population loss in industrial communities. The ‘Steel Belt’ of the Great Lakes took on the characteristics of its now-infamous modern-day moniker, ‘the Rust Belt’.

Beyond the statistical data and economic trends that deindustrialization represented, there were the social and cultural effects it had on the workers caught up in its sweeping tide. Single-industry communities in which identity was closely associated with work and the lifestyle surrounding it were thrust into a ‘postindustrial’ world. Oftentimes this meant both looking forward in search of new economic development and backwards at the industrial identity that was left behind. The phenomenon of viewing history, quite literally, as a new resource to be extracted and sold is an underemphasized and important piece of the story of deindustrialization. New narratives were crafted, and old ones reassessed, to adapt to new realities. Economists and politicians responded with calls for moving forward in a new global economy, using positive rhetoric of revitalization and restructuring that did not acknowledge the loss of autonomy, sense of betrayal, and crisis of identity experienced by those families who lived through deindustrialization. Of particular importance is how worker experience — both collective and personal — shaped the way the industrial past was remembered. Northeast Minnesota and the mining-based region of

the Iron Range are an illustrative case study in this regard, as the steel industry suffered a cataclysmic collapse in the 1980s. Like many other communities facing decline, the Iron Range looked to the service sector to make up for lost mining jobs, and in seeking to broaden that horizon it turned toward its own industrial past with the proliferation of heritage tourism.

In examining how this shift in capitalism, and deindustrialization, were felt on the ground by those who experienced it we can turn to the historiography itself. Economists, philosophers, and historians all reacted to the labor movement of the 1970s and its perceived radicalism in relation to the Keynesian system. When that system went into crisis in the mid-1970s, and its death throes in the 1980s, others then offered their interpretations of why it had all collapsed. While giving us necessary insight into how this transformation of the world economy happened, this also shows us how it was interpreted by academics and theoreticians — and how often they did not fully account for the voices of families experiencing deindustrialization firsthand. At best, they are represented by economic data and jobs figures illustrating how America's industrial economy declined over the end of the 20th century. At worst, workers are not consulted or included at all: they blend into the changing industrial landscape itself as economists and politicians look forward hopefully toward economic revitalization in a new, globalized world. No one asks workers how they feel about losing jobs and industries tied intricately to their own communal identities — or how they feel moving into new sectors of the economy.

After examining some further context as to how exactly this transformation of the world economy happened, and what it meant, we can steadily move further down the vine: starting at what it meant at a national level, then at a regional level such as the Steel Belt, and then at a communal and personal level such as the Iron Range and those living in it. How did workers identify with each other, with their jobs, and with their class? As will be shown, the traditional benchmark of measuring working-class consciousness — trade unions — is more complicated than previous academics had believed. It is a mistake to equate 'the working class' as a block represented by any one union. Throughout the postwar

period the rank-and-file and leadership of unions were in conflict with one another; this then reveals to us that it is not enough to examine unions themselves in understanding the social, cultural, and mental effects of deindustrialization. Finally, we will move into an analysis of workers themselves and how *they* perceived and reacted to the larger changes around them. This is done through consulting oral histories and newspapers written for and consumed by workers and their families. These primary sources will show how workers voiced their experiences of deindustrialization, and how the resulting crisis of identity metastasized into anxieties over the futures of their communities. Anxieties over the past and what was lost in turn fueled plans for the future. The result was a messy, troubling, and complicated commodification of history to capitalize on the nostalgia of the industrial past in hopes of fostering tourism — even if it was a history in conflict with the actual experienced memories of workers themselves.

In analyzing this historical event and the lasting effects of history's commodification, we can make use of the philosophical school of Critical Theory. Historians in the past have turned toward sociologists and philosophers to better understand periods of study, the most famous perhaps being with the work of Max Weber. In this case, the work of thinkers within the tradition of Critical Theory can inform our understanding of how marketing and selling history to the public influences how that history is told, and in turn how it influences the workers and communities who consume it. Namely, it allows communities suffering from an uncertain future to retreat into the nostalgic past, and also allows those outside the community to ignore the realities of the 'creative destruction' of capitalism by glossing over its negative consequences in the present. Philosophers such as Mark Fisher elucidate how meaning is constructed in the present via understandings of the past and future. When the volatility of capitalism throws the future into uncertainty, that understanding of the present becomes constructed primarily out of the past - whether as memory or recorded history. When those memories and history are commodified, and therefore sanitized, it in turn drives how the present is understood, and the future looked towards.

Scholarship on Postwar American Capitalism

The field of labor history has, generally, moved from a study of nations and institutions to one of individuals and social groups. Originally it centered upon research of the role institutions played in shaping both modern economic systems and the class structures of those within them. In the United States, these institutional histories often described the relationship between business and government with the organized labor union being a homogenized face of the working class. Departmental faculty in these fields tended to specialize in the realm of labor economics and workers were often described in little more than employment figures representative of larger production forces. The academy and labor historians in general are indebted to E. P. Thompson and other social historians who developed a new methodology in pursuit of explaining trends which the prototypical institutionalist historian had failed to. Emphasis was placed upon workers, women, and minorities as actors themselves and pivotal agents in their own historical development. The likes of David Brody and David Montgomery argued that when institutional states were formed, "...working-class agency was present in the outcome." In other words, the working-class had agency and an important role in the foundation of nations — oftentimes overlooked in favor of more traditional historiographies which viewed singular men and elite groups as being the most important actors in nation building.¹ A sharp division emerged between 'new' and 'old' labor history, each agreeing on the same outcome — the development of labor — but through different means. Hudelson and Ross note that this 'new labor history' "...attempts to study not just the institutional history of unions but the thoughts, feelings, experiences, values, and cultural expressions that have made up the lives of working-class individuals and communities at different times and places."² Critics of this 'new

¹ Aronowitz, Stanley. *False Promises: The Shaping of American Working Class Consciousness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 407.

² Hudelson, Richard and Carl Ross. *By the Ore Docks: A Working People's History of Duluth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xix.

labor history' derided the branch as ignoring institutions and elites to an irresponsible degree, and argued that cultural trends, politics, and technological change occur at a level above the individual and influence them just as directly as their own agency.

It was in this era of academic discourse that the canon of the field established itself, more or less, around three figures teaching and training rising graduate students in three different traditions of 'new labor history'. Herbert Gutman, particularly following his essay "Protestantism and the American Labor Movement", most closely followed the tradition of E. P. Thompson and the social historians. Likewise, David Brody remained the most tied to labor historians of the older style and their descriptions of trade unions as institutions. Somewhere in the middle were historians akin to David Montgomery who expressed some synthesis of the two branches within the 'new labor history'. The field reached a watershed with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 and resulting collapse of a cohesive labor movement. Labor history again fractured in attempts to understand a seemingly new class realignment and the subversion of previously understood historical trends. 'New labor history' intellectuals such as Brody became the new 'historians of the old guard,' as Jefferson Cowie put it. In tandem with divisions over the eternal question of '*what happened?*' were divisions over what deserved studying to answer the question. The fall of the Keynesian state, a lack of concrete working class solidarity, and the rise of neoliberalism reignited debates over institutional and individual histories; the fields of women's history and African American studies rose to expand upon the social-individual histories of a peculiar transitional stage in American history.

Reacting to the Crisis of Keynesianism (1967-1990s)

Theorists and intellectuals who wrote of or around the 1970s labor movement are usually writing in one of two realms: they are trying to explain why Keynesian economics failed, or they are trying to explain why the solidarity of the working class failed. These two 'events' are undoubtedly linked, but

oftentimes the former involves some political call-to-arms for a return to Keynesianism or a Keynesian-like system. The latter has developed as decades have been put between historians and the period in question, and, it would seem, as historians grew more comfortable incorporating various other academic fields within their own methodology, most prominently sociology. These two ‘methods’ of examining the 1970s labor movement are emblematic of a general theoretical framework concerning the historical development of capitalism called the theory of social structures of accumulation, which will be detailed later. In the meantime, it would benefit us to review some of the intellectuals and their theories at the time — in this case, Galbraith Sr. and Jr., Friedman, Harrington, Aronowitz, Sennett, and Cobb. These persons wrote before, during, and in the immediate aftermath of the time period in question. While they are not the sum of all that was said and theorized in the tumultuous period from the 1960s to the 1980s, they serve us as representatives themselves of the prevailing schools of thought about that time, *in* that time. Following this contextual foundation, we can see how modern historians interpret the period, and how this modern scholarship reflects the methodology of the theorists who came before them.

The ‘Keynesian doctrine’ established by John Maynard Keynes reached new heights in the postwar era by promoting full employment and broad consumption under the umbrella of strong government intervention. When John Kenneth Galbraith published *The New Industrial State* in 1967, he had served on the staffs of the Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson administrations – with his experience in the latter two chiefly being the context behind much of his own economic theory as illustrated through the capstone to his trilogy of books on American capitalism. While Galbraith himself was publicly identified with the Keynesian orthodoxy, *The New Industrial State* laid out the economic branch of ‘post-Keynesianism’ for which he would be known.

This challenge (the revised sequence) to the monolith of American liberalism’s economic backbone (the accepted sequence) was best summarized by his son James in the new foreword to the text: “In...the ‘accepted sequence,’ consumer preferences came first. Firms place their products before a

discerning public, sell what they can, discount the rest, and then repair to study how it might be done better next time. In [Galbraith's] own 'revised sequence,' large firms start with the design and technology of new production... They then engage their advertising and consumer-finance staffs to ensure that the result can be sold."³ A key criticism of Keynes from the very beginning was his willingness to overlook long-term economic forces like technological change. Galbraith put this at the center of his own theory with what is termed the 'technostructure' and emphasized a radical analysis based upon it: the traditional central figure in economics — the individual consumer — had been supplanted. Postwar production, by its very nature, required a great deal of central planning on the part of the corporate firm to develop and mass-produce advanced consumer items: cars, television sets, home appliances, etc. To rely on the whim and influence of the consumer market was incommensurate with the planning required to produce their products, so the consumer market was negated entirely. At a time when advocates of 'consumer sovereignty' were in the mainstream of western economics, the notion that they were really being *told* what to demand by the technostructure-based corporate firm was a radical belief.⁴

Part of the central planning of the firm is the coordination of competition with rival firms and industries; but Galbraith asserted that to this degree most firms within similar industries engaged in price fixing. A significant tenet of any belief rooted in market capitalism is the virtue of healthy competition. Once full employment was reached through the management of aggregate demand — specifically government spending — the free market would deliver unto its consumers the benefits of corporate firms in competition with each other. Galbraith entertained no such illusion; competition was and had been dead. The classical economic belief, 'the accepted sequence', that the consumer through their purchasing power informed the market, which informed the producer, was irrelevant in the postwar era of the

³ Galbraith, James K. Foreword to *The New Industrial State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), xi.

⁴ Galbraith, John K. "The Technostructure." In *The New Industrial State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 73-88.

technostructure.⁵ Galbraith called this new permanent planning system by which western corporate power operated the ‘revised sequence’.⁶ In his concluding chapter Galbraith offered a reflective assessment of the planning system that sounded not dissimilar to Marxist contemporaries in his time critiquing capitalism. “As we have seen, [the planning system] is able to manage [people’s] needs only because it serves them abundantly. It requires a mechanism for making men want what it provides. But this mechanism would not work — wants would not be subject to manipulation — had not these wants been dulled by sufficiency.”⁷ Corporate firms manipulated wants into what was offered in abundance, resulting in that abundance being expected and wanted.

The 2007 foreword to *The New Industrial State* serves to a significant degree as an essay by James K. Galbraith on the death of the Keynesian state as it occurred from the 1970s and into the 1980s. This is useful, as the economic theory of Galbraith the son is largely an intellectual continuation of that of Galbraith the father. James Galbraith identifies the rise of neoliberalism through four phases: the rise of Japanese steel and auto manufacturing, American deindustrialization in the 1980s, the tech-bubble of the 1990s which saw a resurgence in corporate power, and the corporate scandals that abounded during the era — Enron, Tyco, and so on. When Japanese manufacturing began to challenge the American market, Galbraith Jr. points toward the voluntary export restraints put in place by the Reagan administration in 1980. “Rather than open America to the free market, which would have been catastrophic for American business, they cut the Japanese into a new bargain, permitting them to increase their market share and to upgrade their products over time. The result was a managed defeat for the American firms, which was bad, but far better than an unmanaged one would have been.”⁸ With interest rates higher than any normal

⁵ Galbraith, John K. *The New Industrial State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 264.

⁶ Ibid. “The Revised Sequence.” 263-272.

⁷ Galbraith, John K. *The New Industrial State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 484.

⁸ Ibid, xviii.

business could conceivably handle, the result was not that the market separated the healthy from the infirm, but that businesses began to cheat. This, Galbraith Jr. asserts of his father's work, was why *The New Industrial State* had failed in predicting the larger postwar collapse: "...optimistic confidence that no government would be crazy enough to raise interest rates that high."⁹

Much of the rest of James Galbraith's analysis covers the rise of neoliberalism in the late 1980s and 1990s, and the associated rise of 'high finance' in investment banking and non-corporeal money transfers. While *The New Industrial State* and John Galbraith himself had not foretold of the collapse of postwar prosperity, he is the first true whistleblower to call attention to the cracks in the façade of the economic order. The organization replaces the market, consumer sovereignty negated, and competition non-existent. *The New Industrial State* succinctly highlights the flaws at an institutional level, though it does not make the leap to how this might affect the working class within the system at a social-historical level.

Positioning himself in opposition to Keynesian theory and its descendants (Galbraith included), Milton Friedman lambasted the postwar welfare state as a man-made monster dangerously ignoring natural economic laws. In response to Galbraith's 1977 BBC educational program *The Age of Uncertainty*, Friedman and PBS released a 10-part rebuttal based on his own book, *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement* in 1980. In the affluent home of a third-generation Italian-American dentist, Friedman tells his television audience just how unnatural the welfare state had become: "The Visalli family, like all of us who live in the United States today, owe much to the climate of freedom we inherited from the founders of our country — the climate that gave full scope to the poor from other lands who came here and were able to make better lives for themselves and their children. But in the past 50 years, we've been squandering that inheritance by allowing government to control more and more of our lives, instead of

⁹ Ibid, xviii-xix.

relying on ourselves. We need to rediscover the old truths that the immigrants knew in their bones: what economic freedom is and the role it plays in preserving personal freedom.”¹⁰

In both text and television program, Friedman compared the economic policies of successful nations — most notably and timely, China — with those in failed, centrally-planned economies such as India in the late 70s. The natural conclusion was that the free market worked best for workers, employers, and societies as a whole by providing economic freedom, a prerequisite to personal freedom. The economic freedom of a society influenced the liberty with which its individuals were allowed to associate and cooperate with one another, both in entrepreneurial ventures and in innovations to industry. The nation’s “Golden Age...when it was truly a land of opportunity,” as debate moderator Robert McKenzie postulated at the capstone discussion of *Free to Choose*’s first episode, and to which Friedman agreed, “was the late 19th, early 20th century. No regulations. No permits. No red tape.”¹¹ Not only was it a golden age, but it was a prime exhibition of the economic laws of the market when left to itself: a radical explosion in American industry and capital after the Civil War.

Stagflation which had dogged the 70s, too, was fallout from the naïve intervention of the Keynesian welfare state into otherwise natural economic processes, process which themselves maintained a healthy society of individual cooperation. He even discards the accusation that the 1973 oil crisis kicked off the process, pointing toward states nearly or entirely reliant on imported petroleum such as West Germany and Japan, where inflation was not nearly as severe in comparison. The actions of bipartisan political figures in influencing natural economic laws were the primary drivers of inflation. This interference disrupts the economic freedom of the market, and therefore the personal freedom and interactions of individuals in that society. Friedman extrapolated on these doomed interventionary policies in “The Role of Monetary Policy”. It had been the praxis of progressive economic planners of both parties

¹⁰ *Free to Choose*. “The Power of the Market.” Directed by Graham Massey. Written by Milton Friedman. Public Broadcasting Service, 1980.

¹¹ *Ibid*.

to support a market with high levels of employment, so that consumption could also be promoted. To that end, it was the effort of the Keynesian state to put significant spending towards fostering full employment measures – an interference in the market that Friedman predicted would result in a retaliatory slap of the invisible hand. It was his and Edmund Phelps’s view that an industrial capitalist society should always maintain a “natural level of unemployment”, and that artificially inflating employment would in turn result in inflation of wages, and in the general economy.¹²

Friedman established what today is recognizable as a libertarian-conservative perspective regarding trade unions and workers’ representation. Pointing again to Britain and its wage/price controls, he lamented that unions voiced understandable grievances, but unwittingly served as unnatural instigators amongst otherwise rational individuals in the free market:

*The garbage collectors in London felt justifiably aggrieved because their wages had not been permitted to keep pace with the cost of living. They struck, hurting not the people who impose the controls, but their friends and neighbors who had to live with mounting piles of rat infested garbage...[They] behaved as a group in a way they never would have behaved as individuals. One group is set against another group, the social fabric of society is torn apart, inflicting scars that it will take decades to heal.*¹³

Speaking with the 1970s characteristic union membership decline fresh in the audience’s memory, Friedman asserted in *Free to Choose* that unions and union legislation, while good-intentioned, actually harm the worker and her economic standing. The answer, then, to the proposed question of “Who Protects the Worker?” is, as is the *modus operandi* of Friedman’s philosophy, themselves. “What I object to is the special privileges that have been given *by government* to labor unions, which have not been made available to other groups at all.¹⁴ Unions protect and benefit their own workers to the disadvantage of non-organized laborers, institute bloated bureaucracies which make hiring and firing of good or bad

¹² Friedman, Milton. "The Role of Monetary Policy." *The American Economic Review* 58, no. 1 (March, 1968), 7-11.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Free to Choose*. “Who Protects the Worker?” Directed by Graham Massey. Written by Milton Friedman. Public Broadcasting Service, 1980.

employees impossible, and uphold minimum wage requirements which make large-scale employment impossible for small business owners. “The American worker benefited not out of unions, he benefited in spite of unions. He benefited because there was greater opportunity, because there were people willing to invest their money, because there was an opportunity for people to be able to work, to save, to invest.”¹⁵

The collapse of the welfare state, then, had come about as a result of its own actions.

Overextension of ‘full employment’ measures had led to an oversaturated job market in which wages lost their buying power in the face of inflation caused by such artificially high employment. The sudden recession and stagflation of the 1970s was but an expected reaction of the free market to government intervention. Workers threw off their chains – in a Friedman interpretation – and left the bureaucratic unions structures of highly-paid, out of touch ‘representatives’ behind. They instead would enter a truly free labor pool in which they protected their individual selves through the acquisition of valuable skills and admirable work ethics. Early Silicon Valley is pointed to as a bastion of the free market’s ultimate potential: highly specialized companies compete with each other over the labor of skilled workers by offering competitive wages and benefits. The worker in Silicon Valley walks a gilded path in which a better employer offering a 30% raise may emerge across the very street she currently works from. She herself is a commodity the industry competes with itself for.¹⁶

At the stark other end of the political spectrum, activist and socialist Michael Harrington offered up a vigorous defense of the Keynesian welfare state and proposed a new way forward for a nation amidst a strange, new stage of capitalism. *Socialism: Past and Future* was published the same month of his passing in July of 1989 and serves as both a reflection upon the previous two decades as the “the end of socialism,” and as a political manifesto for a revival of the left to match the Reagan Revolution. At its core, his final text is a survey of the social democracies of Western Europe; particularly Scandinavia and

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Germany. Meanwhile, he sketches out a history of the socialist movements in the United States and their varying relationships to orthodox Marxism and the international leftist community. The lion's share of the book, though, is dedicated to his view on the future of socialism in America and socialism in a global context.

In his reflection on the fall of the American labor scene, lynch pinned by the 1980 election, Harrington illuminates a split amongst leftist thinkers. His assessment begins with the infamous declaration of Peter Jenkins in his own postmortem on the 1970s: "The Socialist Age was coming to an end." His is emblematic of a sect of leftist activists and intellectuals who believed the Keynesian state – the Kennedy war on poverty and the Johnson Great Society included – represented the triumph of western socialism. While Harrington and his kith were of the persuasion that the Keynesian state was simply another stage of capitalism, albeit one that was notably more benevolent to its workers and influenced by socialist thinkers. In this text we see him put forward a thesis about the 1970s and 1980s that would come to be the center of modern labor historian's reevaluation of the period: that the labor question had not been answered with the New Deal and its legal legitimization of trade unions. "[T]he successful resolution of the problems of the 1930s generated a whole set of new, and as yet unresolved, problems in the 1970s and 1980s."¹⁷

Much of Harrington's dissection of the 70s and 80s comes in predominantly two strands; a rebuttal to the contemporary rise and dominance of Friedman and his libertarian-neoconservatives, and an economic history of the development of modes of social accumulation. In regards to the former, Harrington primarily attacks the Friedman-esque conservative criticism of Keynesianism: that the central planning of social spending and economic stimulus invariably led to a mismanagement of resources. Both readily acknowledged that the Johnson administration's federal spending for the Vietnam War spurred inflation, and then some, "More broadly, it is certainly true that, as Keynes himself noted in *The General*

¹⁷ Harrington, Michael. *Socialism: Past and Future* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1989), 122.

Theory, full employment brings inflationary pressures.” Though whereas Friedman identified this truth as evidence of the unsustainability of a welfare state, Harrington identifies this truth as evidence of the unsustainability of capitalism. “Was [the economic downturn] of the 70s and 80s the result of the slow but certain workings of the monetarist laws of the economy, or the consequence of structural changes brought about by the accomplishments of the preceding quarter of a century?”¹⁸ Put another way, was the collapse of the postwar economy evidence of the invisible hand striking back as a force of nature, or was it the natural conclusion of the welfare state’s success – deindustrialization and the global restructuring of economic markets to meet international competition?

Harrington looks to other nations as proof of the successes of the welfare state. “[W]hat unites these disparate economies is a common, and very strong, institutional commitment to full employment.” Likewise he cites the 1985 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development which found that “in 1974 and 1975, in large measure because of the oil shock and recession, GDP went down, tax revenues declined, and the need for social spending went up. This suggests that social spending was to a considerable degree the result of the crisis of the mid-seventies rather than its cause.”¹⁹ ²⁰ The conclusion, at least in part, Harrington comes to is that the welfare state was not nearly as egalitarian in its redistribution as Friedman and his compatriots claimed. Moreover, the crumbling of economic prosperity was not the free market naturally slapping back.

So what happened to the welfare state? The so-called Golden Era that existed from 1948 to the 1960s was a cyclical frenzy as rising union-based wages and federal welfare programs helped continuously enlarge consumption to match the advance of mass industry. However that industrial advancement brought with it advances and changes in the workforce – changes which Harrington

¹⁸ Ibid, 123.

¹⁹ Ibid, 125.

²⁰ OECD: *Social Expenditures, 1960-1990* (Paris: OECD, 1983), pg. 14.

identified as both the undoing of the Keynesian era and the unraveling of 20th century class solidarity. Automated jobs which made other jobs obsolete rose to replace the costs accrued from a high-earning human labor pool, while the professional managerial class and low-paid service sector began to replace the bulk of the blue-collar workforce. “In short, the crisis of the welfare state was the consequence of its triumph, not the result of some original sin of an economic policy flawed from the outset.” In tandem with flexible technology, the rest of the world economy rose to the level of competitor to the American hegemony. Globalism, “weakened labor’s power: the workers of the advanced countries were now part of a world labor market based on the ability of capital to move to the ends of the earth in order to get cheap hands.” A low-paid service sector and deregulated financial speculation sector became the backbone of the American economy in a new, competitive global market.²¹

The harsh transitory period of deindustrialization and introductory globalism also drastically altered the American class structure, its solidarity, and the last vestiges of the Keynesian social democracy. The changing face of the nation’s labor pool from blue-collar to service sector, white-collar professional, or skilled manufacturer – in Harrington’s mind – also diminished the proportion of workers most dedicated to the aforementioned “social-democratic compromise” between government, major industry, unions, and socialist political parties which had constituted the Keynesian welfare state.

The turbulent transition into a global economy, the rusting out of the steel belt and broad blue-collar working class, and the division between labor institutions and the Democratic coalition paints a picture of labor’s decline that even modern historians looking decades back would likely agree with to a large extent. This rapid change in the American class structure was, again, a result of the success of the Keynesian system, as was its own demise. Entitlements and welfare provisions for the working poor replaced cultural spaces within blue-collar communities which had previously fermented class solidarity: union halls, churches, schools, and bars. “[T]he new entitlements coincided with, and even reinforced, a

²¹ Harrington, Michael. *Socialism* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1989), 126-130, 133-134.

certain fragmentation and depersonalization of all of social life, a decline in solidarity, and a rise in possessiveness...’’²²

New methods of examining class solidarity – how it emerges, rises, and falls – evolved out of the postwar tradition of critical philosophy. They became resoundingly popular during the early 1970s as political figures like George Wallace sent the American citizenry scrambling for an explanation for white working class discontent. Countless sociological examinations of the working class could be examined, but Stanley Aronowitz’s *False Promises* serves as a succinct example due to its initial publication in 1973 and subsequent 1992 reprinting in which the author submits a new epilogue on working class consciousness and deindustrialization from the 70s through the 80s. Aronowitz is also notable in drawing specific attention to the origin and proliferation of concession bargaining, as well as the failure of trade unions to expand into the new working class backbone of the American economy – the service sector.

A pivotal shift identified by Aronowitz came in 1979 when President Carter bailed out Chrysler, who claimed they could not survive unless such a federal loan arrived, and unless the United Automobile Workers (UAW) made \$400 million in concessions and work rule modifications. Chrysler had been a fine example of what many at the time believed to be the failure of the American auto industry as it began to compete against European and Asian markets. Its plants were outdated, they were reluctant to produce smaller fuel-efficient vehicles, and did not modernize domestic manufacturing facilities to new technological standards. “Instead, GM, Ford, and Chrysler were investing heavily overseas in precisely those technologies that could have made their domestic operations more viable.” This was an aspect of deindustrialization that would have twofold effects: multinational corporations came to the bargaining table with union leadership expecting certain concessions to be made, all the while the corporation themselves would proceed with a focus on diversification and conglomeration. In the face of encroaching

²² Ibid, 135, 136.

plant closings, unions readily began accepting cuts in wages if it meant preserving core benefits and the stability of the plant.²³

Internally, trade unions failed to adapt to the face of neoliberalism's new workforce. The failure of unions to make headway in regards to race and gender were both instances of the union establishment burying its own head in the sand rather than confront such demographic changes and other crises of the movement: the consequence of their own bureaucratic institutions stifling the rank-and-file, their dependency on a dominant position within the Democratic Party, and their overreliance on legal frameworks which could be overturned with one unfavorable Congress. More broadly, Aronowitz cites historian Michael Goldfield and his thesis as a persuasive explanation for the tumultuous decline of labor based upon these external and internal problems facing leadership, "...a change in corporate and government policy joined during the Reagan years with a broadly based inability or unwillingness by labor's leadership to confront some serious [aforementioned] issues."^{24 25}

Aronowitz began what would become a dominant framework of retroactive critical analyses of the 70s and 80s by examining divisions between the rank-and-file and leadership. He highlighted a tendency of trade unions, partially as a permanent trauma of red baiting by the government and partially as a result of the cooperative nature of postwar management-labor relations, to consistently identify themselves with the establishment of government and business. "[M]any unions, after the defeats of the early postwar period, decided to stabilize their membership by transforming themselves into service organizations...unions have provided many if not most of the services one would expect from a decent European-type welfare state."²⁶ So when the nation witnessed the firing of eleven thousand workers

²³ Aronowitz, Stanley. *False Promises* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 398, 400, 402.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 404-405.

²⁵ Goldfield, Michael, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

²⁶ Aronowitz, Stanley. *False Promises* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992), 406-407.

during the PATCO strike by the federal government the dominos fell. With a new recession beginning and the memory of the Chrysler bailout fresh: the 80s were marked by a new era of concession bargaining, as unions desperately tried to save contract benefits even if it meant loss of wages and job security.²⁷

In this, Aronowitz draws attention to a strange perversion of class forces in the postwar period. Union leadership had become so desperate to politically preserve itself and the legal legitimization won in the early 20th century, that it isolated its own constituents at a grass-roots level. Class consciousness withered from within as Friedman and Reagan alike drew not unfair attention to the lifestyles and wages of those at the top of labor in comparison to those it was supposed to represent. In tying itself so closely to the establishment, to management, and party elites in order to preserve itself, Aronowitz believes that labor culture itself decayed: "...vitiating...by the wide disseminations of the middle-class cultural ideal and its practices, especially the twentieth century idea that the good life is constituted by objects of consumption – houses, cars, higher education."²⁸

The sociological analyses of *False Promises* offers both a helpful understanding of American class consciousness, and how the 70s and 80s bankrupted such a concept. Aronowitz separates the economic definition of class from his preferred historical definition. Here, class is interpreted as a historical social group achieving, "political and ideological self-representation" through, "the development of institutions of economic and political self-expression – such as trade unions and political parties or associations – in which the social category in question portrays itself as a social actor and elements of a shared culture, which, combined with those of bourgeois...components, give a specific cast to the social group." These social roles typically being the 'oppressor' and 'oppressed' applied to bourgeois and working class communities respectively. "Among these [casts] are...a distinctive

²⁷ Ibid, 410.

²⁸ Ibid, 414.

vernacular within language, inherited traditions..., public sites, and...intellectuals...[including] musicians and writers..., and social institutions...that may constitute both a series of closely knit communities and a veritable ‘state within a state’.”²⁹ Though in the United States, these institutions of economic and political self-expression – most successfully the trade union establishment and the Democratic Party – had always existed in hesitant alliance, “[T]he U.S. worker’s movement...only accepted the ideological Left within the terms of the issues of organization, economic justice, and the struggle for trade union rights...the right of workers to organize themselves...or to secure social welfare...has always been in question – even after legally procured...” While similar trade unions in western Europe had formed broader coalition movements with emancipatory aims, American unions had grown close to protecting what it was certain aided its success: Keynesian tenets of mass consumption and mass employment, contract benefits, and a bureaucratic service-structure.³⁰

Another analysis originally authored in the early ‘70s gives us another avenue to investigate work, workers, the movement, and the period. While Aronowitz on the whole offers many external explanations for the rise of anti-unionism and deindustrialization of the 1980s, Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb’s 1972 *The Hidden Injuries of Class* interrogated the internal strife of the white working class in this new postwar environment. Over the course of a series of freeform interviews primarily held in Boston, the pair presented a thesis on how the American class structure post-WWII influenced the personalities, self-identification, and culture of the working men and women; transforming them into a dejected, anxious, and ultimately class-confused ‘subject’. They proposed a psychology of the American class system wherein societal respect has been stripped of workers relegated to the lower castes. “The workingpeople...have been denied the *presumption*, rather than the *possibility*, of societal respect, denied

²⁹ Ibid, 439.

³⁰ Ibid.

some way of moving through daily life without being defensive and on guard, some way of being open with other people without being hurt.”³¹

Sennett and Cobb illustrated a complicated relationship whereby the blue-collar worker both vehemently tied himself to his “truer” work, and also aspired to gain the recognition and respect afforded to those in the white collar professional caste above. In one early case study, a Boston meat-cutter turned loan agent expressed this: “Because Frank does not yet know the rules of his new position, because he is caught between two worlds, he feels something is wrong with him.” Frank expressed disdain for his fellow banking employees, linking their education to their laziness, and described his current job as unreal work, “pushing papers.” So why did Frank strive to join a caste/class which he himself viewed as infirm?

[I]mages in his conversation concerning the poor, both white and black...fuse material deprivation with chaotic, arbitrary, and unpredictable behavior; he sees poverty...as depriving men of the capacity to act rationally, to exercise self-control....just as intellect gives a man respect in the world, the educated do nothing worth respecting; their status means they can cheat...Capturing respect in the larger America, then, means to Frank getting into an educated position; but capturing that respect means that he no longer respects himself.³²

Being middle class meant a better chance at being educated, and being educated awarded a greater degree of self-control, societal respect, and self-development. In the new industrial order, Middle-Classdom had become equated to being a fully developed human being. Blue-collar work was more dignified work, but it also carried with it a societal revulsion at being somehow less human. The worker, “feels compelled to justify his own position, and in his life he has felt compelled to put himself up on [the middle-class] level in order to earn respect.”³³

³¹ Sennett, Richard, and Jonathan Cobb. *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 248.

³² *Ibid*, 22-23.

³³ *Ibid*, 25.

Belief in the core of the American dream, Sennett and Cobb postulated, was the answer to the pivotal question in class analyses; ‘if they are dissatisfied, why don’t they revolt?’

The position we take in this book is that everyone in this society...is subject to a scheme of values that tells him he must validate the self in order to win others’ respect and his own. When the plumber makes this attempt, however, the feelings involved are quite different than when a professor does it. The examples we have so far given...point to three general results of such assertion: the search for respect is thwarted; the individual feels personally responsible for the failure; the whole attempt accustoms him to think that to have individual respect you must have social inequality.³⁴

Just as such, Sennett and Cobb pointed toward the works of philosophers like Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci who, at the turn of the century, theorized about a new aspect of class which Karl Marx had not fully fleshed out, and which contributed to the legitimization of the power of one class over the other, this being ‘authority’. An example is made of a foreman who orders an employee to come in for extra hours or he will be fired. The freedom of the worker is being infringed, but the foreman carries with him a societal construction of ‘authority’ – that he has the *right* to diminish others’ freedoms. Therefore, those persons who have risen to a caste/class above which their own freedoms are not stripped of them are persons who are truly able to know themselves, because they have full access to their dignity, and to their autonomy. How the worker responds to this power – to authority – was a significant factor in Sennett and Cobb’s thesis on the American class structure. Educated persons had their dignity and autonomy, but only because society and class dynamics decreed it so. The work itself was “a sham, and repugnant. Still, the power of the educated to judge him, and more generally, to rule, he does not dispute...and in accepting the power of educated people *he* feels more inadequate, vulnerable, and undignified.”³⁵

³⁴ Ibid, 75.

³⁵ Ibid, 76-78.

In Retrospect to the Fall of Keynesianism (2000s)

This notion of existential alienation within the working class itself would be the groundwork for many future studies on class, such as Nancy Isenberg's *White Trash* in 2016. Continuing on Sennett and Cobb's theme of 'debunking' the academy's preconceptions of the working class, Isenberg's text interrogates the long history of classism in America and the bastardization, discrimination, and commodification of working poor culture. She also assesses the validity of American mythology: the folktale of the nation's founding as a state representing all of its people, with a government giving an equal voice to every citizen. America as the New World, a world without class. "Thus not only did Americans *not* abandon their desire for class distinctions, they repeatedly reinvented class distinctions."³⁶ From colonial farmers recreating class constructions in marriage practices, to the 'master class' eugenics-craze of the early 20th century, class never went away.

In her analyses of the postwar American environment, Isenberg also gives us an example of another new trend in labor history: labor as it relates to the history of American pop culture. She examines the ramifications of the southern redneck trope popularized by 1972's *Deliverance*, how Elvis Presley, Andy Griffith, and LBJ all centered themselves upon mythological connections to the white underclass, and the recuperation of that underclass into popular media in the 1970s and beyond. It was an aspect of history that has become more and more of a concern to historians; popular media can give us a great deal of information on the national consciousness. As Anthony Harkins described *White Trash*, "...[it] makes clear the centrality of conceptions of the rural white poor in American history and national identity, above all as a force of threatening social degeneration, but also, at times, as authentic, untrammelled, and culturally revitalizing (as long as they did not directly challenge the political and social power structure)."

37

³⁶ Isenberg, Nancy. *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 310.

³⁷ Harkins, Anthony. "Nancy Isenberg. *White Trash: A 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*."

Isenberg also draws attention to the reconstruction of class in the 1970s as it pertains to 20th century white ethnics. She was not the first to emphasize the demographics of Richard Nixon's dreamed-of 'New Majority': white lower middle class and working class ethnics and Catholics. "The alienated 'rabble'," that were a part of the recuperation of larger underclass culture as a truer, authentic breed. "[E]thnic Americans were better Americans, because they understood the traditional values of loyalty, love of the flag, and hard work, and they did not expect government to provide unfair special assistance (as they imagined blacks were doing)."³⁸ The recuperation of ethnic culture that took place in the 1970s – a largely suburban middle class revival of traditional music, foods, etc. – might be pointed to as the 'whitening' of American ethnics. When it became politically pertinent for ethnics to back the establishment, broader American culture made room for them to be sanitized, de-radicalized, and accepted. Such an effort politically began with Nixon and his 'New Majority', but carried on with country-boy Jimmy Carter and subsequent 'down-to-earth' politicians. This was parallel to the similar postwar emulsion of southern underclass and ethnic cultures into broader white culture with the likes of Elvis Presley, Tammy Faye, and Dolly Parton.³⁹

To bring the cultural, economic, political, institutional, and social histories together would paint for us a fuller portrait of the 1970s-1980s period, and this is largely what modern postwar labor historians have pursued. Jefferson Cowie's 2010 *Stayin' Alive* portrays the 70s as the last time in which the working class and labor movement had any substantial presence in American political culture. The working class did not disappear, of course, but the systemic change in the class system and the transition into the culture wars meant that working class agency was no longer a central pillar of politics – as it had been for much

American Historical Review 122, no. 3 (June 2017), 824.

³⁸ Isenberg, Nancy. *White Trash* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 275.

³⁹ Isenberg, Nancy. "The Cult of the Country Boy: Elvis Presley, Andy Griffith, and LBJ's Great Society." And "Redneck Roots: *Deliverance*, Billy Beer, and Tammy Faye." In *White Trash* (New York: Penguin Books, 2016), 231-266, 269-290.

of American history. Cowie convincingly argues for a general timeline for the decade: the early '70s marked with radical industrial grass-roots unrest, the mid-70s collapse of postwar surplus and the death knell of Keynesianism, and the latter-70s marked by a new national malaise toward action and change – the sublimation of voices of dissent. “The rapidity of the change in the nation’s sense of destiny is one of the most profound yet unacknowledged transformations in American culture.”⁴⁰

The insurgencies of the early 1970s have more in common with the early fights of the labor movement before it had secured its own legal legitimization. It was radical, grass-roots, and aimed at not only material gains but at liberation from alienation. The aforementioned text *The Hidden Injuries of Class* and countless other studies like it in the early 70s aimed at understanding the ‘Blue-Collar Blues’ that seemed to overcome the working class in this time. Wildcat strikes rose as the organized rank-and-file clashed with both management and their own union leadership, which increasingly seemed more tied to the status quo of Keynesian high employment, high consumption. The Lordstown plant strike of 1972 served as an archetype for this new sort of revolt: it was multiracial, it was young, it was concerning job boredom and quality, it was against the union leadership as well as management, and it resulted in a mixed-bag that pleased no one. Dubbed “industrial Woodstock,” young workers across the nation emboldened by well-paying jobs with fine benefits were revolting not for material gains, but out of an anxiety at their lot. When they did strike for benefits, they chiefly demanded better pensions and an earlier retirement – exemplified by the incredibly popular ‘30-and-out’ benefits secured by the UAW which guaranteed pensions after 30 years on the job. ‘Lordstown Syndrome’, ‘Blue-Collar Blues’, the ‘70s saw the social blowback of the Keynesian welfare state in the form of unbearable alienation.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin’ Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 73.

⁴¹ Cowie, Jefferson. “Old Fashioned Heroes of the New Working Class.” In *Stayin’ Alive* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 23-73.

In describing the malaise that enveloped the latter half of the 1970s, Cowie defers to one of the strikers at the Lordstown plant,

*I think we're in an era where everybody is a kind of spectator. I don't know. Maybe that's just me. Boy I can't get it together to do anything. You watch the world around you. You watch the wars. You watch the corrupt politics. You watch the taxes. You're just so small. You can't change anything. I can't change anything out there [at the Lordstown plant]. How am I going to change the world?*⁴²

Cowie argued the 'old guard' of union leadership being so hesitant to create a more diverse, dynamic, and modern union ultimately led to the loss of their own political power, and historians were too critical of student 'insurgents': "Yet the insurgencies of the early seventies, resisted so mightily by the union hierarchy, were the main source of whatever hope there may have been for updating the old order...[unions and historians] accustomed to assuming that 'the labor question' had long been answered...solved back in the thirties by union recognition and the enlightened New Deal state."⁴³ He maintained that this 'liberal consensus' was instead a containment of the workers themselves as the subjugated partner to union leadership bent on assuring their own importance and hierarchy. By the 1970s, they had simply grown tired of this new subjugation and revolted. The result, then, was a vocal - but ultimately fragmented - labor movement in the early 70s which conclusively failed to coalesce into a national movement. With the economic crisis of stagflation in 1973, workers arrived instead at a national sense of resignation at the system they felt unable to change due to a rigid leadership and unable to shake up for fear of unemployment in the midst of a major recession.⁴⁴ The decade which had begun with optimism at the ability to reform through action and moral argument, ended with a national sense of cynicism and resentment at the powers that be.

⁴² Ibid, 74.

⁴³ Ibid, 8-9.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 17-19.

There seemed, then, to be two threads which had largely made up studies of the 1970s-80s: what Immanuel Wallerstein calls the cyclical rhythms and secular transformations of the capitalist world-economy. On the one hand, the collapse of postwar economic prosperity in the mid-70s rings as one of many cyclical ups and downs experienced by the very nature of market-driven capitalism. These frequent crashes endow upon their time certain social movements; in America we might point to the Great Depression and resulting New Deal state. So, historians and social scientists living and thinking within the immediate aftershock of the death of postwar surplus carried out most of their analysis within this framework. However there exists also the methodological approach stemming from the secular transformations of capitalism: large-scale shifts in the very state of the world-economy and in the structures of accumulation within capitalism. By this measure, the period from the late 1960's through the 1980s exist as both a cyclical rhythm – the 70s and 80s being the first economic declines of the postwar nation – and a major secular transformation of global capitalism. Deindustrialization, globalization, the rusting out of the steel belt, the disillusionment of class forces, and the domestication of unions all occurred as something more than a result of 1970s stagflation. Capitalism itself changed, and American economic hegemony decayed.

Postwar American Capitalism in Transition

It is useful to examine the final three decades of 20th century American history as a period of sweeping transformation. The 1970s and 80s were described by contemporary observers as the “‘Me’ Decade”: a departure from the communitarian social values of the 60s and into a new era of hyper-self interest, “the greatest age of individualism in American history!”⁴⁵ Modern, removed historical observations have likened it more to a mass withdrawal from extended national trauma: “...a troika of disasters that rattled the American psyche - the oil embargo that threatened the nation’s supply of energy,

⁴⁵ Wolfe, Tom. "The “Me” Decade and the Third Great Awakening." *New York Magazine* (August 23, 1976). 25.

the beginning of the stagflation that sapped the nation's economic strength, the president's 1974 resignation that drained its faith - and then the fall of Saigon in 1975 shattered the remains of national purpose...the promise of modernity itself [slipped] out of reach."⁴⁶ Far from an 'empty' decade, the 70s were the end of one stage of the world-economy with the first economic crisis since the postwar boom: the oil embargo and stagflation. The 80s, then, ushered in the next stage: a globalized, neoliberal economy. Here it is useful to become familiar with the social structures of accumulation theory so that it might serve as a framework for understanding the broad context of the period, and how it all filtered down to regions and neighborhoods.

Social scientists and economists make use of social structure of accumulation (SSA) theory as an institutionalist framework for analyzing the historical development of capitalism. It was developed in reaction to the apparent crisis of global capitalism in the 1970s, and offered an explanation for repeating cycles of capitalist crises. The theory posited that a social structure of accumulation - a coherent, long-lasting structure - forms the supporting basis for long periods of rapid and stable capital accumulation. However, the same structure eventually turns from a promoter of accumulation into an obstacle to it, ushering in a long period of structural crisis of accumulation. Furthermore each structure is made up not only of economic frameworks but also cultural institutions.⁴⁷ The history of capitalism was a series of secular transformations from one structure of accumulation to the next, pockmarked by cyclical rhythms of economic progress and decline. In some instances, these collided into explosive paradigm shifts - as happened in the last few decades of the 20th century.⁴⁸

The prevailing economic structure that existed from roughly the 1930s until the 1970s was interchangeably known as the welfare state, regulated capitalism, fordism, but most popularly as

⁴⁶ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2010). 12.

⁴⁷ Kotz, David M. "Social Structure of Accumulation Theory, Marxist Theory, and System Transformation." *Review of Radical Political Economics* 49, no. 4 (2017). 3-4.

⁴⁸ Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005). 1-4.

Keynesianism. When economic strife appeared on the horizon, public consumers tend to save what they have – in the short run government spending can encourage further consumption and boost the state out of a recession. The free market operated mostly efficiently, though required federal intervention to smooth out its flaws – primarily by the organization of aggregate demand (total economic spending) in order to foster full employment. John Kenneth Galbraith noted chinks in the armor of this structure early on. If the norm of Keynesianism was for the consumer to communicate to the firm what it should create, what had actually occurred was that firms had begun to communicate to the consumer what they should want.⁴⁹

The Keynesian consensus blew up in the 1970s in a twin inflationary crisis and capital flight. Prior to that, the system of regulated capitalism that had guided the American economy in the postwar years had been momentarily prosperous. Median household income between 1954 and 1970 had nearly doubled from \$27,000 to approximately \$45,000, likewise exports expanded in that same time from \$4 billion to \$180 billion. Keynesian tenets of full employment and full consumption had put money into the pockets of workers, who had in turn invested back into their domestic economy - unemployment reached its lowest level in the 1960s at 4%.⁵⁰ Economic prosperity not only benefited the material needs of the nation, but influenced the cultural zeitgeist itself. Workers, more or less secure in their employment and income, took greater risks in direct action toward a more equitable workplace. 1970 emerged as the second largest strike year in American history: 2 million workers in various industries engaged in work stoppages, slow downs, walk-offs, and both formal and wildcat strikes. Oftentimes these demonstrations were not specifically over pay - as was the norm of the first half of the 20th century - but over the quality of life in the workplace, and the work-life balance.⁵¹ “It’s a different generation of workingmen,” one

⁴⁹ Ibid, 484.

⁵⁰ Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey: America since World War II*. 8 ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015). 442.

⁵¹ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive* (New York: New Press, 2010). 2.

striker surmised at Lordstown's GM plant, "None of these guys came over from the old country poor and starving, grateful for any job they could get. None of them have been through a depression. They've been exposed...to all the youth movements of the last ten years...they're just not going to swallow the same kind of treatment their fathers did. They're not afraid of management...They want more than just a job for 30 years."⁵² This national movement toward rank-and-file radicalism in the early half of the 70s placed workers at odds with both corporate and union hierarchies.

The Postwar Industrial Union

The dissonance between union and worker is rooted in the so-called 'liberal consensus'. This was, in essence, an ideology as much as it was a strategy to forming the industrial relationship - and as has been said, 'the ideology of the parent is seldom the ideology of the child.' The 'child', here, being that new breed of worker which could only have been born out of the tumult and fire of the 60s and early 70s. Then the 'parent' is loosely those who fought for the right of the union to be recognized as an institution and sought to better equip the worker to be materially satisfied in this new 20th century industrial world. The line becomes blurred between those thinkers and historians who record the progression, and those who shaped it themselves. David Brody, for instance, was a labor historian and industrial relations theorist oft-cited by unions themselves to explain their actions in seemingly culling their own ranks of dissent. While we might then hesitate to consult Brody and his works in reflection on the larger movement, he is certainly sufficient in explaining the industrial system which he - perhaps unintentionally - ended up defending.

By the close of the Second World War over one-third of non-agricultural workers were organized within a union, a 50% increase from any pre-war level. A relatively affluent industrial class blossomed as

⁵² Ibid, 46.

spending pushed money along from the company to the family and, subsequently, the community.⁵³ Likewise, President Truman sought to contain the anti-New Deal conservative coalition which had so often dogged his predecessor, while maintaining an air of defiance and separation from the new enemy: the Soviet Union and its radical economic system, 'Communism'. The intricacies and differences between Marxism, Leninism, Stalinism, and Soviet Communism were lost to the wind in favor of simpler, consumable understandings of economic systems in the form of ideologies. Communism became totalitarian dictatorship, and Capitalism became individualist democracy.⁵⁴ The direct, domestic, result of this being that the Truman administration became more willing to deal a heavy hand to perceived left-wing radicalism if it meant the containment of that anti-New Deal political bloc. Unions were sussed out for communist sympathies and those who didn't reign in their ideology were trampled: the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) being a pertinent illustration, which suffered a large loss of membership after the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act - outright banning Communist union leadership. This Second Red Scare set the stage for how unions would initially operate in the postwar era, with only those expressing careful political moderatism surviving to forge the new industrial workplace. This is one explanation for the consistent difficulty unions had in pursuing a broader and more diverse population of affiliated workers. The voices of racial justice and gender equity had been purged from the movement, leaving those that remained content at representing the white, male industrial midwest and northeast. Conversations regarding the quality of work life and the deeper relationship between worker and occupation were stifled. American Federation of Labor (AFL) President George Meany expressed it succinctly, "[trade unionists] do not seek to recast American society...we seek [only] a rising standard of living."⁵⁵

⁵³ Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*. 8. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). 5-8.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 66-72.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 85-90.

So the Truman administration and immediate post-war climate formed a double-edged sword for the union cause: the working class had a collective voice and a seat at the political table, but only so long as it expressed the right *kind* of voice. That voice, then, became the status quo through which it seemed postwar surplus would be delivered - Keynesian economics. Between 1947 and 1972 weekly earnings of non-supervisory workers increased 62%.⁵⁶ Those wages went into savings, which incentivised consumption, which then created more jobs for more people. Unions achieved tangible, *quantitative* returns which in turn bolstered their political standing. So, these unions found themselves equally as invested in the Keynesian strategem of full employment and broad consumption, to the point that they grew increasingly hostile to any challenge to this system. The state of industrial relations became known as 'industrial pluralism' - wherein labor became the junior partner to management, but a recognized partner at that. Brody terms the new development 'workplace contractualism', with unions becoming robust, professional organizations headed by administrators. In pursuit of those quantitative returns, unions deemed it imperative that all requests and issues go through the structured hierarchy of the union, so that union administrators might hash it out at the negotiating table with industrial management.⁵⁷

This broad-based defense of the post-war status quo proved a volatile companion to the larger geopolitical machinations which eventually saw the United States engage in a long-term effort to contain Communism within southeast Asia - particularly in Vietnam. The chief of the freshly merged AFL-CIO, George Meany, expressed his opinions, and therefore the stance of the nation's largest union federation, in regards to the War in Vietnam as the ideology of 'free trade unionism'. His was a view of independent trade unions as an essential component of democracy, the only defenders of workers against a number of institutional threats. The denial of a worker's right to join an autonomous union free of any corrupting

⁵⁶ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive* (New York: New Press, 2010). 28.

⁵⁷ Brody, David. *In Labor's Cause: Main Themes on the History of the American Worker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Chapter 6.

outside influences was, therein, a denial of a basic human right. Suddenly then, unions across the globe were split between ‘free’ and ‘unfree’: those within western industrial capitalist countries being free, and those worker’s councils and federations within communist states being unfree.⁵⁸

This conception of the postwar industrial union was a strange amalgamation of two different answers to an identity crisis that had plagued the labor leadership in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. The first argued for a complete separation of labor and the state, with independent unions focused upon immediate jobs-related issues. The second imagined a tighter cooperation between labor and state into a corporate state structure, dubbed ‘new unionism’. George Meany and his ‘free trade unionists’ emerged out of the two, upholding some basic tenets of both approaches: the requirement for an industrial administrative-organization, the importance of political alliances in government, all while maintaining some form of autonomy - even if that autonomy meant close cooperation with the government, as it did in the case of Meany’s AFL-CIO and various administrations carrying out the War in Vietnam. To defend union autonomy abroad, the AFL-CIO advocated, was to defend union autonomy at home by purging their ranks of radical dissent that threatened the delicate balance of workplace contractualism. In summation, George Meany and the AFL-CIO carried forward the torch of ‘free trade unionism’ so uncompromisingly it often meant the bending and stretching of the very ideology itself: in reality pursuing union autonomy abroad at the expense of it at home. So greatly would it be manipulated to suit the personal anti-communist sentiments of Meany and his circle, that it would all shatter by the dawn of the 1970s.⁵⁹

The result of such dedication to the status quo at home and abroad can be seen quite clearly with the Hard Hat Riots which struck New York City in May 1970. Over one thousand college and high school

⁵⁸ Wehrle, Edmund F. *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (University of Michigan Press, 2005). 9-10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 14-19.

students rallied near New York City Hall to protest the war in Vietnam, U.S incursions into Cambodia, and the Kent State shootings four days prior. The Mayor of New York, John Lindsay, ordered all flags at City Hall to be flown at half staff in solidarity with those students slain by National Guardsmen. Such an action triggered a response from Peter J. Brennan - president of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York and vice president of the New York State AFL-CIO. Brennan, an ardent follower of Meany's 'free trade unionism', was an avowed anti-Communist and war supporter regardless of which administration oversaw it. Brennan organized several hundred construction workers - garbed in brown overalls and orange hard hats - and sent them to break up the anti-war rally. City Hall itself was stormed by scores of union workers, forcing the civil servants there to raise the flag to full staff. Other workers ripped the Red Cross banner and Episcopal flag down from Trinity Church, while still others invaded nearby Pace University, smashing windows and beating students there.⁶⁰

Brennan shortly thereafter became the Nixon administration's Secretary of Labor. The position was seen in a larger symbolic aspect to the administration: an affirmation that a key constituent of the New Deal working class bloc, the Bronx Democrat, had now transitioned into the fold of the Republican Party and Nixon's fabled 'New Majority'.⁶¹ It also finely illustrated the effect that the larger unions, namely the AFL-CIO, had on the domestic landscape in their rabid support of the war, and dismissal of those who rallied against it. The 1972 Presidential election pitted Republican Richard Nixon against Democratic Senator George McGovern - "the most pro-labor candidate ever produced by the American two-party system."⁶² Even so, it remained that many of labor's greatest political voices refused to stand at his side. AFL-CIO chief Meany refused to endorse either candidate and actively worked against McGovern's nomination at the Democratic Convention in Miami. This was a direct continuation of labor

⁶⁰ Bigart, Homer. "War Foes here Attacked by Construction Workers." *New York Times*, May 9, 1970.

⁶¹ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive* (New York: New Press, 2010). 163.

⁶² *Ibid*, 7.

leadership's anti-communist sentiment and vocal defense of the Vietnam war. For all that McGovern had to offer, it was his 'New Politics'-style platform of anti-war positions, collegiate youth following, and commitment to a more diverse Democratic Party that ultimately made him a 'failing' candidate in the eyes of many of America's workers. Nixon, taking cues from the insurgent George Wallace, pitched his candidacy explicitly toward white men of the working class by an appeal to their culturally conservative values over their material needs. What we now understand today as the controversial 'Southern Strategy' that ultimately secured Nixon his reelection.⁶³

So the state of industrial relations, focused upon an institutional and hierarchical union sitting as the junior partner at the negotiating table with management, naturally turned much of the union leadership into the defenders of the Keynesian status quo. So long as there was a rise in consumption and employment, the worker would benefit from a more materially comfortable life. In the defense of this status quo, and as a result of the long sordid history of the First and Second Red Scares, unions themselves feverishly culled their ranks of dissent: there could be no wildcat strikes, this would damage the status quo. There could be no non-hierarchical union structure, that would threaten the union's institutional status. This, coupled with the development of their own ideologies and philosophies on industrial relations, turned the largest union federations - namely the AFL-CIO - into bastions of American foreign policy and rabid enemies of those young anti-war protesters that made up the New Left. As Cowie put it, "[Union successes] had turned the house of labor into a palace[,]but...it became clear that the entrance was guarded and the foundation lay on shifting sands."

The Fall of Keynesianism: Alienation

A structure of accumulation is composed of two parts: a golden age when it works efficiently, and a period of structural crisis when it no longer works effectively, and is subsequently replaced by a new

⁶³ Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 400-402.

‘stage’ in capitalism - a new structure. In this case then, economist David Kotz identifies the period of 1948-1973 as being the ‘golden age’ for Keynesianism, illustrated by the general growth of the postwar United States then. Likewise the interregnum between two stages, in which the prior structure of accumulation is in crisis and eventually replaced, existed from approximately 1973-1979.

The postwar prosperity that had been the foundation to a cultural optimism for the future, and cogent efforts of solidarity towards such a goal that - like the nationally-covered Lordstown Strike of 1972 and its “blue collar blues”-suffering racially diverse strikers⁶⁴ - suggested possibilities of an inclusive coalition. While the Keynesian paradigm had made such prosperity available, it entered into the very beginnings of its crisis with the widespread systemic alienation that afflicted the nation’s industrial workers. Figures like Edward Sadlowski and Joseph Yablonski led grassroots efforts to reform or upend a labor leadership that had grown too tied to the status quo: ignoring issues of workplace safety, democracy, and quality of life.⁶⁵ Relative economic prosperity and employment security allowed a kind of working class solidarity around higher dreams - escaping the job itself. Mike Kinsley, who assembled dashboards at the Ford Wixom plant, summarized this discontent; “You’ve got to prepare yourself mentally...There’s only three ways out of here. You either conform and become deader each day, or you rebel, or you quit.” In United Automobile Workers specifically there were increased calls, “to press for early retirement, to change the jobs so that they are made more interesting, and to make overtime voluntary, issues that were rarely mentioned in the past.”⁶⁶ The problem of alienation was so palpable in the early 70s that it became the centerpiece of President Nixon’s 1971 Labor Day Address:

The dignity of work, the value of achievement, the morality of self-reliance - none of these is going out of style. With that fact clearly understood, let us also recognize that the work ethic in America is undergoing some

⁶⁴ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive* (New York: New Press, 2010). 46-50.

⁶⁵ Klein, Joe. "Eddie Sadlowski: Old-Fashioned Hero of the New Working Class." *Rolling Stone* (December 18, 1975).

⁶⁶ Salpukas, Agis. "Workers Increasingly Rebel Against Boredom on Assembly Line." *New York Times*, April 2, 1972.

*changes. It means that business, labor, and government should explore the new needs of today's wage earners: We must give the individual worker more responsibility - more of the feeling that his opinion counts...we must make sure that technology does not dehumanize work, but makes it more creative and rewarding for the people who will operate the plants of the future.*⁶⁷

Postwar prosperity afforded by the Keynesian system, and an unmatched global economic dominance, had given American industrial workers security. With that security came a labor movement unique to that period - one that had at its core a more radical critique of alienation, work, and capitalism itself. The 1960s had been a period of cultural revolution, but it seemed to observers that the dawning years ahead would see such a spirit crystallize in the industrial heartland. “[T]he rank-and-file union members...are in an acquisitive and rebellious frame of mind. The blue-collar worker is in the crosscurrent of social change, disgruntled about his bosses and ‘the system,’ and sensitive to the black-power revolution within the ranks of labor.”⁶⁸ A failure to secure desired clauses and benefits, at the time, were used to explain this new revolt from below which seemed brewing beneath the surface of industrial unions - a tension palpable by workers, leadership, and by management itself, “The unions have let power pass to the locals, and now they are stuck with the results...The stubborn guy, the irresponsible local leader, has the power of the whole organization behind him,” one such GM official remarked.⁶⁹

The Fall of Keynesianism: End of Prosperity

“What happens when the fabled growth machine begins to falter at the very moment that the population’s appetites have been whetted,” Daniel Yankelovich asked, “and its expectations have reached unprecedented heights?”⁷⁰ The planning system, as Galbraith observed, had managed wants and desires to

⁶⁷ Nixon, Richard. *Address to the Nation on Labor Day*. The American Presidency Project, September 6, 1971.

⁶⁸ Armstrong, Richard. "Labor 1970: Angry, Aggressive, Acquisitive." *Compensation Review*. 2, no. 1 (October, 1969). 37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 41.

⁷⁰ Yankelovich, Daniel. *New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1982). 171.

fit into what firms had constructed their markets to supply. So when the structure went into crisis, it was felt culturally as well as economically. “Instead of middle-class jobs growing, especially in the manufacturing sector where trade unions were strong, the nation now began to experience the ‘outsourcing’ of high-paying factory jobs, with classified employment ads focusing on jobs at McDonalds and Wendy’s, not GM or Ford. The ‘de-skilling’ of American industry...became an epidemic.”⁷¹ 1973 signalled the final nail in the coffin of postwar prosperity with the start of the Arab oil embargo, the spike in oil prices that followed, and the inflation crisis. Following the devaluation of the American dollar in 1971 due to pulling out of the Bretton Woods Accords, and United States support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War, Organization Of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) halted all oil shipments to the U.S. The move signalled an end to America’s full autonomy in an increasingly globalized economy - a loss of dominance that would only widen as the latter half of the 20th century carried on. In 1973-74 inflation reached double digits, industrial productivity fell, and the Keynesian model of artificial unemployment as a cure for inflation (Keynesian demand management) buckled: in 1975 inflation hit 11% and unemployment 9%, with both accelerating upwards.”⁷²

Rising inflation eating into stagnant wages developed into debilitating ‘stagflation,’ which meant that real discretionary income for workers had declined by 18% between 1973 and the early 80s. The cost of a single family home doubled, and the price of basic necessities rose 110%. “Worker morale also continued to deteriorate. In 1969 79 percent of non-college educated young people agreed that ‘hard work always pays off’; by the mid-1970s the figure had fallen to 56 percent...Besieged by inflation, unemployment, and loss of control in the workplace, the average blue-collar worker, for the first time since the end of World War II, seemed to face a future that contained little basis for optimism or faith.”

⁷¹ Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). 442.

⁷² *Ibid*, 443.

There were 156 decertifications held in 1956, in 1979 this figure skyrocketed to 330 as more and more workers voted to end their union representation. Between 1954 and 1966 union membership of the nonagricultural workforce had fallen from 35% to 28%. By the 70s it had fallen further to 25%.⁷³

As the stagflation crisis delivered a heavy blow to postwar prosperity, a twin crisis emerged in the 1970s and 80s: mass-capital flight. Kotz, as well as most modern historians and economists, lays this at the feet of the beginnings of globalization. “U.S. industry, left unscathed by the war, dominated both domestic and world markets. However, the effective operation of the system of regulated capitalism on a global level led to rapid recovery and economic advance in Western Europe and Japan.”⁷⁴ It was a continuation of the “creative destruction” at the heart of capitalism that early economists like Joseph Schumpeter had identified as the “process of industrial mutation that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure from within, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one.”⁷⁵ The successful implementation of the Bretton Woods’ regulated capitalism in other, war-torn industrial states had lead to a crisis of regulated capitalism in the United States. The monopoly on international markets American industry had enjoyed since 1945 was suddenly thrown into competition with other international firms that offered more industrial goods at lower prices.

“Simply put, this turned [American] big business into small business. Big business, no longer having the luxury of a stable existence undisturbed by the prospect of bankruptcy, became determined to find ways to cut labor costs, reduce tax obligations, and avoid regulatory restraints on their freedom of action.”⁷⁶ When U.S. industry couldn’t compete with the productivity of robust, industrialized nations, management turned on its workforce - in many cases identifying the new rank-and-file activism as being

⁷³ Ibid, 445.

⁷⁴ Kotz, David M. *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). 80.

⁷⁵ Schumpeter, Joseph. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1942). 82-83.

⁷⁶ Kotz, David M. *Neoliberal Capitalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. 80.

to blame for falling productivity, and unions themselves for raising labor costs too high with workplace benefits. The 1970s recession and steep drop in the rate of profit since the mid-60s meant parallel decline in domestic capital investment. With capital expenditures declining, there were no new jobs in those fields most traditionally associated with the working class. Companies that did modernize relied on automation to take the place of skilled workers. “[S]tructural unemployment soared, debilitating the working class.”⁷⁷

The economic structure of Keynesianism, which had existed in its own golden age from the end of WWII until the early-70s, had entered into a period of structural crisis. The 1970s recession which marked both the end of a near-three decades of prosperity and the downfall of the dominant economic structure came about as the consequence of conflict. American corporations came into increasing conflict with both domestic and international actors which, eventually, the prevailing economic structure proved incapable of confronting. Activists in the United States expanded the welfare state significantly under the Great Society. Workers were engaging in a grassroots effort to curtail poor working conditions - even threatening the industrial pluralist orthodoxy which had pacified unions themselves into the junior partner to management. The American public, particularly the budding environmental movement, hounded industry and its attempts to offset the cost of production on to society in the form of environmental degradation. Outside of the United States, OPEC and Latin American nations successfully demanded fairer prices for their oil exports. The implementation of regulated capitalism in Japan and Western Europe meant that, decades after the end of the war, the American manufacturing industry faced international competition it had not been prepared for. Intense conflict between American businesses, labor, and citizens on the one hand and capitalists in other developed countries on the other rendered the social structure of accumulation ineffective.⁷⁸ A new structure had to be erected as the previous one floundered in crisis, unable to cope with the numerous tensions it itself had created. This new structure

⁷⁷ Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). 444.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 67.

would be called ‘Post-Fordism’ by certain leftists; ‘Supply-Side Economics’ by those equating the structure with its most popular policy proposal; and ‘Neoliberalism’ by most social scientists.

National Malaise and the Rise of Neoliberalism

Historian Andreas Killen wrote of this paradigm shift, “Whether it was seen as a terrible moral crisis or as an opportunity, the perceived collapse of established institutions necessitated a rewriting of the basic national storyline...it seemed to many Americans that history itself had become unhinged from any master narrative or enterprise with a secure outcome...[so] they began telling themselves new stories.”⁷⁹

The trauma of decline in the 1970s largely destroyed any national rank-and-file labor movement that earlier onlookers had expected to sweep the nation. At the start of the 70s, the midwest and rust belt constituted the highest union density in the nation - but by decade’s end the AFL-CIO had lost near four million members. Hourly compensation and shop floor efficiency, growing in lockstep with each other since the 1940s, first diverged in 1973.⁸⁰ Deindustrialization, plant closings, and anti-unionism followed. Unemployment reached 8.5% by 1975, and suddenly the safety and assured income of a union job was too much to lose. That explosion of labor activism in the early half of the decade reflected this: the number of major strikes and lockouts nationally fell by almost half from 381 in 1970 to 187 in 1980.⁸¹

Dewey Burton, an autoworker from Michigan, was one of those laborers who still had his union card, and his attitude in the midst of the nation’s first great postwar economic downturn illustrated the new malaise seizing hold of working class society. Interviewed by the *New York Times* on the eve of the 1974 midterm elections, it had been only a few months prior that the political reality of Watergate had made itself known - resulting in the disgraced resignation of Nixon. While the election would deliver

⁷⁹ Killen, Andreas. *1973 Nervous Breakdown* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2006). 8.

⁸⁰ Economic Policy Institute. “The Productivity–Pay Gap.” EPI.org. October 2017.

⁸¹ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive* (New York: New Press, 2010). 1-19.

sweeping electoral wins for the Democratic party, it would be a momentary victory built on the back of opposition scandal, as opposed to a true rallying of the New Deal coalition. “It’s the money thing. It takes so much to just make it,” Burton admitted, “that there’s no time for dreams and no energy for making them come true - and I’m not so sure anymore that it’s ever going to get any better.”⁸² With poetic finality he noted words that could be emblematic of the entire period:

*Something’s happening to people like me - working stiffs, as they say - and it isn’t just that we have to pay more for this or that or that we’re having to do without this or make do with a little less of that. It’s deeper, and harder to explain, but it’s like more and more of us are sort of leaving all our hopes, outside in the rain and coming into the house and just locking the door - you know, just turning the key and ‘click,’ that’s it for what we always thought we could be...I’ve come to understand [the system] more, and I understand that not much is going to improve for me as a result of it...It was a gradual thing, no big explosion. I realized I was killing myself and that there wasn’t going to be any reward for my suicide.*⁸³

Worse than a rabid politicization of working class culture - there was a vacuum. So many strikes, so much hope - and what had it been for? In the critical reevaluation of industrial relations, workers had not only found that it wasn’t representative of them, they had found it was built to contain them. “New Deal labor policies were designed with the stability of the capitalist economy in mind.” One theorist asserted in 1976, “Their pro-union provisions responded to labor militance and served to head off the formation of a radical working-class movement. The National Labor Relations Act established procedures which encouraged unions to pursue peaceful collective bargaining rather than a more activist course.”⁸⁴ The very core of that near fifty-year Roosevelt coalition, the New Deal itself, became called into question. It suddenly seemed that it hadn’t been the great salvation of America’s working class, but an explicit method of control. The labor question hadn’t been solved. Institutional change not only hadn’t occurred, but things had suddenly gotten worse.⁸⁵

⁸² Woaten, James T. “Pre-Election Mood: ‘There’s No Time for Dreams’.” *New York Times*, October 17, 1974.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hurd, Rick. “New Deal Labor Policy and the Containment of Radical Union Activity.” *Review of Radical Political Economics* 8, no. 3 (1976). 1.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 40.

By 1978, it is suggested, it was clear that the New Deal and the coalition it had born for half a century were dying. President Jimmy Carter had begun to take a hands-off approach to the economic crisis as it worsened, eventually equating it to a ‘crisis of the spirit’. What took place in the short tenure of the Georgian president was a idealistic aspiration for a rekindling of the Democratic party after a long absence - a “New Deal that Never Happened”. The result was a lackluster agenda which failed “[to] effectively draw together the economic politics of the thirties and the social politics of the sixties...”⁸⁶ Carter’s approach to capitol hill politics was defined by his adoption of the “trustee model” of the executive branch: that Congress was marred by special interests and infighting, so the President’s role was to rise above the fray and pursue policy in the best interests of the nation. This coupled with his campaign of populist, anti-establishment rhetoric put him at odds with the ‘wheeling and dealing’ nature of legislative politics. Simply put, his administration refused to take part in any significant negotiation efforts with Republicans or Great Society Democrats in Congress - ultimately alienating himself from any congressional coalition that might help pass substantive domestic policies. The Carter administration and those new Democrats in Congress - the ‘*Watergate Babies*’ - were a new post-60s free-market, social liberal that would come to define the 1990s Neoliberal movement of Bill Clinton. “[Carter] acknowledged that the solutions of the liberal Great Society had become part of the problem and promised to remake the government...[he included] business in the local decision-making process, and [offered] tax credits to employ youth - [pleasing] Republicans.”⁸⁷ As such, the “New Democrats” expressed open skepticism of workers and their organizations and, by the latter end of the 70s, suggested that the answer to deindustrialization was to sponsor the expanding non-unionized service sector. This “reindustrialization,” they supposed was the modernization of the American economy the nation so desperately needed.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Cowie, Jefferson. “Out of Control: Reagan, Labor, and the Fate of the Nation.” *Dissent*, January 2012.

⁸⁷ Kaplowitz, Craig Allan. "Struggles of the First ‘New Democrat’: Jimmy Carter, Youth Employment Policy, and the Great Society Legacy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1998). 202.

⁸⁸ Ginzberg, Eli, and George J. Vojta. "The Service Sector of the U.S. Economy." *Scientific*

In the 1976 election approximately 70% of all voters identified economic issues as their primary concern: 26% specifying inflation and 31% unemployment.⁸⁹ Concerns over the worsening economy were overwhelmingly the primary issue of American voters: and Carter systematically failed to achieve anything in this regard. “If Carter’s so good for the working people, how come they’re not working?” Dewey Burton challenged of the Democratic administration.⁹⁰ Jimmy Carter, through his handling of domestic economic legislation, tax increases under his administration, and through his lamentations over the failure of American spirit, alienated the traditional Democratic constituency. A 1980 Gallup Poll found that 47% of Americans rated his performance as ‘poor’ or below, while only 55% of voters in the 1980 election who named unemployment as their primary concern voted for Carter - 67% of those who named inflation voted for his Republican challenger, Ronald Reagan.⁹¹ Modern historians like Chafe offer a rebuttal, though, to observers of the time who viewed the 1980 election as a ‘Reagan Revolution’. “To a remarkable extent, withdrawal from the political process was concentrated among the less well-off.”

By the time Jimmy Carter was elected, blue-collar and service workers constituted 75 percent of the ‘party of nonvoters.’...American officeholders [were] being chosen by an electorate increasingly dominated by middle and upper-class citizens, with those at the bottom of society choosing to withdraw completely from the political process...Democrats in the United States had abandoned their natural constituency, moving so strongly to conservative positions on economic issues that they offered no appeal to blue-collar workers or inner-city ghetto dwellers. Hence, the party of nonvoters was actually comprised of former Democrats - once the core of the New Deal coalition - who now no longer saw any political party that represented their economic interest.”⁹²

This modern view of the final death of Keynesianism with the election of 1980 suggests a more nuanced view of the role of the working-class in this systemic change. It was not a wholesale conservative

American 244, no. 3 (1981).

⁸⁹ Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). 415.

⁹⁰ Robertson, Nan. “One Man’s Road to a Vote for Reagan.” *New York Times*, October 15, 1980.

⁹¹ Chafe, William H. *The Unfinished Journey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). 419.

⁹² *Ibid*, 421-422.

shift amongst America's blue collar class, but alienation and withdrawal from an entire system which seemed to no longer represent them.

Iron Range Labor

Northeastern Minnesota, more so than the agricultural south of the state, has always relied on resource extractive industry, which is itself inherently temporary. Initially in the late 19th century this was primarily a substantial lumber industry employing mainly immigrants, but became dominated by mining as American capitalism systemically transformed in the 1890s. The post-Civil War economic boom transformed United States manufacturing from a composition of smaller firms employing fewer than ten workers on average, to large trusts dominating whole industries and marketing products nationwide.⁹³ This industrialization of American capitalism was driven by the expansion of railroads: they required enormous injections of capital financing, they acquired federal land grants and sold much of this property to new immigrant workers, and they linked together national markets. In Minnesota's case, this cemented the dominance of mining in the state's northeast.

Ore deposits in what came to be called the Vermillion Range were discovered in 1866 and Minnesota's wealth of iron ore discovered in the late 19th century created an indelible link between the region and the broader heartland steel industry.⁹⁴ Iron mined in Minnesota's Vermilion, Cuyuna and Mesabi ranges was shipped out of Duluth and - at its peak - made up 82% of all iron ore extracted in the United States. The steel belt's foundries were directly fed by the 'North Country', and through this the Range gained a seat at the table of 'steel fundamentalism,' in which the industry became the economic standard for the national postwar economy.⁹⁵ This also meant that the region, nearly from its beginnings,

⁹³ Hudelson, Richard and Carl Ross. *By the Ore Docks* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). 8-9.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 40.

⁹⁵ Power, Michael Thomas. *The Economic Role of Metal Mining in Minnesota: Past, Present, and Future*. A Report Prepared for the the Sierra Club and Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, 2007. 4.

was uniquely susceptible to the cyclical rhythms of capitalism: “Large capital outlays were required to manufacture iron and steel, which were used mainly in the construction of railroads and structures, which could be delayed when times were bad; demand for steel thus fluctuated greatly with the ups and downs of the economy.”⁹⁶

This sensitivity to the national economy could be illustrated as early as the Panic of 1893, which saw mass layoffs and withdrawals of smaller firms from the Minnesota mining industry. Andrew Carnegie emerged with a powerhouse monopoly driven by massive production cost cuts that allowed for an unmatched underpricing of metals integral to steel production. In 1901 the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Tower interests were consolidated into the billion-dollar United States Steel Company. US Steel dominated every aspect of Minnesota mining through vertical integration: iron ore mines on the Mesabi Range, both the D&IR and DM&N Railways which transported the ore, and the docks and ore boats of Duluth which transported it across the Great Lakes.⁹⁷

The Iron Range became the majority supplier of iron ore for the American steel industry in the first half of the twentieth century - with the Mesabi Range’s open pit mines being the most lucrative and technologically advanced. Northeastern Minnesota’s entire infrastructure became built around mining tax revenue, which made the pain of economic downturn all the more acute. The Great Depression led to mass mine shutdowns and unemployment rates upwards of 70%, but a massive upswing in steel demand during the Second World War led to a successive recovery and growth. “By the dawn of the postwar era, the region had already experienced several cycles of boom and bust.”⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Hudelson, Richard and Carl Ross. *By the Ore Docks* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). 41.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 41-42.

⁹⁸ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams: The Struggle to Sustain Mining on Minnesota's Iron Range, 1915-2000* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). xiv-xv.

The Voices of Creative Destruction

One of the primary consequences of the secular transformation of world capitalism that occurred in the 1980s was the deindustrialization of the American economy. Normally studied by economists as a restructuring of the economy to fit within a new competitive, globalized world; it also had immense ramifications as, “one of the major transformations of the twentieth century.”⁹⁹ The restructuring of American capitalism that came with Neoliberalism in the 1980s touched not just the economy, but the national culture and zeitgeist as well. Imperative to understanding deindustrialization is moving, “beyond the ruins.” Beyond orthodox discussions of plant closures, employment policy, and hard economic data. Deindustrialization - as a historical event - has more to tell us about the clear and present reality American society currently occupies within the current stage of capitalism. A secular transformation in capitalism, yes, but how did that figure to the folks on the ground - their own mental and cultural frameworks? As historiography on a broad scale has moved from political to social, so too should a history of capitalism and American history move from political-economical to social. As Cowie and Heathcott succinctly question, “What are the ideas, symbols, and images that shape our conceptions of the ‘postindustrial’?”¹⁰⁰ The Iron Range as a case study in this regard is useful: it is a region defined by industry that has always been fighting industrial decline, and it is a region that has had to radically face questions of a ‘postindustrial’ future. How they have done that is not only a question for Rangers themselves, but also a question for historians - particularly public historians whose concern is the public dissemination and consumption of history. In regions undergoing staggering industrial loss, public history became irrevocably intertwined with efforts to rejuvenate economies; as such, history became just as much about what could be sold as what happened. Deindustrialization is a symptom of a secular transformation in

⁹⁹ Cowie, Jefferson and Joseph Heathcott, Introduction to *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*. Edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 5.

capitalism from Keynesianism to Neoliberalism; but it is also an era defined by historical memory. Deindustrialization, particularly on the Iron Range, can afford us insights into how communities form narratives within the ‘creative destruction’ of capitalism: how they memorialize, commemorate, and consume such history.

The Economics of Deindustrialization

The term ‘deindustrialization’ was popularized in politics and the academy by Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison’s landmark 1982 economic analysis, *The Deindustrialization of America*. They defined it as, “a widespread, systematic disinvestment in the nation’s basic productive capacity.” For the United States, this mainly manifested in the way firms moved capital, “in the forms of financial resources and of real plant and equipment,” away from productive, tangible industries and into an increasingly financialized realm of speculation, corporate acquisitions, and foreign investment. This new kind of American economy created within neoliberalism did not lend itself to productive industry, but to the non-corporeal movement of funds from one place to the other. “Left behind are shuttered factories, displaced workers, and a newly emerging group of ghost towns.”¹⁰¹

The fallout of deindustrialization on the national economy was palpable. U.S. GDP during the 1970s grew by 2.9% per year - a precipitous fall from the decade previous which averaged a growth of 4.1% per year. Productivity growth nearly completely collapsed in the wake of the 1973 oil embargo from 3% per year between 1949-1973, to 1.3% in 1973 and decreasing through the 1990s. This was coupled with a momentous rise in imports: between 1929 and 1969 foreign imports averaged 5.7% of national

¹⁰¹ Bluestone, Barry and Bennett Harrison. *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1982).

GDP. Over the course of the 1970s this doubled to 10.9%; in manufacturing specifically imports had tripled in the same timeframe from 13.9% of GDP to 37.8%.¹⁰²

The success of postwar capitalism in developing and wartorn countries abroad led to the end of a monopolistic, U.S.-based manufacturing world market; while globalization meant that firms competed at an international level. The end of the postwar boom in 1973 meant that the Keynesian paradigm - high wages, high employment, cooperation between management and union at the bargaining table (industrial pluralism) - was not meeting corporate expectations. International competition, safety net and benefits costs for workers, and the high labor rate were identified as the source of the problem. As such, corporations adopted capital mobility - the geographic relocation of manufacturing or the disinvestment from traditional industry - as a threat to levy concessions from unions at the bargaining table. Under pressure from management threatening to shutter factories, unions leaned heavily on their track record as service-providers to their members and made concessions wherever possible. If management came to the table with a list of cutbacks, unions would seek fringe benefits and ultimately be willing to accept managements' demands to lowering the costs of business: automation, job cuts, and pay decreases.^{103 104}

The 1959 steel strike serves as an early illustration of this use of capital mobility that would grow increasingly prevalent as globalization and deindustrialization wore on. United Steelworkers of America (USWA) president David J. McDonald was a pioneer in placing fringe benefits at the core of union focus, and had previously led a successful month long steelworkers strike in 1956 which resulted in their first three-year contract. The union won a 7% annual wage increase, but the bulk of the strike's success was with the attainment of further fringe benefits for USWA including supplemental unemployment benefits,

¹⁰² Barry Bluestone, Foreword to *Beyond the Ruins*. Cowie, Jefferson and Joseph Heathcott, eds. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.) viii.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 10-12.

¹⁰⁴ Aaron Brown (Iron Range journalist, author, professor), in discussion with the author, August 19, 2018.

a union shop for the whole industry, and cost-of-living adjustments.¹⁰⁵ When the contract was up for renegotiation in 1959, industry negotiators demanded an alteration or elimination of a clause in the master contract which limited management's ability to make changes resulting in lost hours or job cuts. In July 500,000 steelworkers went on strike, and support came from the Range and Duluth as well where most mine workers were organized under the USWA. District 33 Director Earl Bester invited McDonald to tour the Iron Range mines, and pickets were established by Local 1938 at the Julia Mine near Virginia, the Wooster Mine near McKinley, and the Meadow Mine near Aurora.¹⁰⁶

In early October President Eisenhower invoked the back-to-work provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act, a mandate which allowed a federal injunction to send all striking workers back to work if the strike threatened national health or safety. AFL-CIO affiliate newspaper *Labor World* expressed dismay at the injunction and stood behind McDonald's resolution to battle it in court.¹⁰⁷ The Supreme Court ultimately upheld the injunction, and strikers across the nation were ordered home from the pickets - including 24,000 workers from northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.¹⁰⁸ A new contract was negotiated for the 1960 new year: it included "Historic Fringe Benefit Gains" and preserved the contract sections which limited management's ability to cut jobs and hours. Pension and health plans were improved, but the pay increase had been lowered to far below anything the union had ever demanded.¹⁰⁹ "It set up two big things," Aaron Brown, an Iron Range historian and journalist remarked, "[it] confirmed to American companies that they could import steel whenever there were domestic supply problems...and [it]

¹⁰⁵ Smemo, Kristoffer, Samir Sonti, and Gabriel Winant. "Conflict and Consensus: The Steel Strike of 1959 and the Anatomy of the New Deal Order." *Critical Historical Studies* 4, no. 11 (2017). 48.

¹⁰⁶ Pietrinl, Elio. "8 Points Fomented Strike." *The Labor World*, August 20, 1959, Vol. 64 - No. 13.

¹⁰⁷ "Did it Help Steel Stall on Settlement?" *The Labor World*, October 15, 1959, Vol. 64 - No. 21.

¹⁰⁸ "24,000 Area Strikers Sent Back to Jobs." *The Labor World*, November 12, 1959, Vol. 64 - No. 23.

¹⁰⁹ "New Steel Contract Contains Historic Fringe Benefit Gains." *The Labor World*, January 14, 1960, Vol. 64 - No. 34.

established that the union would seek fringe benefits when money wasn't available, and that they would ultimately be willing to accept automation and job cuts to keep those benefits.”¹¹⁰

‘Red Iron Rotted’: Postwar Struggles in Northeast Minnesota

Substantial differences between northeastern Minnesota and the rest of the steel belt meant that the timeline of deindustrialization varied significantly in the former compared to the latter. While the majority of America, steel belt included, enjoyed the fruits of America’s postwar economy and economic upswing, northeastern Minnesota struggled from the outset. Rank-and-file labor activism in the 1970s was based upon job security and adequate wages. Instances like the Lordstown wildcat strike of 1972 are a perfect example: young, multiracial autoworkers fought both management and the national union in a conflict not over wages or benefits, but over job speedups. It was a more radical kind of grassroots activism that had at its core a critique of worklife in industrial America, and its concerns over pensions, job democracy, and job quality reflected this. Unrest in the 1970s steel belt reflected more closely the labor radicalism of the 1930s: “ [grievances over the] petty despotism of the workplace...and the inhuman pressures of mechanized production lines.”¹¹¹

Radicalism in postwar northern Minnesota never existed in quite the same fashion. This is primarily due to the way in which mining and mining-adjacent economies of the north struggled against industrial decline since the 1950s. Of the three prominent iron ranges in Northern Minnesota - the Vermillion, Mesabi, and Cuyuna - it was the Mesabi that proved the most ore-rich and the most culturally significant. Mesabi ore was high-grade hematite and of a gravel consistency that, in the first half of the 20th century, made it incredibly easy to exhume using fairly simple steam shovels. As early as 1909 the Lake Superior region’s ore reserves were already reaching the upper limits of their yield at the industry’s

¹¹⁰ Aaron Brown, in discussion with the author, August 19, 2018.

¹¹¹ Cowie, Jefferson. *Stayin' Alive* (New York: New Press, 2010). 46.

rate of production. “[B]efore 1940,” a report from the National Conservation Commission concluded, “the production must already have reached a maximum and begun to decline.”¹¹² Geologists and the mining industry as a whole were preparing for the depletion of natural ore in the Superior region well before the 1980s, and 20th century ingenuity was deployed to fight it. Resource extraction is by definition a nonrenewable, limited industry. Jeffrey Manuel does a phenomenal job of showcasing how, in this way, the Iron Range reacted to the loss of its economic powerhouse in much the same way as other regions: it looked to technology to not necessarily fix the problem, but to postpone it for as long as possible. For the Range, this technological fix was the turn to taconite mining pioneered by Edward W. Davis. Taconite was a low-grade ore found aplenty in the Range, but typically unused due to its low percentage of iron. Davis and the University of Minnesota developed a method for taking huge slabs of the 20-30% iron-ore, pounding them into a fine powder, collecting the iron using magnets, and blasting the resulting 65% iron-rich pellets in furnaces.¹¹³ Spurred by a public campaign on the future of taconite in the Superior region, Erie Mining Company constructed a pilot plant near Aurora and expressed interest at the state’s mining industry moving towards taconite.¹¹⁴ By the early 1950s Reserve Mining Company began construction on a plant to access 7.5 million tons of the low-grade ore from the Mesabi - which geologists had estimated to hold up to 1.5 billion tons of taconite. Situated on the north shore of Lake Superior, the immense Reserve Mining plant there (the E.W. Davis Works) would come to be the regional hub for taconite production and would eventually incorporate the town of Silver Bay.¹¹⁵

While taconite expansion was just beginning, another of the cyclical busts hit the region - this time due to the first real knock of globalization. With technological advancements in shipping that cut

¹¹² Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 16.

¹¹³ Bigart, Homer. "Poverty Blights Iron Ore Region" *New York Times*, January 13, 1964.

¹¹⁴ Mullaney, Thomas E. "Big Boom Foreseen in Low-Grade Ores." *New York Times*, October 14, 1949.

¹¹⁵ "\$75,000,000 Plant for Taconite Set." *New York Times*, September 22, 1951.

down on transport costs, and earlier worries about the Mesabi's long-term viability spurring industry expansion in South America and Africa, Great Lakes ore came into very real international competition for the first time. In 1950 U.S. Steel expanded operations to Venezuela, and other steel companies in that decade began importing millions of tons of ore from Canada. "While Minnesota was responsible for 68 percent of all U.S. iron-ore purchases in 1946, by 1957 it produced only 49 percent. At its highest production levels, iron ore from the Lake Superior region supplied nine out of every ten tons of ore used by the American iron and steel industry. By 1960, it was supplying less than half of the needed ore."¹¹⁶ From the mid-1950s to the early 1960s - while most of the nation was at the height of its postwar boom - the Iron Range was going through one of its most dramatic and concerning busts. Then-Senator John F. Kennedy visited Hibbing at the heart of the Mesabi Range for a campaign stop and drew direct attention to the recessions that rocked the whole of the Great Lakes.

*This district here in northern Minnesota has had three recessions in eight years. Here in 1960, after the recession of 1958, the steel strike of 1959, we see steel mills of the United States working 50 per cent of capacity. Steel is the basis of the industrial power...And it isn't just the steel mills; it is the men. 100,000 steel workers are out of work in the steel mills, with others working part time, and you feel it back here where it all begins. This is the iron range and the iron range is the power of the United States.*¹¹⁷

Just a year prior to Kennedy's stop in the town of Hibbing, one of its residents had departed alongside countless other young people fleeing a dismal future. Robert Zimmerman, better known by his stage name 'Bob Dylan', wrote of his home after he left in 1959. Dylan's third studio album *The Times They Are a-Changin'* featured a dispiriting, painful description of the postwar Range in "North Country Blues".¹¹⁸ The song painted a realistic, if haunting picture of not only the sources of economic woe - but its social effects. "They complained in the East, they are paying too high / They say that your ore ain't

¹¹⁶ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 46, 49-50.

¹¹⁷ Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy, Hibbing, Minnesota, October 2, 1960, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.
<http://www.jfklibrary.org/archives/other-resources/john-f-kennedy-speeches/hibbing-mn-19601002>

¹¹⁸ Bream, Jon. "The Minnesota Profile: Forever Bob Dylan." *Star Tribune*, February 3, 2013.

worth digging / That it's much cheaper down in the South American towns / Where the miners work almost for nothing / So the mining gates locked, and the red iron rotted / And the room smelled heavy from drinking.” The final lines of Dylan’s poetry are a summation of fears and anxieties that accompanied the instability of life in communities such as the Range irregardless of time or place - written in the 60s, it would be just as palpable twenty years later, in any number of industrial communities caught up in the creative destruction of capitalism. “The summer is gone, the ground's turning cold / The stores one by one they're all folding / My children will go as soon as they grow / Well, there ain't nothing here now to hold them.”¹¹⁹

While worker discontent across the steel belt was asking radical questions about the nature of work due to employment security and a steady economy, northern Minnesota was struggling just to maintain that postwar prosperity. While northern Minnesota had long held a reputation as a leftist-union stronghold (the head of the Communist Party USA from 1959-2000 hailed from Hibbing), the industrial decline of the 1950s in the region led to an early political realignment among the working class toward business interests - particularly as it came to taconite. The long campaign to alter the Minnesota state constitution with a ‘Taconite Amendment’ that would ensure a relative freeze on tax hikes in the taconite industry was met with popular support.¹²⁰ Russell Munson, USWA union representative in Hibbing, publicly expressed his support for the GOP-led initiative, “I tell you something - this taconite amendment, by God, it's our last hope. If people vote the amendment down, we are finished here.”¹²¹

In the midst of America’s postwar golden age, northern Minnesota was facing one of its most significant bouts of industrial decline, coupled with mass unemployment in the late 1950s through the 1960s. With the passage of the Taconite Amendment in 1964 the mining industry swooped in to delay the

¹¹⁹ Dylan, Bob. *The Times they are A-Changin'*. New York, NY: Columbia Records, 1964.

¹²⁰ "Taconite Proposal Adopted." *New York Times*, November 5, 1964.

¹²¹ Bigart, Homer. "Poverty Blights Iron Ore Region." *New York Times*, January 13, 1964.

stagnation a while longer. Within the very month United States Steel Corporation announced plans for a taconite plant at Mountain Iron; the Hanna Mining Company announced a future plant in Nashwauk (Butler Taconite); Jones & Laughlin Steel planned for a plant near McKinley; and the Erie Mining Company planned to expand its own plant in Hoyt Lakes. Dr. Charles Mayo - head of the Citizens Committee for the Taconite Amendment - expressed hope for, “regaining our leadership...by creating an opportunity for rebirth of our iron mining industry.”¹²² In the past, working class radicalism on the Iron Range was expressed practically through calls for high corporate taxes on mining companies, but postwar economic decline and the tangible threat of a lost future undercut the prototypical patterns of radicalism. Manuel highlights that at the core of this period was a growing division between twin ‘identities’ of the Ranger: the liberal-radical working class, “forged in the heated labor battles of the early twentieth century and finished in the national political culture of the New Deal,” and the fundamentally conservative taxpayer.¹²³ Labor-liberalism in northern Minnesota was built upon the Keynesian notion of ever-expanding industry, and when Minnesota experienced the first hints of deindustrialization earlier than most regions a major blow was dealt to that traditional Democratic coalition. Anxiety over capital flight to South American ore and the industrial decline of Minnesota’s natural iron mines rallied the working class around corporate tax cuts and bipartisan pragmatism.

The taconite boom in the late 1960s through the 1970s insulated the economy of northern Minnesota while the national economy faced its first blow to postwar prosperity. For the Range, this came through an explosion in construction trade jobs to build new taconite plants, and subsequent openings within the new facilities. The Hibbing Taconite company began construction of a \$300 million processing facility near Hibbing in 1974, Inland Steel Company announced a \$70 million plant near Virginia that October, and U.S. Steel sought a \$200 million expansion of its Minntac plant in Mountain Iron - with

¹²² "Taconite Expansion Gains in Minnesota." *New York Times*, November 16, 1964.

¹²³ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 83-84.

Eveleth Taconite and National Steel following suit with their own expansions in Eveleth and Keewatin respectively. “Altogether, some \$900-million worth of additional taconite facilities are planned which will eventually double the state's production.” the *New York Times* optimistically reported - after several years of comparing the region to the depressed counties of Appalachia.¹²⁴ The Arrowhead Regional Development Commission estimated 7,000 temporary construction jobs, 3,500 permanent jobs, and a total population increase of 12,000 people - a near 20% rise. Richard Paull of the Hibbing Chamber of Commerce expressed the pervasive contemporary notion that a sustained rebirth was arriving, “I believe we have the biggest construction boom in the entire country...right now our whole economic picture is moving well, and this time it seems permanent.”¹²⁵

“The Rest of the World Grew Up”: Deindustrialization in Northern Minnesota

Technology assuaged anxieties of decline on the Iron Range while the rest of the nation struggled with recession; though it was a temporary fix for an unassailable problem. By the end of the 1960s, due to the exhaustion of iron-rich ore, the future for the Superior mining region was seen to be exclusively in low-grade ore used in pelletizing, such as taconite. As such, all underground iron mines in Minnesota were closed down in favor of larger open-pit mines, which themselves tended to employ fewer miners due to advancements in technology.¹²⁶ “Although taconite promised new jobs on the depressed Iron Range,” Jeffrey Manuel summarizes, “it never matched the number of mining jobs available before the downturn of the 1950s.”¹²⁷ The taconite boom of the 60s and 70s couldn’t sustain itself when the first and most emblematic of deindustrialization’s blows came in the 1980s. South American mines had competed with

¹²⁴ Shapiro, Harvey D. "Taconite Rejuvenates the Iron Range." *New York Times*, August 3, 1975.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Earney, Fillmore C. F. "New Ores for Old Furnaces: Pelletized Iron." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no. 3 (September, 1969). 514-517, 523-524.

¹²⁷ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 81.

the Superior region's ore since the first half of the 20th century, but by 1980 it gained an overwhelming edge with advances in shipping technology and the full development of mines in Venezuela and Brazil. Every aspect of the steel industry was touched, from mills in the eastern Great Lakes to mining towns in northern Minnesota. In 1974 the United States produced 132,195 tons of crude steel, and by 1980 this had already fallen to 101,455 tons. By 1984, having gone through the throes of the early-80s global recession, the steel industry declined further to 83,941 tons produced that year. In 1974 the steel industry employed 512,395 workers in the United States; ten years later this had more than halved to 236,000.¹²⁸ The interconnectedness of the American industrial economy meant that such a depression spiderwebbed to *all* industries, be it ore-mining which fueled steel mills or auto manufacturing which steel mills supplied. Political economist Barry Bluestone used the Iron Range specifically to exemplify this effect as he witnessed mass layoffs in Michigan automotive assembly plants in 1982: "No instance of a plant, store, or office shutdown is an island unto itself...for example, iron-ore miners in Minnesota...will lose their jobs because, with fewer domestic cars produced, there is less need for sheet steel and consequently less demand for iron ore."¹²⁹

Some economists at the time expressed optimism at the longevity of Mesabi iron due to its direct access to water shipping routes and proximity to steel mills on the Great Lakes - but even this underestimated the degree to which domestic steel companies were hedging their bets on foreign iron and steel.¹³⁰ Bluestone again illustrates the complexities of how capital flight aided and abetted the undercutting of American industry:

¹²⁸ Tarr, David G. "The Steel Crisis in the United States and the European Community: Causes and Adjustments." In *Issues in US-EC Trade Relations*, edited by Baldwin, Robert E., Carl B. Hamilton and Adre Sapir. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988). 174.

¹²⁹ Bluestone, Barry and Bennett Harrison. *The Deindustrialization of America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1982). 72.

¹³⁰ Tarr, David G. "The Steel Crisis." In *Issues in US-EC Trade Relations*, edited by Baldwin, Robert E., Carl B. Hamilton and Adre Sapir. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988). 180.

U.S. Steel's 1979 Annual Report lists partial ownership of eleven foreign companies operating on five continents, including four mining and mineral processing businesses in South Africa, in which it held shares ranging from 20 to 49 percent. This might not have been a problem except that these processing companies work closely with the South African Iron and Steel Corporation (ISCOR), a state-owned enterprise that produced nearly three quarters of the steel used in South Africa during the 1970s. Between 1972 and 1978, ISCOR also received almost \$538 million in loans from American banks. Almost 90 percent of that total came from Chase and Citicorp, both of which were among those banks that were refusing to provide investment capital to upgrade the domestic U.S. steel industry.¹³¹

Enormous profits that had been made in steel - particularly during the Vietnam War - were not put into modernizing existing plants and mines, but into diversification, foreign investment, and acquisition. U.S. Steel paid nearly a billion dollars for Marathon Oil in 1982 instead of upgrading plants; ultimately changing its name to 'USX' in 1986 to signal a reorganization of the multinational corporation away from steel.¹³² "Steel has been a major cost to the corporation," CEO David Roderick said, "We have lost substantial sums of money. [The reorganization will] put a greater burden on [steel and domestic ore operations] to control their own destiny."¹³³ Steel and related industries (including iron ore mining) comprised 34% of U.S. Steel/USX's sales in 1985, while its subsidiary holdings Marathon Oil and Texas Oil & Gas made up 54% of sales that year.¹³⁴ The nation's largest steelmaker for the majority of the 20th century suddenly drew the bulk of its profits from oil and gas. "What is the problem?" One column published in *Duluth News-Tribune and Herald* derided, "It is that the rest of the world grew up and the big American companies failed to adjust."¹³⁵

On the Iron Range - as Bluestone had predicted - deindustrialization in the steel industry rippled into the iron mines that supplied it. Brazilian ore was being shipped to steel mills in Chicago at a 25%

¹³¹ Bluestone, Barry and Bennett Harrison. *Deindustrialization*. New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1982. 146-147.

¹³² Aronowitz, Stanley. *False Promises*. 2nd ed. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992. 400.

¹³³ "U.S. Steel Changes Name, Announces Reorganization." *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, July 9, 1986.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Warsh, David. "Steel's Rise and Fall." *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, August 10, 1986.

lower price compared to Mesabi ore, and the drop in demand became reflected in production. Taconite pellets - once-hailed as the saving grace of the Range - had fallen from 56 million tons produced in 1979 to 23 million tons in 1982.¹³⁶ The number of workers employed in mining on the Mesabi dropped by nearly 60% between 1980 and 1988, from 14,000 to 5,500.¹³⁷ Hibbing had a 25% unemployment rate in 1982 according to its mayor, James Collins, who also estimated that some towns on the Range had rates as high as 50-60%. Even if the national economy were to improve, Collins said that 10-20% of miners would never see their jobs return, "The companies have found they can get along with less people."¹³⁸ The Range had experienced busts before, but the rhetoric surrounding the 1980s crisis contained a level of permanency. One worker laid off from National Steel's Keewatin plant remarked, "I don't think that you'll ever see [the mining companies] come again, at the rate that they were in the mid-70s."¹³⁹ Another out of work miner from National, Dave Storrs, echoed such an outlook, "Been laid off many times in sixteen years. It's just another layoff to me. But this one here is - it looks like it's going to end up permanent...It's gonna' get worse...[The unions] will go on strike. But they won't get anything out of it, They'll lose...They've lost their strength."¹⁴⁰ Storrs voiced a prevailing sentiment amongst workers and their families in the midst of deindustrialization: futility in the face of larger forces at work - a loss of autonomy. When asked if he was bitter at the company's mass layoffs, Storrs replied, "I'm sure they're

¹³⁶ Greenhouse, Steven. "An Ore Carrier's Troubled Odyssey." *The New York Times*, July 14, 1985.

¹³⁷ Schmidt, William E. "Heavy Industry is Up, and so is a Corner of Minnesota." *New York Times*, November 20, 1988.

¹³⁸ Serrin, William. "Recession Silences the Mines of the Minnesota Iron Range." *New York Times*, August 7, 1982.

¹³⁹ James "Jim" Young, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 7, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0639, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁴⁰ Dave Storrs, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0671, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

the ones who got their pockets full of money out of the deal, but we're just a small cog in the big wheel. There's nothing we can do about it."¹⁴¹

The Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB) was originally formed in 1941 to allocate occupation tax funds (a tax on the tonnage of iron ore mined per year) towards 'rehabilitation activities'. That is, to diversify the Iron Range's economy beyond its singular dependence on resource extraction. The IRRRB became illustrative of the lopsided response to industrial decline that governmental agencies gave to communities like the Range; there was never any cohesive federal response to deindustrialization. Only regional economic development agencies with minimal budgets trying to stem the symptoms of global changes - systemic changes - in capitalism.¹⁴² In 1985 the IRRRB released the Little Report, a review of the agency's activities and the region's broader future authored by the consulting firm Arthur D. Little, Inc. The report's first two points laid bare the reality of the crisis: "The Range is undergoing a major structural shift in its economy with the decline of taconite production," and, "the decline in taconite production is not a temporary or short-term phenomenon."¹⁴³ The report stressed that 10,000 new jobs were needed on the Range, and that most of those should come through development of forestry, service, and tourism sectors of the economy. Though the Little Report ultimately warned that these new jobs would, "probably utilize non-mine-related labor at significantly lower wage rates."¹⁴⁴

"I really can't believe that there are that many intelligent people that were that out of touch with the economic situation in the industry." Bill Herschbach, another laid off laborer ruminated, "That they

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 137-139, 160-161.

¹⁴³ Arthur D. Little, Inc. 1985. "Analysis of Operations, Opportunities and Implementation Strategies for the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board." <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/pre2003/other/851190.pdf>. ES-2.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, I-20.

would all expand so large, and have everything completely fall out, somebody should have been able to see that something wasn't right there."¹⁴⁵ With the late 1960s taconite amendment creating a relative 'tax cut' sentiment amongst workers on the Range hoping to usher in a new regional boom, those same workers expressed a range of emotions and narratives when the bottom fell out of taconite in the 80s. Many workers employed or on temporary layoff did not hear any official word of plant closures from management. Dave Hedblom was one of over four hundred people who found themselves unemployed after Hanna Mining announced the permanent closure of the Butler Taconite plant in May 1985. "They were supposed to let the unions know first and then the employees by either word of mouth or by letter...I found out by listening to the radio." Hedblom was one of a number of residents who expressed betrayal over how they learned they had lost their jobs, "I was just driving down the road one day and heard they were going to shut Butler Taconite down. Well, then the next day I received an official letter. And that was real bitter, because they didn't seem to have enough care for their employees to let their employees know first."¹⁴⁶ Dave Storrs, a second generation miner of sixteen years, expressed similar contempt at Hanna, "I should've known the first year I was hired that something's going on...even the old-timers said it would never shutdown. They swore it'd never shutdown the day before it shutdown...It was a good job while it lasted...but after sixteen years, not a letter of thank you, or goodbye - nothing. It's just, 'you're laid off.'"¹⁴⁷ The broader history of the Iron Range is often remembered as one fostering leftist radicalism and strong unionism - but this often overlooks the degree to which the postwar Range became defined by cooperation between labor and management in a bid to preserve industry as long as possible. It's from this time period that Minnesota itself gained recognition on the national scale as, "A state that works." The

¹⁴⁵ Bill Herschbach, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 3, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0641, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁴⁶ Dave Hedblom, interviewed by Candace Perry, August 19 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0716, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁴⁷ Dave Storrs, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0671, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

Time Magazine front cover story of August 1973 identified the state as an uncontroversial, polite, and naturally beautiful one that flourished in part due to the, “business community's social conscience” and the niceness and bipartisan cooperation of both politicians and civically-engaged citizens.¹⁴⁸ When that perceived social contract was broken workers in northeast Minnesota - just as other downsized and laid off workers in other states - expressed emotions of betrayal, a loss of trust, and alienation.

The immediate personal implications of the crises on the Range ruptured the social fabric of tight-knit communities. Jim Swearingen, a salaried worker at U.S. Steel’s Minntac mine and later its general manager recounted the period with bleak honesty. “It was horrible. We were down for eleven or twelve months - totally down. There wasn’t probably 100 people out of 1,200 working. It was ugly and people were hurting.”¹⁴⁹ Swearingen also expressed a not uncommon positivity about the situation; tying together the region’s industrial pride of independence and personal grit in hard times to alleviate perceptions of victimhood. “Iron Range folks tend to be pretty resilient when it does come to that type of thing. I think when they’re working they do put away money knowing [layoffs] can happen. You know, they get their unemployment - they tend to get unemployment extensions...A lot of them heat [their homes] with wood, they hunt, they fish. So there is an ability to do a lot better of a job when it comes to providing for yourself. So people tend to get through it.”¹⁵⁰ Yet other non-salaried workers expressed just how much the 1980s collapse hurt. “It was hard.” Marsha Benolken, another laid-off laborer with Hanna recounted, “When you have two incomes, you make the bills for two incomes. When you go down to one income people say, ‘oh well luckily he has a job,’ but there’s still the house payment and car payment - there’s not much left over. If any. So I thought right away, how are we going to make it?”¹⁵¹ She was one

¹⁴⁸ "Minnesota: A State that Works." *TIME Magazine*, August, 1973, 32.

¹⁴⁹ James “Jim” Swearingen, in discussion with the author, March 11, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Marsha Benolken, interviewed by Candace Perry, August 9, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0692, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

of many unemployed workers who were faced with a very tangible possibility of needing to leave the area entirely to find work. Marsha knew people who sold their homes at substantial losses just to avoid house payments, but she echoed the hesitance that others expressed at the idea of leaving. “I’d be so scared. I guess you get so used to being in one place your whole life, you don’t want to make a new life - leave all the friends, and the family. I just couldn’t see doing it.”¹⁵² Others did leave, often looking for work, “everywhere in the United States,”¹⁵³ and letting homes slip into foreclosure after being on the market for years. Andrew and Viola Anderson tried to sell their home for four years in Silver Bay by the time Reserve Mining Co. filed for bankruptcy and shut the plant down in 1986. Most residents who wanted to sell were forced to price well below their original investment. Andrew insisted, “I won’t give it away,” even as the town lost a third of its population over the course of a decade.¹⁵⁴ Other residents were willing to take the loss. “I’m not going to let the house not selling prevent the moving.” One couple seeking work on the east coast said.¹⁵⁵ Yet even leaving the communities of the Range did not ensure finding a job elsewhere. Many displaced workers left for hopeful jobs in the nation’s south, but deindustrialization and recession touched all corners of the nation. The Thom family had left Ely in 1981 in search of employment, but got as far as Denver before they ran out of money for gas and repairs. By 1982 they were homeless in a broken down school bus: “We heard all about the jobs there were in Colorado and Arizona,” Bonnie Sue Thom said, “But if the jobs are here, we sure can't see them. That's why we want to get moving on, only we can't do that either.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Dave Storrs, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0671, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁵⁴ Hertz, Laurie. "Bay Residents Look for Silver Lining." *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, July 25, 1986.

¹⁵⁵ Joan & Pat Churack, interviewed by Candace Perry, August 2, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0691, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁵⁶ Peterson, Iver. "Homeless Crisscross U.S. Until their Cars and their Dreams Break Down." *The New York Times*, Dec 15, 1982.

The Iron Range had been in decline for decades, with technological advancements in mining allowing the region to prop up a resource extraction-based economy for as long as possible. The 1980s steel crisis wasn't just the crows coming home to roost in the Range - it was a systemic shift in industry across the nation. It was not simply the loss of natural resources but the movement of capital investment away from domestic production and into foreign industries: be they iron mines in Brazil, textile mills in Southeast Asia, or auto manufacturers in Japan. Technological advancements in mining could not sustain the Range if foreign ore could be transported for cheaper, and if American banks stopped investing in American industry. In corporate America's eyes the Keynesian state had become too costly: unions kept labor costs up, welfare programs led to higher taxes, social regulation (such as the new regulatory body of the Environmental Protection Agency, OSHA, consumer protection agencies, etc.) intruded in business practices, long-term job security and secure pension plans meant firms became beholden to their employees' financial needs for longer, and corporate taxes served as the cherry on top.¹⁵⁷ With advancements in transportation and telecommunications technologies inherent to globalization, whole markets across the globe opened up which did not have the same levels of regulated capitalism as the American Keynesian state did.

Imagining a Postindustrial Future

A full history of deindustrialization is one which includes the effects it had on social, cultural, and mental frameworks in the lives of those it touched - and such information is not included in the orthodox historiography of statistical analysis, survey research, and economic data. “[Historians] need to incorporate how people who experienced [deindustrialization] directly explain it,” Joy Hart and Tracy K’Meyer suggest, “...the ambiguities and contradictions [of worker memory] display the struggle...to

¹⁵⁷ Kotz, David M. *The Rise and Fall of Neoliberal Capitalism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. 82-83.

reconcile the impact of these events with their self-images as shapers of their own destinies.”¹⁵⁸ For the Iron Range particularly, worker memory and identity in the wake of deindustrialization was tied up in the overarching competing identities of the Ranger: the conservative taxpayer defending corporate tax cuts to keep mining on the Range as long as possible, and the oft-times radical leftist with a strong union history. Workers often displayed mixed reactions as to who was to blame for the collapse of the steel industry. Some, due to perceptions of companies breaking perceived social contracts, put that blame squarely on management. “I think in the higher-up ranks in the mines,” Marsha Benolken suspected, “all you are is a number to them. They don’t think of you as a real person.”¹⁵⁹ Bill Herschbach was more scathing, “Their whole management scheme is so outdated that it’s just pathetic really...I don’t even consider working in the mines up here a big company, cause they’re so backwards it’s ridiculous.”¹⁶⁰ Others felt it was the unions who had asked for too much at a time when the industry required everyone to make sacrifices. “Without the union we wouldn’t have nothing.” Dave Storrs said, cementing his belief in the Iron Range’s nostalgic past as a union bastion, “But possibly, maybe, the unions tried asking for too much at one time. Might be hurting us now.”¹⁶¹ Almost all believed both sides of the ‘labor struggle’ to be partially culpable. “I think it was 50/50.” Swearingen said plainly, himself a member of management. He pointed towards U.S. Steel’s lack of communication with workers that led towards tension in the workplace, alongside an over-willingness to layoff employees. Likewise, that the union was too zealous to hold on to fringe benefits that needed to be cut. “Maybe 60/40.” He later reconsidered, placing a little more responsibility

¹⁵⁸ Joy L. Hart and Tracy E. K’Meyer, Chapter 13 in *Beyond the Ruins*. Cowie, Jefferson and Joseph Heathcott, eds. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.) 286.

¹⁵⁹ Marsha Benolken, interviewed by Candace Perry, August 9, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0692, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁶⁰ Bill Herschbach, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 3, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0641, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁶¹ Dave Storrs, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0671, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

on U.S. Steel - particularly corporate on the east coast.¹⁶² Pete Hawkins, a laid off miner at the Minntac plant Swearingen also worked at, had similar feelings. “This’ll probably get me in trouble with the union, but there’s got to be changes on both sides.”¹⁶³ Uniquely, though, residents on the Iron Range also put blame on the larger, global economic forces out of their direct control. Perhaps due to the Range’s historical sensitivity to the rises and falls of the international steel trade, many workers expressed an understanding that globalization itself was taking its toll. “The mining company itself can’t help it. I think it’s - it’s this whole system of things.” Joan Churack said. “It’s the government let all this imported stuff come in. The miners...they really worked hard, and made cutbacks, and they took cuts, and did everything that they could to keep it running.”¹⁶⁴ She and her husband Pat had both been laid off from Minntac, and both expressed palpable exhaustion and anger at the broad, historical trend of the Range. “I know half a dozen people that are sitting around just hoping that they’ll get back or that something’s going to fall in their lap.” Pat remarked of his friends who worked at the Minntac and Everett mines, “I don’t think in this area it’s going to happen. The traveling that we have done, I know that other areas are hurting too...but not, I don’t feel, to the extent that it is here.” Joan interjected,

*Yea, it’s so insecure, everything is insecure. That’s the only good part of when the mines did say that they shut down...was knowing that you don’t have to say, ‘is it going to happen this week? Is it going to happen this week? When is it going to be?’ The uncertainty, and the stress that uncertainty puts on people - that’s why it’s so depressed [here]. Everyone you talk to right now that’s still working, you know, they’re just under so much stress...it’s just going down, and you can relate to the feelings...should you leave, should you stay, what should you do? It’s real hard. For a single person it’s easy, but when you have a family that’s the hard part.*¹⁶⁵

Workers across the board referenced this - uncertainty, insecurity - to such an extent that for many it became wrapped up in the identity of the Ranger itself. When the *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*

¹⁶² James “Jim” Swearingen, in discussion with the author, March 11, 2019.

¹⁶³ Hertzell, Laurie. “A Day in the Range Life.” *Duluth News News-Tribune & Herald*, August 10, 1986.

¹⁶⁴ Joan & Pat Churack, interviewed by Candace Perry, August 2, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0691, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

ran a front page profile on the Hawkins family of Mountain Iron as a prototypical Iron Range household, the byline read, “Uncertainty no stranger to Minntac family.”¹⁶⁶ Whether that uncertainty was a point of pride - proof of the gumption and tenacity it took to be a Ranger - or a reason to get out, depended on a number of minutiae that influence one’s reaction to deindustrialization: their age, if their spouse had a good income, if they had children and how old they were, and their own family’s history in mining. Dave Storrs referred to his own familial history in mining as shaping his expectations and lifestyle, “My father worked in the mines, [so] I know how to run a budget by working in the mines.”¹⁶⁷ While still others looked specifically to escape mining for the sake of their posterity. Pete Hawkins said as much as he reflected on identity and the future. “Everybody talks about the Rangers being a different breed. Maybe we are. But we want the same as everybody else, you want what’s best for your children, you want them to be better than yourself.”¹⁶⁸ Suki and Pete Hawkins were just one in a number of cases of folks looking to leave - finding the realities of instability in mining to be too much. They didn’t want their son Danny to be a steelworker or a miner, they wanted him to go to college. “I don’t want him to go through the same uncertainty - strikes, layoffs, not knowing if you’re going to have a job.”¹⁶⁹ Workers didn’t mince words on the realities of the Range’s postindustrial future: “I’m not going to get a job in the service industry where I make \$3 an hour. I’d have to work four jobs to support my family. We have some nasty habits, like sleeping in a bed and living under a roof and eating and occasionally going to Dairy Queen.”¹⁷⁰

Outside of a few mostly failed attempts at revitalizing a manufacturing industry such as the chopsticks factory, both the IRRRB and the larger state of Minnesota looked primarily towards the

¹⁶⁶ Hertz, Laurie. “A Day in the Range Life.” *Duluth News News-Tribune & Herald*, August 10, 1986.

¹⁶⁷ Dave Storrs, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0671, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁶⁸ Hertz, Laurie. “A Day in the Range Life.” *Duluth News News-Tribune & Herald*, August 10, 1986.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

service sector to fill the void left by mining. It's important here to note the role that historical memory played in industrial communities faced with deindustrialization. How individuals remember their community shapes how they conceptualize its present, and how they think about its future. Especially so in the case of largely homogenized industrial communities like the Iron Range which prided itself on its rural gumption, independence, mining history, and close-knit coterie. "My roots are here. For the first time in my life, I'm part of a community." Jim Young, who had spent much of his childhood moving across the country, described of his hometown. "I can go into the grocery store, I can go up to the golf course, I can go to church, and I know 90% of the people there. To me that's very important."¹⁷¹

With a community in crisis under deindustrialization, the limits of that cohesive identity were pressed upon and narratives were developed, consumed, and accommodated to make sense of the communal ruptures. Like other downsized workers, some on the Range recaptured their agency and viewed deindustrialization as the best thing that could have happened to them. Joan Churack expressed as much: like many unemployed miners her husband was going to use the opportunity to return to school, and they were going to move out of Minnesota. "[Pat's] always had a dream, now's the opportunity to go for it, and fulfil that dream...it's just going to feel good...we're just starting our lives over. We feel really fortunate enough that our children are young enough, [they] can start over. To just go out and take it a day at a time."¹⁷² Jim Young had finished an Associate's Degree at Hibbing Community College, and was looking to become a teacher in Itasca County. "I knew when I got laid off I was going to focus my energies on going back to school, not going back into the job market unskilled, uneducated, and work for \$5 per hour...I think that the way things have turned out...they're turning out for the better. Our family life has never been as good as it has been the past couple of years...I think as a family we're much better off

¹⁷¹ James "Jim" Young, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 7, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0639, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁷² Joan & Pat Churack, interviewed by Candace Perry, August 2, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0691, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN

right now. Our bank account isn't...but we are. As people." He expressed dismay that state grants for retraining often pigeonholed workers into getting trade certifications instead of new degrees outside of industry. "They couldn't see the writing on the wall five years ago and they still can't," he said of co-workers who had dived right back into vocational work, "that kind of disappoints me."¹⁷³

Memory as Economy: The Postindustrial Ranger Identity

In June of 1986 one mining company executive declared the crisis to be, "at about the bottom" and recovering.¹⁷⁴ Barely two months later Reserve Mining Co. declared declared bankruptcy and shuttered the Davis Works Plant in Silver Bay indefinitely - leaving most employees unemployed and with lost pensions.¹⁷⁵ ¹⁷⁶ Closures like this have an additional consequence in the form of lost tax revenue - particularly tax revenue towards relief efforts. As previously mentioned, the IRRRB (the region's only major economic development agency) drew much of its funding from its allocated portion of the occupation production tax - a tax on tonnage of ore mined in a year. Paradoxically, this meant that the IRRRB enjoyed full coffers when industry was doing well, and lost funding when industry was in decline - and when the agency was most needed. In 1986 Reserve paid \$6.1 million in occupation production taxes, all of which was lost with the bankruptcy filing and plant closure.¹⁷⁷ This ramification of deindustrialization, plant closures, and even simply production decline in the Iron Range severely impacted the IRRRB in how they sought to revitalize and rejuvenate the region.

¹⁷³ James "Jim" Young, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 7, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0639, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁷⁴ Miller, Al. "Ore Industry Crisis Ending, Official Says." *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, June 5, 1986.

¹⁷⁵ Miller, Al. "Bankruptcy Petition Filed for Reserve." *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, August 8, 1986.

¹⁷⁶ Musilek, Joe. "Reserve Crisis Leaves Tax Outlook Uncertain." *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, August 9, 1986.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

The steel crisis had left its economic and social toll: between 1980 and 1988 the estimated population of the Iron Range had dropped by nearly 6%, from 343,000 to 324,000. Employment in mining on the Mesabi dropped by 60%.¹⁷⁸ The primary suggestion of the Little Report for moving the Iron Range past the steel crisis and into a diversified economy was through expansion into the service sector:

Reassess further development opportunities and investment requirements for Giants Ridge and the Interpretative Center in the context of these two projects and the broader economic development strategies of the IRRRB. While further investment in the projects should be considered in the context of an IRRRB transition, they, nonetheless, need to be consistent with a viable tourism development program and economic development strategy.

¹⁷⁹

Tourism of northeast Minnesota's historic locales and natural beauty was where the IRRRB turned. In seeking a way forward in a postindustrial world while simultaneously holding on to and honoring the industrial past, heritage tourism seemed to be the middle-ground. At play here was an implicit tension - sometimes flaring up into tangible conflict - over memory and growth. Commemoration and rejuvenation. Local government officials, regional planners, and service-sector business owners formed a coalition based around the idea that the Iron Range needed to diversify out of resource extraction - heritage tourism was that way. In tacit opposition, or at least cautious hesitation, were industrial miners and community members who held fast to nostalgic, if vague, regional identities. The identity of the Range itself: that it was a *producer* of something, that it *mattered* on the national scale as a contributor to the steel industry - the backbone of the American economy.¹⁸⁰ This conflict between moving forward while looking back is not unique to the Range: it occurred in midwestern towns whose

¹⁷⁸ Schmidt, William E. "Heavy Industry is Up, and so is a Corner of Minnesota." *New York Times*, November 20, 1988.

¹⁷⁹ Arthur D. Little, Inc. 1985. "Analysis of the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board." <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/pre2003/other/851190.pdf>. ES-9.

¹⁸⁰ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 164.

steel furnaces ran cold, in east coast cities that struggled to wash away the grime of an industrial past, and in southern states that lost what little union density they had.^{181 182 183}

Jeffrey Manuel offers a description of what the proliferation of heritage tourism meant on the ground - not just in the Iron Range, and not just amongst miners, but in any community experiencing industrial decline and the subsequent transitioning of identity.

By promoting the Iron range's heritage of industrial mining the concerns and dreams of current miners were removed to an apolitical realm of nostalgia where the industrial past was celebrated but also cut out of debates about the directions of a postindustrial future. In other words, industrial heritage on the Iron Range celebrated industry but removed it to a nostalgic past where it had little to say about the present or future.¹⁸⁴

It is a reaction to the cultural shift that is deindustrialization: across the nation a movement sprang up in the late 20th century to to memorialize, and therefore revitalize, declining regions. History was not just about the past as it was experienced and recorded - it was itself a resource to be extracted. A resource that regions like the Iron Range could sell: a process that involves the marketing, commodification, and packaging through sanitization of the industrial past. As can be seen by the first hand accounts of miners who were in the midst of this transition, it resulted in a past that was not altogether honest, but rather rose-tinted by nostalgia. Residents in the Range were honest about the difficulties of working in the

¹⁸¹ O'Hara, S. Paul, *Envisioning the Steel City: The Legend and Legacy of Gary, Indiana* in *Beyond the Ruins*. Edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.)

¹⁸² Savage, Kirk, *Monuments of a Lost Cause: The Postindustrial Campaign to Commemorate Steel* in *Beyond the Ruins*. Edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.)

¹⁸³ Hart, Joy L. and Tracy E. K'Meyer, *Worker Memory and Narrative: Personal Stories of Deindustrialization in Louisville, Kentucky* in *Beyond the Ruins*. Edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003.)

¹⁸⁴ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 164.

mining industry. When asked if his father's career as a miner had influenced him, Bill Herschbach was quick to answer, "No. No. He told me that I was crazy. That they just bleed you."¹⁸⁵

There is a notable difference between the way that workers themselves spoke about their industrial heritage, and how new businesses and planners marketed it. The development of the Iron Range Interpretive Center in Chisholm can serve as a case study in the marketing and development of regional heritage and nostalgia. The rhetoric of history as a new resource to be extracted was plain even in planning reports: "This program, the Iron Range Interpretive Program, is a unique attempt to build a tourism base - where no base previously existed - by concentrating public monies in the preservation and promotion of the Region's rich natural, historic and cultural resources."¹⁸⁶ The Interpretive Center began as an effort to link together the Iron Range Hiking Trail with a number of retired-mines-turned-museums in the area - a union of the natural and historical aspects of the budding tourism industry to attract the, "young, well-educated, upper income," vacationing families.¹⁸⁷ After a scathing 1980 report found that the center was underperforming (it was built to accommodate 225,000 tourists a year when it first opened in 1977, but the reality was in the area of 70-80,000 a year), it was recommended that it be further developed by the IRRRB to better cater towards urban tourists from the Twin Cities and Chicago.¹⁸⁸ In 1986 it was reopened as the Ironworld Discovery Center - but popularized as a theme park dubbed 'Ironworld USA'. It boasted a 'Festival Park' with a celebratory 'Avenue of Nations' and "an impressive array of ethnic food kiosks,"; an authentic 1915 steam locomotive and trolley system connecting the Pillsbury and Glenn Mines; the Interpretive Center itself and its own museum covering the region, the

¹⁸⁵ Bill Herschbach, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 3, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0641, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁸⁶ Midwest Research Institute. *Assessment of the Tourism Development Components of the Iron Range Interpretive Program*. Minnetonka, MN: Minnesota Legislative Reference Library, 1980. 7.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 1, 40-41.

mining industry, and the old world with a new display of “exquisite European artifacts,”; and a new 1,600-person outdoor amphitheater for concert events.¹⁸⁹

Of important notice with Ironworld’s facelift is the obvious focus on ethnic heritage. This is part of a national cultural revitalization of the early 20th century ‘New Immigrants’ (those hailing from eastern and southern Europe) that took place across the 1970s and 1980s. Historians such as David Roediger have illuminated how such a period marked the recuperation of ethnic Europeans into the social hegemony of Whiteness - a hegemony that attributed whiteness with the status quo of dominant culture. Nancy Isenberg continued on this thread, emphasizing how such cultural revitalization contributed to the sanitization of radical identities.

Unappealing (or un-American) idiosyncrasies were cleaned up; the food, literature, music, and dress promoted; and the whole ethnicity set apart from the diseased and dirty huddled masses who came through Ellis Island. Heritage, like historic memory itself, is always selective. Ethnics and poor folk can be admired from afar, or from a temporal distance, as long as doing so ensures the supremacy of the middle class in the narrative. People can choose to treasure those parts of their heritage that they see as favorable and wish to keep, jettisoning what unpleasant truths they would prefer to forget.¹⁹⁰

As mining was lost as a stable cornerstone of modern Ranger identity, more and more often would the ethnic heritage of the region be both praised and marketed. In 1987 the Director of Ironworld, Robert Scott, told the *New York Times*, “In this town you are not legally married unless you have potica and ham at your wedding,” and boasted of the Interpretive Center’s demonstration kitchen as one of many ways ethnicity was specifically celebrated at Ironworld.¹⁹¹ One of Ironworld’s largest and most successful events was the annual Minnesota Ethnic Days festival, usually held over the course of five weeks in the summer. This was different from the authentic small town communal celebrations that dotted the Range

¹⁸⁹ “Ironworld Opens with 4-Day Gala.” *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, July 2, 1986.

¹⁹⁰ Isenberg, Nancy. *White Trash: The 400-Year Untold History of Class in America*. New York: Penguin Books, 2016. 276.

¹⁹¹ Nathan, Joan. "The Ethnic Foods of Hibbing: Sarma and Strudel and More." *New York Times*, Feb 25, 1987.

and other ethnic areas: Ethnic Days was a key aspect of heritage tourism and the need to market any and all differentiating features of depressed regions to outside tourism. Bakeries that had once baked hard rolls for miner's lunch pails now specialized in ethnic breads marketed toward tourists.¹⁹² It was radical leftist immigrants at the beginning of the 20th century who had built the Iron Range - both literally and metaphorically - into the bastion of unionism and industry that it became renowned for. Yet this was not the memory as marketed. Instead, tourists were encouraged to visit Chisholm, "an old fashioned hometown where friendliness is a way of life." To ride an authentic steam engine at Ironworld, "that actually hauled iron ore from the depths of a Minnesota iron mine now [transporting] people into their own mine experience!"¹⁹³ This emphasis on mining technology, sanitized expressions of ethnic identity, and Minnesota niceness all contributed toward an oftentimes shallower historical representation, ignoring the voices of contemporary miners and giving them, other residents, and outside tourists a nostalgic memory to look back upon.

Workers, on the other hand, were often honest about the difficulties and instability of mine work, and to varying degrees used this aspect of the Ranger identity as a point of personal pride and solace. Even though Joan and Pat Churack were intending to move away with their children, they referred to their own immediate heritage in the region warmly. "My Dad," Pat said, "during the Depression...he was making 25 cents a day. Joan's dad went through a tough time, all our people went through tough times. And they are now." Memory of their industrial heritage served as, predominantly, a source of hope: "If they can get through, by god we can." 'The Ranger' had always been associated with industry, but with the industry's collapse, the focus on moving children away either geographically or occupationally, and the drop in union density that accompanied the Reagan years, that identity came into crisis. Despite how industrial heritage was marketed, miners themselves didn't have kind things to say about the industry or

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ "Ironworld Opens with 4-Day Gala." *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, July 2, 1986.

the companies that ran it. “I liked the people and...the atmosphere, more than anything like the actual job.” Jim Young described working at the Keewatin plant, “The jobs required very little thought. Very little. Everything was laid out for you. Very little independence.” He said that even if he were called back he wouldn’t return, “and be a robot again.”¹⁹⁴ Bill Herschbach said the mines were, “a terrible place to work,” especially so when the steel crisis began and shutdowns were on the public mind. “The last few years you had people hiding in the pit, spying on other people, trying to catch them doing something wrong so they could save their own job. It was as cutthroat as it could get.”¹⁹⁵ Dave Storrs described the mines as, “a very down-attitude,” with friction between the workers and supervisors being common.¹⁹⁶ Marsha Benolken said that she, “enjoyed the work sometimes”, but that it was work that often left you with, “a face full of mud. But you just laughed along with it because you knew it was worth the money.” That was another sentiment common amongst people working in the mines, and which Benolken expressed as part of her wanting to return to find work in labor, “The money, yes. Money has a lot to do with life. It seems to run your life, that’s for sure.”¹⁹⁷ Few at all said that there was any generational support for working in the mine - especially if the previous generation had worked in the industry. Tom Buescher’s father worked in the mines, and it had not been a life he had wanted for his son, “He would have rather seen me continue at college.” Buescher tried two years at Hibbing Community College before going to temporarily work for Hanna Mining. “I figured I’d go make some money first...It was good money.” He also voiced a rejection of the company following his being laid off - that he wouldn’t return,

¹⁹⁴ James “Jim” Young, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 7, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0639, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁹⁵ Bill Herschbach, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 3, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0641, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁹⁶ Dave Storrs, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0671, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁹⁷ Marsha Benolken, interviewed by Candace Perry, August 9, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0692, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

and that the companies, “[were] not dependable anymore.” The job was never seen as a career, just a good place to earn money for a little while, “You were like a machine. There was poor communication, and you did the job but we didn’t know why we were doing it.”¹⁹⁸ The crisis of Ranger identity boiled over with deindustrialization. It left folks trying to find pride and hope in a hard line of work that often led to seasonal unemployment, in an industry that was particularly susceptible to booms and busts, and which did not have strong multi-generational support. Heritage tourism which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s would feast upon the romanticized notion of the mines - honest perhaps about how tough the work was, but leaving working voices unheard as to how *they* felt about it. We can see this crisis of identity put to words succinctly by returning to the words of Tom Buescher. When initially asked why so many residents in the Iron Range went into mining despite their parents not necessarily being supportive, Buescher at first leaned on the nostalgic and romantic: “It’s in the blood.” After a few more minutes of conversation he and the interviewer discussed the population decline of his hometown of Nashwauk: how many homes Tom had seen up for sale and how many people he had seen leave. When asked if he would do anything differently, he responded that he probably would have still worked in the mines. He was asked why - and there was a few moments of silence before he responded. “Mostly, it was the easy way out.”¹⁹⁹

‘The Time is Out of Joint’: Commodification and Hauntology

In critically analyzing the historical evidence laid out in this essay, we can find particular usefulness in the concept of Hauntology. It is a term coined by Jacques Derrida, but taken up by philosophers like Mark Fisher in the 2000s to explain modern history’s tendency toward recycling old aesthetics. In other words, culture looking backwards to seek solace from the new uncertainty moving forward. By applying this concept to the historical epoch of capitalism’s systemic transformation in the

¹⁹⁸ Tom Buescher, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0673, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

late 20th century, it can offer us insight into how capitalism's consequences - namely deindustrialization - influence the social, cultural, and mental frameworks within which people live.

A historical analysis of global capitalism's shift from Keynesianism to neoliberalism puts us on a top-down trajectory of study. It involves understanding changes in public and corporate policies which shaped the world economic order, which in turn had ramifications felt through every aspect of society. Neoliberalism - an esoteric and vague term denoting changes in capital investments, corporate regulations, and union representation - touched the lives of working men and women living in the Iron Range. Workers *reacted* to this transformation of global capitalism in steel cities like Pittsburgh and in mining towns like Chisholm. A crisis of identity emerged as the realities of deindustrialization threw the futures of industrial communities like the Range into uncertainty. Workers simultaneously looked to the experienced hardships of the past as a source of comfort when faced with an unclear future; while also explaining with honesty how they themselves sought to escape that historical instability and uncertainty of industrial work. While earlier strands of Critical Theory - namely the Frankfurt School - can speak towards issues such as commodification, their own critique of capitalism is limited by the historical timeframe in which they lived. Frankfurt School thinkers like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, and Walter Benjamin lived within the height of Keynesian capitalism - and so their critiques are critiques of that historical stage of capitalism. In examining our case study of deindustrialization, we should turn toward more modern strands of Critical Theory typified by philosophers such as Derrida and primarily Fisher.

First we must start with the readily apparent: what exactly is Critical Theory? The Institute for Social Research — colloquially dubbed the 'Frankfurt School' — emerged in the early 20th century as a Marxist circle whose focus of debate was on the outcome of the German Revolution of 1918, and specifically why the proletariat had failed to rally around communist revolutionary forces as Marx had predicted they would. Within this immensely wide topic came a general development of Marxism which

leaned more toward the earlier Marx and his tendency to make use of Hegelian conceptions of dialectics. The capstone to this pursuit was the 1923 publication of *History and Class Consciousness* by György Lukács, in which the author offered a critique of the ideology of liberal capitalism by way of illustrating its contradictory nature, asserting that Hegel's original conception of dialectical progress was the best way to illuminate these contradictions. Following this, the Institute became largely tied to the reintroduction of Hegel to Marxism.²⁰⁰

The most publicly well known of the Frankfurt School was Herbert Marcuse, who became wrapped up in the political activism of 1960s student protests (much to the chagrin of his colleagues). His seminal text — the one which proved the most influential for the student movement — came with the release of *One-Dimensional Man* in 1964. In this work, Marcuse expanded upon his critiques of Marx's class analysis by discarding entirely any notion of a class struggle. Western societies had become 'one-dimensional', with one-dimensional citizens who held one-dimensional desires. Marcuse explained, "The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced."²⁰¹ The members of a one-dimensional society do not know their 'true needs' — nourishment, clothing, lodging, etc. — and instead are transfixed upon supposed 'false needs' that are believed necessary but are only consumerist, superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression.²⁰² "The products indoctrinate and manipulate," Marcuse wrote, "they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. And as these beneficial products become available to more individuals...the indoctrination they carry ceases to be publicity...It is

²⁰⁰ Jay, Martin. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996). 4-5, 46.

²⁰¹ Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Revised ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 2013). 11.

²⁰² Jeffries, Stuart. *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*. (New York, NY: Verso, 2016). 307.

a good way of life.”²⁰³ Not only did the consumerist culture of capitalism reinforce the ideological status quo, it fundamentally altered the psychological profiles of those living within it. Marx’s class struggle was dead, the proletariat permanently pacified. Stuart Jeffries comments, “Marcuse’s dismal notion was that we lack the freedom to know what is good for us...the implication was that while individuals may seem to be free, they are in fact everywhere in chains — shackled to their washing machines and TVs. Everyone except, presumably, Marcuse.”²⁰⁴

The greatest transformation in the Frankfurt School though came with the Second World War. Many within the Institute, most of them German Jews, fled Germany and eventually Europe itself as Nazism rose. Originally the concern had been with the fact that industrial capitalism had developed, and the working classes had not revolted. Something else entirely had happened: in Europe the Nazi Party and other fascist organizations had risen with significant support from the working classes. The Great Depression had unfolded as the most immense crisis to capitalism in the 20th century, and the working class had turned away from traditional leftist parties which expressed critiques of capitalism, and toward fascist parties which expressed nationalist critiques of capitalism and ultimately a defense of the status quo. Marx had thought that of the two most advanced economies of Europe, Germany was the most ripe for communist revolution: but it had instead been the cornerstone of a populist movement which had at its center an explicitly anti-revolutionary defense of the bourgeoisie hegemonies through National Socialism.

In seeking to understand why the working class seemed so against the idea of radicalism, and likewise influenced by the location of their own refugee enclave within Southern California, the Frankfurt School turned toward a critical analysis of culture. An important question to ask here is one that Professor Brian Leiter puts nicely: “To what extent does the cultural domination of the capitalist class help to render

²⁰³ Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man*. Revised ed. (London, UK: Routledge, 2013). 14.

²⁰⁴ Jeffries, Stuart. *Grand Hotel Abyss*. (New York, NY: Verso, 2016). 307.

politically impotent the working classes?”²⁰⁵ One of the primary texts in this field is the 1944 work by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In it, they posit that the entirety of the enlightenment tradition was, in effect, replacing one set of dogmatic beliefs for another, “Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology.”²⁰⁶ The book introduced their concept of the ‘Culture Industry’: a ubiquitous system within liberal capitalism which served as a pacifying force toward mass dissent, and ultimately a tool used in the defense of hegemony.

Horkheimer and Adorno theorized that mass culture operated like a factory which produced standardized goods. Much like an auto manufacturer produces nearly identical cars with mainly aesthetic differences, TV, Film, and Radio produced popular culture which featured largely identical structures, plotlines, melodies, etc. with a few variables swapped around so as it can be repackaged and resold as something new. Beyond these aesthetic changes in mass art, the culture industry served an incredibly important political role. To Adorno, it served the exact same role as Goebbels’ national socialist propaganda. The Reich Ministry of Propaganda churned out familiar films and radio broadcasts featuring old Germanic myths repackaged to espouse Aryan supremacy and fascist-nationalist ideals: Nazism, and indeed fascism itself, relied on the fact that its culture and media was digestible and - above all else - familiar to not only spread its message, but also to quiet dissent, promote conformity, and pacify thought. Later philosophers like Slavoj Žižek and Mark Fisher would also point out the degree to which the Culture Industry recuperates politically radical messages within mass culture: in effect allowing the public to safely express anti-capitalist sentiments of rebellion against the status quo by, for example, watching a film in which the villain is a mega-corporation. These expressions of dissent ultimately do not do anything other than allow us to exert ourselves and then return to contentedness.

²⁰⁵ Kaufman, Daniel and Brian Leiter. “Has Marxism Lost its Way?” Filmed July 25, 2018. 1:29:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Mlkj2HS-q4&t=1110s>

²⁰⁶ Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. New ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987). xviii.

This understanding of Ideology and the Culture Industry became the source of what most people identified the Frankfurt School with: rabid pessimism and a cultural elitism that refused to see any value in popular or lower culture. Marcuse became immensely popular with the student movements of the New Left in the 60s and 70s, who ultimately gave up on the idea of a conscious working class and concluded that the only place true change could come from was the intellectual elite who could see Ideology for what it was. In our case, consulting the Frankfurt School is helpful in their discussions of commodification and one-dimensionality through the Culture Industry. Particularly in how those two concepts serve to obscure social reality by offering familiar and digestible objects of consumption. They discussed this in relation to advertisements, products, Hollywood films, etc. What if the product - the object being commodified and consumed - was historical memory itself? This is where we will turn toward later theorists.

In seeking a broader assessment of the effects of deindustrialization, we are pushed further down the line towards theoreticians who were writing in the 1990s and 2000s. While one would not necessarily include Jacques Derrida in the same intellectual trajectory as the Frankfurt School, it is with him that the concept of Hauntology is first established. In 1993 *Specters of Marx* was published as an effort to revitalize and retool Marxism in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In it, Derrida argued that everything in existence is reliant on the absence of other things: words gain their meaning primarily from how they are unlike other words. A 'cat' is not a dog - the definition of 'cat' comes from defining what it is not. Definitions and meanings are haunted by these absences - ghosts which are not really there, yet influence it. The word 'cat' is influenced by the spectre, or ghost, of all that it is not, because its meaning is derived from all that it is not.²⁰⁷ Mark Fisher explains this a bit better, "...think of hauntology as the agency of the virtual, with the spectre understood...as that which acts without (physically) existing."²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*. English ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994). 202.

²⁰⁸ Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*. (UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2014). 18.

When Marx and Engels had famously written that a, “spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism.”²⁰⁹ Derrida saw more meaning in this than perhaps originally knowingly intended. When the *Communist Manifesto* was published in 1847, communism did not exist in tangible form - only as theory. Yet the foreboding arrival of communism had effects on the tangible world: it influenced how ruling parties thought of and interacted with the masses, and vice versa. It was a non-corporeal ghost influencing the corporeal world, “the specter that Marx was talking about then, communism, was there without being there.”²¹⁰ It would continue to do this haunting, Derrida believed, even though it had seemingly died with the collapse of the Soviet Union.²¹¹

Mark Fisher, a cultural critic and philosopher at University of London, took this concept of hauntology and applied it to popular culture within neoliberalism in much the same vein as how Frankfurt School theorists had applied the concept of the Culture Industry to Keynesianism. Fisher used music as a broad case study representative of culture. He returned to the refrain that Derrida frequently meditated on in *Spectres of Marx*, a quote from Hamlet: ‘the time is out of joint’. Fisher’s hauntology in relation to critical theory is more specific than Derrida: Fisher is concerned with what hauntology means for time. Our understanding of the present is shaped by our understanding of the past and our understanding of the future. To use an example: at any single moment in a melody the listener only hears one note - that note only takes on qualities of a melody when it is mixed with the notes before it and the notes following it. Understanding the future requires understanding the past, and vice versa. Human experience, then, is

²⁰⁹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “The Communist Manifesto,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, ed Lawrence H. Simon (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994), 158.

²¹⁰ Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*. English ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994). 125.

²¹¹ Jacques Derrida is a complicated and controversial philosopher who went on to write a number of works concerning his notion of ‘Deconstruction’. It is not the goal of this paper to explain or interpret Derridean Deconstructionism, but to acknowledge his introduction of the notion of hauntology in order to offer context to Mark Fisher’s use of the concept in critical theory.

haunted by what no longer exists, and what has yet to exist. The present is given meaning via making sense of the past, and making sense of the future.

In short, the issue Fisher draws attention to is the fact that neoliberalism has led to the, “slow cancellation of the future” with events such as deindustrialization taking place during the systemic shift of the 1970s-80s. With the loss of stable conceptions of the future due to this shift, our understanding of the present is flung entirely into the arms of the past. Fisher illustrates this by enumerating how neoliberalism had led to music - and culture itself - being recycled endlessly in reference to the past. The spectres that were now haunting our modern day were the futures lost to the slow cancellation of the future. With the loss of that future under neoliberalism, modern culture became haunted by the past, ultimately failing to create truly new cultural expressions that were more than pastiche.²¹² Fisher’s 2014 book *Ghosts of My Life* examined how this influenced modern culture primarily through various case studies in popular music, television, and film. Overall, he posited that neoliberal culture had become ‘out of joint’ with time: it referred back to older cultural expressions and resulted in modern music simulating decades-old music. Fisher writes, “[W]hen I first heard the Arctic Monkeys...the [music video, the set design, the audio and video production] all conspired to create a simulation of the 1980s. We actually can imagine [that record] being played in 1980...no problem. It could very well have existed then.”²¹³ In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, there had existed hopeful and positive dreams of the future due to new levels of international cooperation and the economic boom enjoyed in the west. The transformation of capitalism in the 1970s and 1980s shattered these dreams, and Fisher theorised that modern culture in the new stage of capitalism was haunted by these lost futures. The result was a return to the past. “Why did the arrival of neoliberal...capitalism lead to a culture of retrospection and pastiche?” One of his proposed answers to the

²¹² Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life*. (UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2014). 14.

²¹³ Fisher, Mark. “Mark Fisher: The Slow Cancellation Of The Future” Posted May 22, 2014. 46:14.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCgkLICTskQ>

broad question rings of earlier Critical Theorists like Adorno, “Could it be that neoliberal capitalism’s destruction of solidarity and security brought about a compensatory hungering for the well-established and the familiar?”²¹⁴

Heritage & Lost Futures on the Iron Range

Fisher’s analysis of hauntology in neoliberal culture continues into various case studies of the U.K. music scene. We will instead turn toward the U.S., and specifically northeast Minnesota. While not explicitly an analysis of pop-culture, the phenomenon of the commodification of historical memory can be better understood with a hauntological lens. Jeffrey Manuel notes that the conceptions of heritage on the Iron Range - and in other industrial communities - were not entirely organic. “Heritage...was a contingent and specific response to the political, cultural, and economic conditions of deindustrializing regions in the post-World War II decades.”²¹⁵ That is, the heritage packaged and offered to a revitalizing tourism industry was constructed for that purpose. Accounts of the mines being, “as cutthroat as it could get...”²¹⁶ and having, “a very down-attitude,”²¹⁷ conflicted with the marketed perceptions of the region. One ad for the town of Chisholm labeled it, “The cradle of Minnesota’s mining heritage,” and beckoned tourists in Duluth and the Metro, “to shop and browse an old fashioned hometown where friendliness is a way of life.”²¹⁸ Likewise, as previously mentioned, we should look at the ethnic revival of the 1970s and 80s with this lense of inorganic heritage: Ironworld did not emphasize the radical nature of Duluth and the

²¹⁴ Fisher, Mark. *Ghosts of My Life*. (UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2014). 14.

²¹⁵ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 202.

²¹⁶ Bill Herschbach, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 3, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0641, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

²¹⁷ Dave Storrs, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0671, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

²¹⁸ “Chisholm...Home of Ironworld USA.” *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, July 2, 1986.

Range's first immigrants - who themselves were often arriving in Minnesota after fleeing persecution of their leftist politics in the old world.²¹⁹ Instead it focused on politically neutral, sanitized expressions of cultural celebration: food, clothing, etc. The annual Ethnic Days celebration, which drew an excess of 40,000 attendants over the summer, celebrated five facets of each white ethnic cultural group: “‘performance of music and dance,’ ‘demonstration of ethnic food preparation and ethnic crafts,’ ‘displays of the finery of each group,’ ‘films of the native homeland,’ and ‘opportunities to taste the various ethnic foods.’”^{220 221} Cultural celebrations of this nature were of the kind that Nancy Isenberg had previously described: non-radical, easily marketable, and ‘safe’. Commodified commemoration like this was not limited to the Range. Cowie and Heathcott take note of a number of instances in which old industrial spaces became retooled for the new economy, stripping them of anything meaningful to say about the history they came from. The Homestead Steel Works - the physical space of gargantuan moments in labor history like the Homestead Strike - is now a strip mall and parking lot. Memorializing the past are twelve solitary smokestacks that had once been a part of the old plant, “they stand merely as commodified quotations from a distant modern epoch, which do little more than offer a bit of nostalgia and character to an otherwise nondescript, postmodern retail landscape.”²²²

Workers themselves displayed a complex, and often contradictory, reaction and reflection on their industrial memory in the wake of deindustrialization. On the one hand, they looked to the struggles of friends and family who had worked in the industry before them as both a source of personal pride and of consolation. The result was a messy tension between those who left, and those who stayed behind. Catherine Conlan, the editor of the AFL-CIO's *Labor World* newspaper, spoke of the haunting this

²¹⁹ Hudelson, Richard and Carl Ross. *By the Ore Docks* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). xxi.

²²⁰ “Ironworld Opens with 4-Day Gala.” *Duluth News-Tribune & Herald*, July 2, 1986.

²²¹ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 204.

²²² Cowie, Jefferson and Joseph Heathcott, Introduction to *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*. Edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). 2-3.

tension had on communities who stuck out industrial decline. “There's a kind of pride, ‘This place died, you all bailed, I stayed here and made something for myself.’ You did what you had to do. There becomes a pride in that, but then it also becomes an insulating factor in a community. ‘We rode it out, where were you? [You’re] not going to know the hardship we went through.’ You see that in smaller towns where it's more apparent...No matter how you ride it out it becomes a scar.”²²³ The community trauma of staggering population loss (20,000 people in less than a decade), coupled with a lack of inter-generational confidence or support in mining jobs, most certainly contributed toward a sense of, (to use Fisher’s phrase) “the slow cancellation of the future.”

Workers experiencing deindustrialization spoke about it with a sense of finality and permanence, whether it be in literally believing that the industry would never recover²²⁴, or lamenting over the betrayal of the implicit company-community social contract - that the companies had lost their dependability.²²⁵ The future was unstable and unclear, and heritage tourism allowed for a return to and celebration of a rose-tinted industrial history that capitalized upon aspects of the Ranger identity which seemed to be slipping away. Rural independence was challenged by the new economic reliance on outside tourists, but also by the broader implications of deindustrialization: not even the iron of the Iron Range was important anymore, there was other, cheaper ore elsewhere in the world. Nostalgia allowed for a return to that as well; residents and PR campaigns were both quick to boast that the Allies had won WWII because of Minnesota’s iron. Meditating on that fact of the past allowed for painful truths to be ignored: that the Range, and the industrial heartland itself, did not have the same national importance anymore. Conlan

²²³ Catherine Conlan (Editor-in-Chief of Duluth AFL-CIO newspaper *Labor World*), in discussion with the author, August 13, 2018.

²²⁴ James “Jim” Young, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 7, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0639, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

²²⁵ Tom Buescher, interviewed by Candace Perry, July 21, 1986, Laid-off Miners Oral History Project, #1986.0673, Iron Range Research Center, Chisholm, MN.

described the aftershock of deindustrialization as leaving Duluth and the Iron Range with an “inferiority complex.”²²⁶

One might critique this view of deindustrialization and hauntology by pointing towards the periodic renewal experienced in more recent years. Isn't the idea that the nation was experiencing a 'slow cancellation of the future' with deindustrialization undercut by the fact that manufacturing jobs have - quantitatively - remained fairly stable across the postwar period? The number of persons in the U.S. employed in manufacturing in the mid 1960s sat at around 18 million, and just under 18 million in 2000.²²⁷ Moreover, Rangers have experienced positivity at the future of the region more recently. “We are having another boom to an extent.” IRRRB Director Mark Phillips said in 2018, referring to the 2,000 jobs that had returned since 2015. Another resident remarked, “Things are way better than I anticipated. And I think it's that the miners are back to work. I know all about the mines being down. I lived it. My dad was a miner.”²²⁸

Such a critique is flawed in a few predominant ways. Namely that it misunderstands the long-term effects of deindustrialization and how they factor into its historical analyses; and that examples of revived hope for an industrial future are actually illustrative of the effects of historical commodification and hauntology. Firstly, Manufacturing jobs did remain fairly steady in the long run, but they became dwarfed nationally - and on the Iron Range - by the explosion of service sector jobs that were non-unionized and paid less.²²⁹ Deindustrialization had implications beyond jobs lost and gained. The post-PATCO strike zeitgeist of America made management far more comfortable in taking on unions at

²²⁶ Catherine Conlan (Editor-in-Chief of Duluth AFL-CIO newspaper *Labor World*), in discussion with the author, August 13, 2018.

²²⁷ Baily, Martin Neil and Barry P. Bosworth. "US Manufacturing: Understanding its Past and its Potential Future." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (Winter, 2014). 12.

²²⁸ DePass, Dee. "Strength of Iron Range Economic Recovery Surprising to Locals." *Star Tribune*, July 14, 2018.

²²⁹ Plunkert, Lois M. "The 1980's: A Decade of Job Growth and Industry Shifts." *Monthly Labor Review* 113, no. 9 (September, 1990). 4-7, 11-15.

the concession table, or even kicking them out entirely. Industrial pluralism - the partnership of management and union that was the standard since the New Deal - was abandoned in the new neoliberal order. The taconite plant at Silver Bay closed down in 1986, but reopened in 1989 as a small nonunion plant.²³⁰ This trend continued on a national level with a staggering 40% decline in manufacturing industry unionization between 1985 and 2000.²³¹ Another long term impact was the environmental degradation from both industrialization and deindustrialization. In an attempt to stem the tide of industrial decline, many communities looked toward technology - putting the costs of battling decline onto the environment. Taconite was one such example of this as famously exemplified with the Reserve Mining trial of the mid-70s. The company was dealt an injunction to halt the dumping of taconite tailings into Lake Superior at Silver Bay when it was found to be polluting the water with asbestos-like fibers.²³² Every industrial community had their personal taconite - a technological breakthrough that sustained industry a while longer at the cost of the environment. Finally, one of the most significant long term consequences of deindustrialization was its severance of the connection between identity and work. On a national level as the United States transitioned into an economy dominated by high finance; on a regional level as places like the Range and the larger Great Lakes sought to reinvent and revitalize themselves; and on a personal level as workers in single-industry communities struggled with the crisis of identity caused by the destabilization of that industry.

A still broader consequence of deindustrialization was the unsettling truths it revealed about the overarching history of capitalism. This is not just a radical critique or philosophy from Marxists - this is a sentiment expressed within the field of labor history itself. We can return again to Cowie and Heathcott: “[D]eindustrialization and industrialization are merely two ongoing aspects of the history of capitalism

²³⁰ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 132.

²³¹ Cowie, Jefferson and Joseph Heathcott, Introduction to *Beyond the Ruins*. Edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). 14.

²³² "Environmental Mercy at Silver Bay." *New York Times*, January 17, 1977.

that describe continual and complicated patterns of investment and disinvestment...in the end the seeds of deindustrialization were in every instance built into the engines of industrial growth itself.”²³³

Deindustrialization reveals the cyclical rhythms inherent to capitalism: the cycle of boom and bust that workers on the Iron Range voiced as a pervasive and ubiquitous sense of uncertainty. This cycle is damaging and alienating to those who live within it, and obscuring this fact is an ongoing issue within both historiography and politics; it romanticizes the industrial past with 2-dimensional images of a white, male, broad-shouldered proletariat.

Furthermore, articles like those mentioned that refer to economic upturns on the Iron Range are themselves symptomatic of the role nostalgia plays in historical memory. The fact remains that mining was a hard job that people took because it paid well and was in their geographic area - but it was work that many expressed as “the easy way out”. Furthermore, it has historically been and will remain a volatile industry prone to instability and uncertainty - ultimately pressing onwards towards the ugly conclusion that resource-extractive industry is eventually exhaustible. The commodification of history allows these uneasy questions and realities to be ignored in favor of the nostalgic consumption of the rose-tinted past: a belief that there can be a return to the way things were. ‘The way things were’ being the as-marketed, inorganic image of industrial work sanitized for consumption. The social-realist romanticism of 20th century industrial work was dishonest and ignorant of workers’ and residents’ opinions. Aaron Brown remembered how one grandfather left the industry as quickly as he could, and the other worked until a mining accident left him crippled. “The nostalgia for mining often comes from people who don't work in mining. It's an idea much more than any reality. I think future people will look at the rhetoric used in this time and regard it as foolish. I certainly do.”²³⁴

²³³ Cowie, Jefferson and Joseph Heathcott, Introduction to *Beyond the Ruins*. Edited by Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003). 15.

²³⁴ Aaron Brown (Iron Range journalist, author, professor), in discussion with the author, January 26, 2019.

At the end of the day, deindustrialization was a, “temporary, historically bound set of conditions that are experienced in terms of permanence by ordinary people in daily life.” As a symptom of the systemic transformation in capitalism, deindustrialization reminds us that capitalism is an economic order that favors constant change, expansion, and therefore volatility. Yet despite this volatility, perhaps the most successful characteristic of neoliberalism is its ability to equate an economic order with ‘Reality’ itself. The final result of this systemic transformation of global capitalism was, in a sense, the culmination of what Frankfurt School thinkers had warned Keynesianism was developing - overwhelming methods of cultural control. Fisher describes this as “Capitalist Realism,” and succinctly described it according to Margaret Thatcher’s 1980s slogan, “There is no alternative.”²³⁵ Market capitalism and globalization was the only way for modern societies to develop, the debate was closed, there were no alternatives. Fisher argues that the 1980s were, “the period when capitalist realism was fought for and established.” Part of the way this was done was in relegating the workers caught up in deindustrialization to the nostalgic past, “the last actors in a doomed proletarian romance.”²³⁶ Manuel expresses a similar sentiment about the role of heritage tourism as a tool of economic revitalization: “The concerns of miners...were removed to the realm of nostalgia, where they could be safely handled in a way that had little effect on future plans for the area.”²³⁷ Commodifying history allows the industrial past to haunt us as rose-tinted memory, and therefore shape how we identify in the present, and how we look at an uncertain future: ultimately obscuring the uncomfortable realities of capitalism itself. Aaron Brown reflected on the difficult process of confronting history-as-nostalgia in terms that articulated the crisis of identity and memory that it sparked: “It’s like watching a tree die. It doesn’t happen all at once. And even though the best thing would be to cut down the dead tree and plant a new one, everyone loves that old tree. Grandpa and grandma

²³⁵ Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 8.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Manuel, Jeffrey T. *Taconite Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). 216.

carved their initials on that tree. It'll have to fall on the roof or smash a car before we'd ever think to get rid of it."²³⁸

²³⁸ Aaron Brown (Iron Range journalist, author, professor), in discussion with the author, January 20, 2019.

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