COXEY'S CHALLENGE IN THE POPULIST MOMENT

by

Jerry Prout
A Dissertation
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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Charles Henry Prout, Jr., who died on December 23, 2010, at the age of ninety. His lifelong insatiable curiosity, dedication to ideas, enthusiasm for life, and love of history provides the inspiration to never to stop searching for insight as revealed in our past.
In 2006 upon resuming the pursuit of a doctorate after a prolonged hiatus (1972), I needed plenty of inspiration and guidance. Members of George Mason University history faculty provided these. In doing so, they revealed just how dramatically the field had changed, and how much it had stayed the same. In her rigorous demands on a minor field statement, Dina Copelman reminded me of the obligations and boundaries of historical inquiry. With her enthusiasm and insight, Rosemarie Zagarri reinforced that this was the right path. Jack Censer was kind to serve as a sounding board and reassure me through episodes of anxiety; one of my long suits. In addition, one of my undergraduate professors, William E. Parrish, has visited me every year since I reengaged, and found ways to keep me plowing ahead. He is now Professor Emeritus of History at Mississippi State University. I recall his spectacular lectures on the Civil War era when he taught at tiny Westminster College. His high standards and passion for the field left indelible marks.

Despite writing his own next masterwork, my principal advisor, Michael O’Malley, was what an excellent Sherpa should be. He inspired with his provocative Socratic classroom style, and then allowed the dissertation to take its course. In a statement that was both reassuring and frightening, he reminded, “This is your dissertation.” Early in the climb, Zachary Schrag astutely advised getting things right in the beginning to save steps in the end. His intriguing questions at the outset echoed throughout this project. And Professor William Schneider’s fresh perspectives and simple question, “Why am I reading this?” continued to reverberate during the seemingly never ending editing process.

While I could not possibly have researched this without the amazing resources now available electronically, the wonderful little town of Massillon, Ohio--known for its glorious high school football program--provided a welcome site for archival research. In its well-kept, turn-of-the-century buildings, the city exudes memories of Jacob Sechler Coxey. The Coxey papers are conscientiously maintained by archivist Mandy Altimus Pond, whose special attention to my research was greatly appreciated. And museum volunteer John Sparks reminded me what Coxey must have been like as a person. “We called him the General,” he told me, recalling how the old man would march into town--though well into his nineties--with his Edwardian collar up and a smile on his face. I am also indebted to Jean Adkins at the Massillon Public Museum for going out of her way to help me. So, too, did the dedicated staffs at the National Archives and Library of Congress in Washington, the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg, and the Ohio Historical Library in Columbus.
One of the most reassuring aspects of this endeavor, and one of the most helpful, has been discussions with my work colleagues. While they never tired of asking, “And so, aren’t you finished?” their kind words of encouragement and admiration helped sustain me. In particular, I was buoyed by the remarkable coincidence that my work colleague, Joseph Pattison, is the great-grandson of former Pennsylvania Governor Robert E. Pattison. Gov. Pattison in the aftermath of his much criticized ambivalence on the use of force in the Homestead strike now had to decide what to do as Coxey’s Army approached. How should he respond to the incursion of unemployed into his state? Joe assisted in my quest for his great-grandfather’s dispersed papers. Joe, himself an Edgar Award-winning mystery novelist under the pseudonym Eliot Pattison, also provided much encouragement.

Not surprisingly, my family played a valuable supportive role. My four sons took an interest in the undertaking, while apparently viewing this as confirmation that I had finally taken total leave of my senses. In the months before he died, my father read rough drafts, and encouraged me to complete my Ph.D. In the end, though against his Depression era instincts, he also reluctantly agreed it was a wonderful idea to try and teach for free at my little alma mater. “In retrospect I think it’s a wonderful idea to do it that way,” he said near his end understanding my intent.

Most importantly, Claudia, my lovely wife of thirty-five years, was the most predictably steadfast of all in her understanding and support. She never complained as I descended repeatedly into the depths of my basement study and emerged with glazed eyes, babbling about some remote discovery I had made. She also provided a fresh view of each draft. Her encouragement at every turn meant more to me than I can express.
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ABSTRACT

COXEY’S CHALLENGE IN THE POPULIST MOMENT

Jerry Prout, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2012

Dissertation Director: Dr. Michael O’Malley

In the spring of 1894, a wealthy businessman named Jacob Coxey led a march of unemployed men from Massillon, Ohio to the steps of the U.S. Capitol. Coxey promoted a plan to put those unemployed from the Panic of 1893 back to work building a national system of roads financed by $500 million in government-backed legal tender. Influenced by his sidekick, Theosophist Carl Browne, the carnivalesque March, displaying both millenarian and utopian imagery, depicted itself as the “Commonweal of Christ.” Though small in number, this racially diverse procession not only attracted welcoming crowds, but sustained front page press coverage over five weeks. In an era of new journalistic techniques, the March became a spectacle that distorted its legacy.

To this point, accounts of the Coxey episode generally skirt the edges of prominent interpretations of the populist moment. Historians generally prefer to see the March as a separate phenomenon, an ill fated spasm of labor unrest coming in between the Homestead (1892) and Pullman (1894) strikes. They seem challenged to join a march
of industrial unemployed led by a businessman to a broader populist movement of producers with roots in rural America.

However, this dissertation argues that Coxey’s March, both in the substance of its ideas and in its spectacular form, can be placed at the center of nineteenth century anti-monopolist, producer unrest. As challenging as the inchoate populist movement is to define, Coxey’s March helps us see it in its many dimensions. Coxey’s March sought to restore a more community oriented economy focused on the value of the producer whether on the farm or in the factory. This marching troupe of the unemployed petitioning their government to invest in their employment posed a symbolic alternative to an ascendant corporate capitalism. In the wake of the Panic of 1893 the March resonated with both tillers and toilers. Coming after the formation of the People’s Party in 1892, the March captured the essential energy of democratic protest extant in an almost two decade producer movement. As Populist Party operatives increasingly sought tactical advantage by fusing with the established parties, Coxey’s March challenged conventional party politics by reminding how the voice of the people might directly express itself.
INTRODUCTION: THE CHALLENGE

“To write about the coherence of Populism — a social and political movement that touched millions of lives and spanned a continent —is necessarily fraught with peril.”¹

Charles Postel

On Easter Sunday, March 25, 1894, some 122 hopeful men left a camp along the Tuscarawas River in Massillon, Ohio, departing on what would become an almost four hundred mile march along muddy roads, over steep mountains, and through inclement weather. Thirty-five days later, surrounded by colorfully clad bicyclists and fancy carriages carrying Populist congressmen and senators, they triumphantly entered Brightwood Riding Park near Washington, D.C. A surging crowd, drawn by the almost continuous front page national press coverage in the days preceding, enthusiastically cheered these marchers as they arrived on the outskirts of the capital. This same sort of warm and welcoming reception greeted them repeatedly over their arduous five week journey. Along unworn and uneven roads, and in the midst of a deep national depression, this so-called “army” of the unemployed marched past thousands of people who streamed to roadsides from their schools, shops, and homes to see this spectacle with their own eyes and to cheer this first ever March to Washington.²

² The exact distance the March covered over 35 days is clouded by a brief barge journey from April 16 to April 19 down the C&O Canal. However on April 9 at roughly the halfway point the odometer on Coxeys phaeton
Then, on May 1, 1894, International Labor Day, this small and weary “industrial army,” though hardly displaying any military regimen at all, swung proudly onto Pennsylvania Avenue and caught sight of the magnificent Capitol dome. With tattered banners unfurled and brass band banging, they approached their final destination. When they reached B Street, an unassuming man with rounded shoulders and a straw-colored mustache stepped from his carriage. He kissed his wife, tipped his bowler to his admirers, and entered the Capitol grounds. Jacob Sechler Coxey (see Figure 1), a successful Ohio businessman whose ideas inspired and whose money capitalized the March, now hoped to give a speech in support of his Good Roads legislation. Already introduced in this fifty-third Congress, separate bills called for the federal government to issue $500 million in legal tender backed by government bonds and then to spend that money on a program to build a national road system that would put the estimated three million unemployed as a result of the Panic of 1893 back to work.  

3 Lucy G. Barber, *Marching to Washington* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2002), 5-9; Kenneth Bowling, “From ‘Federal Town’ to ‘National Capital,: Ulysses S. Grant and the Reconstruction of Washington D.C. Washington History 14 no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2002) :16; “Grand Army Parade,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (September 21, 1892) 1: Pennsylvania Avenue was designed by French planner Pierre L’Enfant to be a grand national promenade. Yet by 1894 the broad avenue had not yet become the public space L’Enfant thought it would attract the sort of ceremonial processions and spectacle protest marches more familiar in European capitals. Not paved until 1871, it remained more a place for retail shops and trolley lines than for grand processions. Finally, in 1892 the Grand Army of the Republic reunited in Washington and about ten thousand veterans paraded down the Avenue to commemorate the Civil War in the sort of ceremony L’Enfant had envisioned; see Bowling, “From ‘Federal Town’ Washington History,
Yet in its climactic moment, Coxey’s peaceful procession was beset by government violence. Club-wielding police on horseback attacked the disorganized army of a few hundred tired and hungry men. Some innocent bystanders, captured in the fury of the moment, were injured. The Commonweal’s African American flag bearer, Jasper Johnson Buchanan, who just moments before had been greeted enthusiastically by the largely black crowds lining the streets, was so bloodied in the melee that he was taken to emergency medical facilities nearby. Coxey meanwhile sought help from a friendly policeman, and as one reporter described, the two “wormed their way through the mob like sparrows through a wheat field.” Reaching the capitol steps, Coxey announced his intent to deliver a speech. But before he could begin, he was hauled off by police and jailed along with his confidant, Carl Browne (see Figure 2), and a Philadelphian named Christopher Columbus Jones. The three men were to be arraigned for trespassing on the Capitol grounds. In a few brief, chaotic moments, the five-week-old March that so captivated a nation’s attention abruptly ended. The procession known to its hopeful creators as the “Commonweal of Christ” soon became known to history as “Coxey’s Army.”

16; “Grand Army Parade,” The Atlanta Constitution, 21 September 1892; See Ray Stannard Baker’s description of Coxey in Ray Stannard Baker, “Coxey and His Commonweal,” The Tourney, (May, 1894): 118. Because no reliable government data existed to develop reasonable estimates of the number unemployed figures ranged from ten to twenty per cent of the eligible working population. American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers in fact estimated three million. See Ray Stannard Baker’s description of Coxey in “Coxey and His Commonweal,” The Tourney (May, 1894) 118. Because no reliable government data existed to develop reasonable estimates of the number unemployed figures ranged from ten to twenty per cent of the eligible working population. American Federation of Labor President Samuel Gompers in fact estimated three million. For a fuller description of the estimates of the unemployed and what they represented see Note 41 in Chapter One.

4 Only the Chicago Record’s reporter consistently refers to Jasper Johnson with the additional surname Buchanan (see footnote 244); The Trio Sentenced,” Morning Oregonian, 22 May 1894; “March Ends in Riot,” The Chicago Record, 1 May 1894; Donald L. McMurry, Coxey’s Army (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1929), 115-119.
Challenged

Historians have not known quite what to do with the Coxey episode. They typically mention it in the context of what Lawrence Goodwyn called the Populist Moment, then fail to explain how an assemblage of northern unemployed industrial workers connects to a movement with rural lineage in the South and prairie states. Goodwyn marked the very beginnings of the populist moment with a gathering of farmers at a log house in Lampasas, Texas in 1877. There, disgruntled farmers coalesced under the banner of “Knights of Reliance,” later to become “The Farmers Alliance.” The organization they formed soon replicated itself in other states and became the structural core of a movement that spread from the Texas prairies across the South to the far reaches of the Dakotas. First local, and then statewide, before it was finally a National Farmers Alliance, these sophisticated networks of localized cooperatives emerged to compete against distant corporate middlemen who were perceived to have hijacked local farm economies. The Alliances responded to the oppressive purchasing method known as the “crop lien system,” that along with farmer’s own overproduction, depressed crop prices throughout the late nineteenth century and preceded the financial Panic of 1893.5

5 Throughout this dissertation the term “populist moment” will not be capitalized, nor in those instances will the term “populist” and “populism,” when they refer to the broader producer movement that spanned almost two decades before the emergence of a formalized Populist Party (see also Footnote 10). The Farm Alliance movement in just a decade, spread rapidly across the plains states and the south. In the brief period between 1886 and 1889, the Texas Alliance alone grew from 38,000 to 250,000 members; in Kansas the membership neared 100,000. At its height in 1890, the National Framers Alliance consisted of almost 1,271,800 members, though only 300 in Coxey’s home state of Ohio. As Lawrence Goodwyn summarized, this “…mass movement of anonymous people became highly charged with a breathtaking new hope; they could free themselves of the ancient bonds of the credit system.” See Lawrence Goodwyn, “The Alliance Develops a Movement Culture,” in American Populism, ed. William Holmes (Lexington, MA: D.C. heath and Company, 1994), 22-34; Postel, Populist Vision,36; Lawrence Goodwyn, Democratic Promise (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 31-50 and quote on 51; Regarding a good summary of reliable sources for National Farm Alliance membership see Elizabeth Sanders, Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers and the American
Yet it is difficult to neatly define this agitation which lasted nearly two decades. Even in states where the Populist Party eventually took hold, not all farmers found fault with the emergence of late nineteenth-century corporate capitalism. In his analysis of those who joined the Populist Party, Walter Nugent concluded that economic distress was not the determining factor for choosing to become a Populist. Rather, he asserted that joining the Peoples Party was a “chosen response.” In examining the demographics of the People’s Party, James Turner, and Stanley B. Parsons, among others, carefully parsed the predilections of distinct rural subpopulations and concluded that isolation from rural villages became a determinative factor for those who would vote with the Populist Party. As Turner concludes, these were “not merely rural folk, but rural folk outside of the orbit of towns.” While such demographic analyses can be helpful, they also leave much to be addressed. As Charles Postel’s recent comprehensive treatment of the period conveys, Populists were not only characterized by their discontent over economic injustice, but also by their bold ideas for changing the economic landscape. Nor is Postel’s definition of the fervor and discontent that simmered for two decades confined only to rural farmers. As with other works dating back to Chester McArthur Destler and Norman Pollack, Postel’s definition includes factory laborers of “industrial orders” who joined the disaffected farmers under the banner of the People’s Party. Thus both distant and more recent historiography suggests Populists were not merely marginal outsiders from remote

State, 1877-1917 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 123. Postel refers to Goodwyn’s work as casting a long shadow on page 7.
farming towns, but rather part of a broad national movement to break the monopolist power of the increasingly powerful trusts and to reform corporate capitalism generally.\textsuperscript{6}

This dissertation will describe this broad movement that spanned almost two decades as “populism” with a small “p,” and thus draw a distinction between the formal Populist Party and the larger anti-monopolist reforms of which the Party was a part. The late nineteenth century version of small “p” populism is not subject to easy historical categorization. It has roots, as will be described, in earlier “producerist” and “republican” traditions that sought to elevate “producers” over lawyers, speculators, bankers, financiers and other men who profited through little apparent labor. It shared views earlier expressed in the Whig’s American System and the Greenback Party’s expansive monetarism. Above all, it emerged from an intellectual tradition that stressed the moral and economic primacy of small producers over large corporate enterprises.

Coxey’s March (see Figure 3) will be viewed here in the context of this broader populist energy that presaged the formation of a Populist Party. It was, after all, the energy of this small p populism that spawned the Populist Party, not vice versa. Yet understanding the inchoate nature of small p populism in this period remains challenging. Its loose knit fabric of reformers and their ideas, from Henry George to Eugene Debs, struggled to find its political voice. More often they settled on proposing novel forms of cooperative organization that might effectively compete against the modern corporation.

As Steven Hahn laments, the entire historiography of late nineteenth-century populism is complicated and perplexing. Or, as Karel D. Bicha more succinctly stated it, “Populism was a movement beset with frightful ambivalence and contradiction.” Yet, so too was Coxey’s March, which is why, as will be argued here, it is representative of this diverse discontent that at its essential core sought to reinstate the primacy of the producer in an economy perceived to be tilted toward the monopolists.⁷

If the 1892 Omaha Platform represents the best effort to finally give some coherence to this two decade old movement, then beneath its often vague planks lies a two-tiered scaffold concerned with an economy too concentrated in the hands of wealthy plutocrats and a government that needed to be more accessible and direct. Assembled on the anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Omaha gathering resulted in a document largely written by best-selling author Ignatius Donnelly. It called for an expanded national currency backed by the government rather than the banks, the public ownership of transportation and communication, the restoration to individuals of lands once publicly owned, a progressive income tax, free and direct elections without the secret ballot, the direct election of senators, and limits on the hours worked by organized workingmen. Beneath these bold proposals there boiled an intense concern that the concentration of power by business and government was wrong, and that the individual producer and voter was losing ground both in the marketplace and at the ballot box.⁸

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If historians therefore find it challenging to place Coxey’s March in this “populist moment,” it may well be because of the very difficulties encountered in defining the energy force that led to Omaha. Though noted historians of this era of ferment on the farm and in the factory title their volumes The Populist Moment, The Populist Revolt, and The Populist Vision, the way we now loosely bandy the term “populism” actually exaggerates the significance of the word in its time. As Goodwyn reminds us, and importantly for the argument in this dissertation, the term “Populist” was only first coined in 1892. Up until then, the uneven alliance of producers that gave rise to this formalized party contained a diverse assemblage of those who vigorously opposed what the new corporate economy was doing to their way of life. Thus they actively sought ways to organize in order to effectively compete within it. They were the “populists” before there was a “Populist” party.⁹

In today’s vernacular, as historian Michael Kazin underscores, the term populism is a seemingly indispensable part of the American political lexicon, generally used to describe the way in which the *vox populi* has expressed itself from Thomas Jefferson to Joseph McCarthy, from the original Boston Tea Party (1773) to the twenty-first century “Tea Party Movement.” Given its omnipresence in our current political vocabulary, it is hard to imagine that in the late nineteenth century the term was entirely new. Suggestive of the very flabbiness of the term “populism,” Postel loosely describes the agitation among producers that evolved into the People’s Party as simply “a particular

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⁹ Indeed Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 51, notes that the term “populism” itself was not coined until 1892. He states that during the period 1886-1887, though the “organizational methods and ideological basis of American Populism were fashioned, it would not be until 1892 that it acquired a distinctive name --‘Populism.’”
constellation of ideas, circulating within a specific coalition of reform, and set in motion within a distinct historical context.”

The challenge for this dissertation is to allow Coxey’s March to remain its own story while connecting its various dimensions to the broader story about the contours of late nineteenth-century populism. This dissertation argues that Coxey’s March embodied the energy and reform spirit of a wide ranging movement in ways that help us understand how the movement was clearly distinguishable from the Party it spawned. To that end, this dissertation will focus both on the way Coxey’s March represented the many incongruous dimensions of the small p populism, and then how, as a direct form of democratic expression, Coxey’s March challenged the large P Populist Party’s proclivity to favor political tactics over principles.

In short, this dissertation will argue that Coxey’s March deserves to be placed at the center, not to the side, when understanding small p populism. Examining Coxey’s

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10 Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 9-25 begins with a discussion of the *ante bellum* roots of the large P Populist movement of the late nineteenth century, including the revolution itself, which as we shall see Coxey and Browne often referred to, for example naming some of the first camps along the march route “Lexington,” and “Concord;” William A. Peffer, *Populism: Its Rise and Fall*, ed., and Peter H. Argersinger, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 1-3 both discuss how as “populism” gradually entered the language, other terms that referred to this producer unrest that translated into political action also competed for attention. For example, when long bearded Populist Kansas Senator William A. Peffer, an advocate of Coxey’s right to demonstrate and his Good Roads legislation was alternately referred to not only as a Populist, but also as “Pefferite.” “Pefferism” in its time could be used interchangeably with “Populism,” just as “Coxeyism” entered the language in 1894 as a way of describing the ideas embodied in Coxey’s March. Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 22, succinctly makes the demarcation between *populism* as a constant in our political dialogue, and the specific institutionalization of a Populist Party. Indeed Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) on page 51 notes that the term populism itself was not coined until 1892. He notes that during the period 1886-1887 as the “organizational methods and ideological basis of American Populism were fashioned it would not be until 1892 that it acquired a distinctive name — “Populism.”

11 Postel, *Populist Vision*, 22, succinctly makes the distinction between *populism* as a recurring energy within our history, and the specific late nineteenth century institutionalization of this energy into a Populist Party. Indeed Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 51 notes that the term “populism” itself was not coined until 1892. He observes that though during the period 1886-1887 the “organizational methods and ideological basis of American Populism were fashioned, it would not be until 1892 that it acquired a distinctive name — “Populism.”
March in its many dimensions helps us to understand how populism in its various representations united not only producers of all stripes, but also an eclectic ensemble of reformers who claimed to represent their best interests. From its moorings in a philosophy that apotheosized the producer, to its unabashedly direct form of democratic expression, this dissertation will show how the Coxey episode represents a quintessentially populist phenomenon.

In addition, and as an important corollary to establishing its populist credentials, the dissertation will show that the March of the unemployed represented a form of direct democratic expression that challenged the tactical direction chosen by leaders of the Populist Party. The formation of the People’s Party marked an attempt to contain under a political umbrella what had been a diffuse reform movement that celebrated the producer over the speculator, the common laborer over the corporate manager. This protest against an ascendant corporate capitalism drew its energy from a diverse array of reform minded leaders initially more interested in their bold ideas than political majorities. In contrast, the political operatives that dominated the People’s Party were often professional politicians who, though loyal to the Populist’s Omaha Platform, became increasingly enamored with allying, or “fusing,” with one of the two established political parties in order to secure their political voice. The very institutionalization of the populist energy in a Populist Party, as Goodwyn suggested, “may be seen as a period of gradual decline in organized democratic energy in Gilded Age politics.” The Populist political operatives seemed oblivious to Georgia Populist Tom Watson’s warning “When we cease our war upon the two old parties, we have no longer any excuse for living.”
Though himself a bona fide member of the Populist Party, Coxey led a march that reminded followers of the democratic energy which had first propelled the populist moment on the prairies two decades earlier.¹²

Yet this is not the way Coxey’s March has been interpreted. The historiography of this period in fact takes the March in another direction. Most historians prefer to view Coxey’s March as only tangentially connected to late nineteenth century populism. To many historians, Coxey’s March appears more logically connected to the rise of a labor movement rather than a genuinely populist episode. This is understandable. Populism resonated with greatest intensity in the South and West, while Coxey departed from northeast Ohio. While Ohio seemed a crucial state for expanding the Populist Party, most of Ohio’s major farm organizations opposed forming a Populist party. Similarly confounding are Coxey’s credentials as a highly successful businessman who gained substantial wealth in a system that populism viewed as corrupted. For these obvious reasons, compounded by the inchoate nature of the populist moment itself, it is perhaps understandable that this March is more conveniently placed in the context of a broader “industrial army” phenomenon. For those historians that try and give Coxey more than a footnote or passing mention in the populist context, they typically reference the affair as a simple class uprising; an outgrowth of the increasing labor unrest that marked this period. Indeed this is the way the contemporary press portrayed the March. And, as reporters

more often than not trivialized the March’s more serious purpose, handed off to history the March’s reputation for ineptitude.¹³

**Historiography**

Indeed, beginning with John Hick’s first noteworthy treatments of the period, historians began placing Coxey to the side of the populist road. In *The Populist Revolt*, Hicks acknowledges the Coxey episode, but only fleetingly. Hicks, who centered the populist movement in the Plains beyond the Mississippi, and demographically as rural to its core, emphasized the political sensibilities of what he characterized as a largely Middle West phenomenon. Hicks views Coxey outside this context and places him loosely in the context of labor unrest. Similarly, Hick’s progressive contemporary Comer Vann Woodward in his *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel*, depicts how the populist cause manifests itself in the reconstructed rural south where remaining racial divisions complicated alliance politics, as their leaders tried to unite with the so-called “Colored Farmer’s Alliances.” Woodward, like Hicks, hardly gives Coxey any mention at all. Indeed, this geographic paradigm, which Hicks and Woodward among others established, poses difficulties for placing Coxey near the movement’s center. As Michael Pierce would later note, though Ohio seemed a crucial state for expanding the Populist Party and one of its formative conventions occurred in Cincinnati in 1891, most of Ohio’s major

¹³ Michael Pierce, “Farmers and the Failure of Populism in Ohio,” *Agricultural History* 74, No.1 (Winter, 2000), 58-85; The year that Coxey marched (1894) more workers were involved in strikes than in any previous year, some 505,000 employees struck despite the depression ensuing from the Panic of 1893 in some 1349 separate strikes, See David Montgomery, *Worker’s Control in America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 20.
farm organizations including the Ohio Farmer’ Alliance and Industrial Union, did not attend the convention and continued to stay away from the Populist Party.  

Yet even when the interpretive paradigm changed, Coxey’s place in it did not alter. In the *Age of Reform*, Richard Hofstadter simply and fleetingly groups Coxey’s March together with other spasms of labor violence that together unsettled an already anxious middle class and precipitated the beginnings of what became the progressive reform movement. Populism itself posed problems for the consensus historian Hofstadter, who chose to see the movement as expressing the “‘soft’ side of agrarianism.” His classic “consensus school” critique of populism viewed it not as Hicks would have it as a rational political response by intelligent farmers to market conditions. Rather Hofstadter views it as an irrational, sometimes paranoid, sometimes nostalgic movement through which farmers sought to regain their lost status in an increasingly sophisticated industrial culture.  

In *The Populist Response to Industrial America*, Pollack disputes Hofstadter’s dismissive view of rural populists. Pollack focuses instead on the reactions of farmers and industrial laborers in an economy undergoing profound transition. Pollack’s account depicts the Populists as reconciled to industrialization and thus trying to develop their own sophisticated response. Notably, Pollack goes well beyond the farm gate in his examination of the populist groundswell against a corporate economy. In his earliest

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work (1962) for example, he devotes an entire chapter to the notion that industrial tramps and vagabonds exemplified the failure of Gilded Age capitalism and economic unrest. The existence of this underclass, Pollack argues, revealed a deeper crisis in capitalist development and it is in this context that Pollack devotes a few paragraphs to Coxey as emblematic of a growing farmer-industrial alliance. Pollack extends the expanse of populism well beyond its previous agrarian and geographical boundaries, and in his brief mention of Coxey, perceptively notes the outpouring of support in rural communities engendered by Coxey’s true army of tramps. Similar to Pollack’s treatment, in *The Search for Order*, Robert Wiebe suggests the similarities between this march of the unemployed with other expressions of populist protest. Wiebe indeed captures the symmetry in the structure and purpose of both labor and agricultural cooperative structures designed as the only viable producer response against corporate capitalism.16

In his breakthrough volume, *Democratic Promise*, Goodwyn emphasizes how populism represented a forward-thinking way to organize to compete in a changing economy and thus also “a moment of democratic promise.” Like Pollack, he challenges Hofstadter and the consensus school notion that populism was simply an antiquated and nostalgic expression. Rather Goodwyn believes populism’s “movement politics” represented a sophisticated approach to economic and political organization. In an age dominated by rapid industrialization, populism offered a “humane alternative,” and a way for farmers to avoid becoming a “dependent class.” Yet, even though Coxey’s March symbolically represented precisely such an alternative, Goodwyn’s trailblazing work pays

it very little attention. Nor in his emphasis on movement politics does he discuss the way the March was organized, or its precedent-setting form of democratic expression. Interestingly, Goodwyn devotes more attention to Henry Vincent, the prairie populist, whose roots date to a radical cult of agrarian populism in Kansas. Vincent, as it turned out was chosen by Coxey and Browne to be the official chronicler of Coxey’s March.17

Similarly, Robert McMath’s *American Populism* devotes more verbiage to Vincent than to Coxey. However, McMath does pose a question fundamental to this dissertation when he asks how different the producers’ movement trajectory might have been had it followed the spontaneous path of the industrial armies rather than the rigid institutionalized path laid before them by the leaders of Populist Party. McMath focuses on the very “cultures of protest” beyond agriculture, including the Greenback movement so fundamental to understanding Coxey. Coxey, a devout Greenbacker, became one of the most ardent supporters of “soft money” divorced from specie (gold or silver). He argued for an expanding supply of incontrovertible “Legal Tender” (a term he proudly used to name his infant son), backed simply by the full faith and credit of the United States. Yet in spite of this Greenback allegiance, McMath fails to connect Coxey’s March to this important monetary component of the producerist philosophy.18

Moreover, two of the most prominent treatments of the intense monetary debate raging during this period also fail to develop any strong connection with

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Coxey and his greenback monetary philosophy. With his Good Roads Plan Coxey promoted the issuance of bonds that would infuse new dollars into the depressed economy. These dollars would then be devoted to the construction of Good Roads and put the unemployed millions back to work. Nonetheless, Irwin Unger in his *The Greenback Era* fails to mention Coxey at all, and Gretchen Ritter in her more recent *Goldbugs and Greenbacks* devotes only a sentence.

Thus, though Coxey himself would run for office as a bona fide Populist, he does not seem to occupy more than an incidental relation to late nineteenth century populist history. Longer treatments of Coxey, such as those included in H.W. Brands *Reckless Decade* or Nell Irvin Painter’s *Standing at Armageddon*, also view the Coxey phenomenon as a separate episode best described in terms of class struggle. And Lucy Barber’s account in *Marching on Washington*, while revealing many previously undiscovered sources, emphasizes the significance of this episode as the first March to Washington, rather than as a quintessential expression of late nineteenth century populist fervor.

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19 Coxey ran for the Ohio Senate as a Greenback Party candidate in 1885, and as a Populist for Congress in 1894 and Governor in 1895; Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 52-58; 260. Unger discusses the “Producerist” philosophy that saw value created not by capital formation, but by the output of honest labor. This philosophy, regardless of whether Coxey consciously knew he was an adherent, was nonetheless very much at the center of his monetary philosophy. Moreover, it colored his “republican” notions of obligation to the larger society, or *Commonweal*. Ritter details how the money debate drew reformers together, regardless of their particular reformist passion. She sees populism as one of many forms of anti-monopolism, and the “last in a long line.” In a theme that becomes evident with the discussion of the Coxey March, Ritter notes “The money debate became a place where other political conflicts over citizenship, nationalism, race, and gender were aired.” This allows her to develop a nuanced argument as to why labor and agrarian reformers never quite fused.

20 Andrew R. L. Canton, *Ohio: The History of a People* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2002), 202; H. W. Brands, *The Reckless Decade: American in the 1890’s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 160-176; Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1897), 117-121. H.W. Brands in his well constructed narrative on the Gilded Age, devotes considerable descriptive text to Coxey, associating the march with labor protests such as the Homestead (1892) and Pullman (1894) strikes, but does not seek to provide any further analysis. Nell Irvin Painter also pays Coxey significant attention in her thematic treatment of how the dispossessed took issue with the propertied elites; Ritter, *Goldbugs*, 52-58; 260.
Not only do historians of this period find little reason to focus on the March, but the three previous comprehensive treatments of Coxey’s March itself fail to place the March squarely in the context of populism. More narrative than interpretive, these treatments place the March in the context of the other industrial armies that Coxey’s March inspired. Such an approach creates its own tautological and self contained logic. Examining Coxey in the context of these other marches simultaneously coming eastward from points as distant as San Francisco and Los Angeles can go no further than the use of the term “industrial army” allows. Although these separate works by Henry Vincent, Donald McMurry, and Carlos Schwantes, offer hints of other possible interpretations, each became consumed with not only the narratives of Coxey’s March but each of the others as well. Reviewers seem to agree with Austin Kerr’s summation that Schwantes narrative style “serves him well for explaining the dimensions of the protest but limits a full analysis of its significance.” The same may be said of similar structural approaches chosen by Vincent and McMurry. The stories they tell are fascinating, but the interpretation lacks any larger sense of context.\(^{21}\)

At the time he began chronicling Coxey’s March, Vincent was in Chicago editing the radical populist newspaper *The Nonconformist*. He arrived in Massillon the day before the March left and departed it two weeks later (April 6) at McKeesport Pennsylvania in order to hurry back to Chicago and begin writing. He saw his book as a way to raise money for the other industrial armies Coxey inspired. As the designated

“official historian” of the March, Vincent’s _The Story of the Commonweal_, released at almost the very same time Coxey was being sentenced for trespassing on the grounds of the Capitol, compared the Ohioan to an heroic fifteenth-century British insurrectionist, Jack Cade. The author marveled at the courage of ill clad and hungry foot soldiers marching through the cold over the Allegheny Mountains. His quickly–written but eloquent volume praised the boldness of Coxey’s proposed Good Roads Program and criticized the short sightedness of those who rejected it. Vincent enticed recruits for the March and witnessed it firsthand. Indeed in 1888 he led his own pilgrimage of populist followers to Dallas for the convention of the Texas Farmers’ Alliance. His narrative concludes before the March reaches Washington. He claimed, however, it had the endorsement of the leaders of what he called the “great industrial movement.”

Like Vincent, McMurry places Coxey in the context of the industrial armies with intriguing central characters such as Charles T. Kelly, who led his own army out of San Francisco, or General Lewis C. Fry, who departed from Los Angeles. These marches resulted in confrontational and violent episodes such as the commandeering of trains in Montana, and dramatic standoffs with local officials in Nebraska and Iowa. At one point, the larger industrial army phenomenon included at least seven other armies moving across the country and perhaps as many as one hundred thousand men. But McMurry

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22 Vincent, _Commonweal_ refers to March’s similarities to actions led by Jack Cade, 39-47; Piehler, “Vincent: Kansas Populist,” 14, provides a description of Vincent’s role as a journalist editing the _Nonconformist_. Vincent’s place in the Farmers State Alliance of Kansas appears in Lawrence Goodwyn, _The Populist Moment_ (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) 61-66; and McMurry, _Coxey’s Army_, 45, mentions Vincent’s role in the March including his recruitment efforts in Chicago and the early publication of _The Story_ and it use to raise money; “Coxey’s 100 Recruits,” _Boston Daily Globe_ (March 25, 1894) 1, places Vincent in Massillon as the March departed. Piehler’s doctoral dissertation, _Vincent: A Case Study in Political Deviancy_ (University of Kansas, 1975) provides an excellent account of Vincent’s coming and going from the March and his political connection to Coxey (see pages 1-12; 83-88).
cannot wholly reconcile the industrial army movement with his perception of the prevailing agrarian-based nature of populism. He does readily acknowledge that the industrial army movement gained support from both farmers and laborers. And although he sees congruence between the March’s adherence to ideas embodied in the Omaha Platform and populism generally, he sees the two as distinct. McMurry thus concludes that Coxeyism “was, for the most part, Populism,” but asserts “Populism, of course, was much broader than Coxeyism,” though he does not develop this point further. Writing well before the development of a more defined populist historiography, McMurry does mention how the industrial armies seemed an important link “between labor and agrarian discontent.” And he summarizes, “The sympathy of prominent members of the People’s Party for oppressed humanity led them to support the industrials both in speech and action.” But McMurry does not elaborate on these very important observations as this dissertation will.23

Like Vincent and McMurry, Schwantes also places Coxey in the context of the industrial army movement. He does so in particularly captivating detail, toggling back and forth between the various marches. In his preface he suggests the historical richness of the Coxey phenomena, but then acknowledges that his own work displays a narrative style which simply touches on many aspects of nineteenth-century life. He freely

23 McMurry, *Coxey’s Army*, 260-285; McMurry notes that farmers often tended to view internal improvement questions in terms of easing their transportation challenges, rather than in providing jobs (see page 279). In this dissertation we will show that farmer’s sympathies for Coxey were rooted in the same Populist vision of a different kind of economy, one more republican in its emphasis on addressing the needs of the entire community rather than aggrandizing individual wealth. William F. Holmes, “Populism: In Search of Context,” *Agricultural History* 64, no.4 (Autumn, 1990): 42; suggests “populism can be seen as an “anti-capitalist republican movement of small producers.” The promise of Coxey’s March and its broad appeal in rural communities thus represented more than just an idea for Good Roads for which farmers would not have to pay, but also a more just economy that would provide fairness and opportunity.
acknowledges how he sought to allow “the march itself to be a dramatic vehicle by which to conduct readers through the mainstream of American life in the 1890’s, as well as into some of its bizarre and now forgotten byways.” Therefore, Schwantes work is largely descriptive of Coxey’s Army as well as the progress of the other industrial armies moving eastward in the spring of 1894. It is a prodigiously researched work with excellent accounts of each industrial army’s progress across America. In his final chapter, Schwantes attempts to connect the Coxey phenomena to a larger “western history,” where highly transitory wage worker populations became ready-made recruits for tramp armies. Schwantes emphasizes the marcher’s desire for honest work in the context of a frontier ethic. He concludes his *Coxey’s Army* by suggesting that the story at its roots is a case study of how ordinary citizens influence politics without elaborating its connection to the broader populism of the period.24

Thus each of these three prior treatments of Coxey’s March do so in the context of the other industrial armies moving eastward in the spring of 1894. Each seems to be making an argument that this migration of industrials created its own unique place in the period. In other words, each argues that the industrial armies in their totality created a

24 Carlos Schwantes, *Coxey’s Army: An American Odyssey*. (Moscow ID: University of Idaho Press, 1985). In an article three years after publication of his book on Coxey, Schwantes sought to develop a construct he first posed, but did not further develop in *Coxey’s Army*. He found an ironic coincidence in the delivery by historian Frederick Jackson Turner of his famous “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in July 1893, and the chance meeting of Carl Browne and Jacob Coxey there, which led to the conceptualization of the March. In his *Western Historical Journal* article Schwantes suggested that in fact the wageworker’s frontier knew no geographical boundaries and presented “a zone of extremely rapid transition from wilderness to industrial post frontier society.” Thus Schwantes helped cast further dimension to Turner’s albeit metaphorical, but much debated construct of the frontier as the defining element in shaping American democracy. Schwantes saw the Coxey movement in this context as an extension of the wageworker’s frontier and he put stock in the way Turner had assigned importance to the “psychological environment of the West.” This dissertation similarly draws from the coincidence of Turner’s lecture at roughly the same moment Coxey and Carl Browne met in Chicago and in Chapter Six addresses the significance by noting how the March became an embodiment of the insatiable and restless American energy, see Carlos A. Schwantes, “The Concept of the Wageworkers’ Frontier: A Framework for Future Research,” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (January, 1987): 39-55.
separate historical space apart from the populist moment. Thus the three analyses suggest that though the industrial armies do exude some populist characteristics, they should be more accurately viewed as manifestations of labor unrest.  

**Industrial Army Paradigm**

It is tempting to leave the Coxey episode in this comfortable space as its own self-contained spasm of class-labor unrest. Indeed, taken as a whole, the industrial armies seemed to display the anxieties of the working class and those suffering from the depression. Coxey’s March and the industrial army movement are, in this narrow sense, very much about creating the conditions for a more “democratic capitalism.” Yet, while the labor-class construct is very much a part of the populist narrative, in this case it should not subsume it. Populism attracted proponents from across the social spectrum and it possessed at least three other attributes that distinguish it from the simple expression of class unrest.

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25 Pollack, *Populist Response*, 35; Ray Stannard Baker, *American Chronicle* (New York: Charles Scribner’s and Sons, 1945), 19; Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down and Out and On the Road: The Homeless in American History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 19. E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), 9; Thompson notes “class happens when some men as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared) feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves and against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed) to theirs.” Sean Wilentz has appropriately cautioned that when explaining the tortured efforts to carve out a distinctive American class historiography, it is important to note that European class historiography now views class consciousness as infinitely more complicated than Marxist or structuralist interpretations would have it with their earlier attempts to map a proletarian solidarity. For Wilentz’s nuanced views on class in America see Sean Wilenz, *Chants Democratic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 15-19.

26 As Postel notes “Populism arose from a rare mixture of farm and labor agitation, stirred with visions of future possibilities that, to a remarkable degree, transcended traditional social barriers.” Postel, 228; Michael Barkun, “Coxey’s Army as a Millennial Movement,” *Religion* 18 (1988): 363-389; The terminology of “democratic capitalism” is used frequently by Norman Pollack in his earliest writing on populism in *The Populist Mind* (1967) and later as his views evolved see Norman Pollack, *The Just Polity: Populism, Law, and Human Welfare* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 5 notes “Populists intended therefore to construct an economy and a supportive culture of democratic capitalism…..”
First, Coxey and his flamboyant accomplice Browne enveloped the March in a dizzying array of religious and utopian symbolism characteristic of late nineteenth century populism. The March exuded a rich millennial optimism in the promise of America. This spectacle its creators referred to as “The Commonweal of Christ,” surrounded itself with religious banners, colorful wagons, and brass bands, and carried a message of religious hope rather than worker anger. Evangelical religion’s message of salvation from earthly inequality seemed entwined with the populist prairie fervor. As Walter Nugent suggests, the populist Farm Alliances were spiced with a messianic call to economic redemption. Indeed, as Peter Argersinger also suggests, the Alliance movement provided “solace and support” for downtrodden farmers. And unlike the staid voice of the established churches, it created a vision of a cooperative society that offered hope. To Argersinger, populism was not simply an economic and political movement, but one with its own share of mystic leaders and evangelical messages. Similarly, Coxey’s March enveloped itself in a religious and millennial imagery of hopefulness and possibility. It was a peaceful march promising economic salvation, even though its detractors would try to associate it with class insurrection and anarchy.  

Second, the March conveyed a bold plan for the construction of public works directed by the federal government, rather than a specific set of grievances over wages or hours directed at a specific employer. Coxey’s Good Roads plan echoed an earlier

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27 Walter Nugent, The Tolerant Populists: Kansas Populism and Nativism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1963) 58; Peter H. Argesinger, The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism: Western Populism and American Politics (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1995), 64-79. Argersinger in addressing Pentecostal populist politics notes that “Structurally and functionally the Farmer’s Alliance resembled the church in Kansas. An Alliance lecturer reported that the Kansas Alliance was “semi religious, for every member must be a believer in the existence of a Supreme Being,” and all the meetings are opened and closed with a prayer.” See also Vincent, Commonweal, 50-51; Kazin, Populist Persuasion, 13.
nineteenth-century producerist philosophy espoused by Henry Carey, with its vision of a Jeffersonian national network of town centers connected by roads and canals, and serving both small manufacturers and small farmers. As Bicha suggests in his study of four leading Populist leaders, the late nineteenth-century version of populism stressed the “classical market and atomized polity, and the diminution of the dimensions and responsibility of government.” If Populists advocated government control of banking, rail transportation, and telegraph communication, it was because public ownership represented a way to level the economic playing field on behalf of the producer. The Populists were not interested in big government, but one independent of the disproportionate influence of the monopolists and their “friends in high places.”

Unlike classic labor-class unrest that manifest itself in demands against an employer (Homestead) or industry (Railroad strike of 1877), the bold plans of populist reformers like Coxey’s were tied to a broader economic philosophy of producerism. Producerism sought to level the playing field for “the millions of small-scale, land owning farmers, businessmen and wage earners,” so they might more effectively compete against the corporate concentration of wealth in the trusts. Coxey’s Plan would not only create jobs for the unemployed at decent wages, but a system of national roads that would lift up the economy and with it these producers who toiled in obscurity. Coxey Good Roads Plan was not about welfare or relief, but a systematic way to put men back to work.

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while building commercial infrastructure. Coxey repeatedly pointed out to his critics that his men were self-reliant. Like other bold populist ideas such as the graduated income tax or public ownership of transportation, Coxey’s Plan sought to level the economic playing field against the wealthy plutocrats. As Coxey planned to say when he reached the Capitol steps:

We stand here today on behalf of millions of toilers whose petitions have been unresponded to, and whose opportunities for honest, remunerative, productive labor have been taken from them by unjust legislation protecting idleness, speculators, and gamblers.

Though a presentist view might see Coxey’s Plan as a precursor to a later twentieth-century “big government” model, in fact what he sought was government that intervened on behalf of its citizens rather than in lock step with the “friends” of corporate interests. As Pollack discerned in his analysis of Populist statements, what these reformers sought was a larger public realm that “…would take charge of matters affecting both the general welfare [transportation] and the sectors of the economy that did not admit to competition.”

Finally Coxey’s March reached beyond the labor-class divide, and like the populist movement itself brought all producers together under a common cause. Ironically, the very same populist historiography which gives Coxey such short shrift, nonetheless recognizes the central role the industrial laborer played in the development of a broad alliance of producers that coalesced under the Populist umbrella. As early as 1962, Pollack, after undertaking an in-depth examination of the populist writings,

established that farmers felt a keen sense of common ground with their fellow industrial producers. Similarly, Hahn’s examination contained in *The Roots of Southern Populism* describes how the Knights of Labor became closely allied with the Southern Farmer’s Alliance. Hahn suggests just how factory laborers shared with farmers in “a vision of a cooperative commonwealth of producers.”

And, though most historians of the period continue in the tradition of starting their analysis with examination of rural populism and then sparingly bridge to its tenuous partnership with labor, Matthew Hild recently turned this order upside down. Hild, in his treatment of populism, gives full weight to the importance of The Knights of Labor’s early overtures to Farmers Alliances in the South. Similarly reinforcing the broader alliance beyond labor or farm boundaries, Postel asserts “Populism signified a melding of rural reform with working class and urban constituencies.” Indeed, Coxey’s March is best understood in this broader context of the alliance between what Gene Clanton effectively referred to as the alliance of “tillers and toilers.” The inchoate and often fragile relationship between farm and factory workers is central to understanding Coxey and the populist moment and how in its multiple dimensions it can be seen as much more than an episode of labor-class protest.


31 Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists* (Athens GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2007) 45-121; Postel, *Populist Vision*, 205. What seemed a natural union of producers was resisted by prominent labor leaders such as American Federation of Labor (AFL) leader Samuel Gompers. Gompers viewed the Peoples Party as composed mainly of “employing” farmers rather than “employed” farmers, and therefore hardly representative of the true producer. On the other hand, Eugene Debs would go so far as to recommend a new experimental state with industrial and farm workers working side by side. The period is marked by repeated examples of farmers and industrials working together in common cause; Postel describes Debs colonization scheme in *Populist Vision* on page 241; Clanton, *Humane Preference*, 1. See also Debs and Populist affiliation in Nick Salvatore, *Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 156-161.
Consistently throughout the late nineteenth century, farm and labor leaders found ways to unite politically in order to fight back against distant corporate middlemen who controlled prices, bankers who charged penurious interest rates, and the rail trusts that controlled when and at what cost produce reached its market. Moreover, the new corporatized industrial economy was creating a growing interdependency between farm and town, city wage worker and rural country farmer. By 1892, the Populist Omaha Platform responded to the pleas of the Knights of Labor and among its planks, resolved that the “union of the labor forces of the United States this day consummated should be permanent and perpetual.” And despite their stereotypes of one another as Huns or hayseeds, industrial laborers and rural farmers shared a common revulsion with the impacts of a new corporate economy that allowed them to come together amicably under the banner of the Peoples Party.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{32} Clanton describes the formation of the People’s Party beginning with a meeting of farm and labor reform groups that gathered in St. Louis in 1889. Their meeting resulted in formation of the National Farmers’ Alliance and Industrial Union (NFA & IU). Yet though the two parts of this umbrella remained largely distinct, their interaction over the period 1889-1891 created a dynamic that served functionally as the precursor to the People’s Party. As Clanton notes on page 23, the issue for the disparate group of populist reformers was whether some sort of third political party was necessary; See Clanton, \textit{Humane Preference}, 1-24; Also for the text of the Southern Alliance and Knights of Labor joint platform (and the Platform of the Northern Alliance) see George Brown Tindall, \textit{A Populist Reader} (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 75-79; Indeed prior to the formation of the People’s Party, the efforts to combine the disparate voices of populism under a single national political banner had also failed. As early as 1887, at an earlier Cincinnati convention, labor, anti-monopolists, farmer alliances, and veteran Greenbackers met to solidify into the Union Labor Party. But their candidate Alson J. Streeter of Illinois captured a little over 100,000 votes. Four years later, when the National Reform Conference met again in Cincinnati (1891), the platform contained planks that “sympathized with the ordinary workingman to shorten the hours of labor, and demand a rigid enforcement of the existing eight hour law on government work...” It also recognized agrarian Charles Macune’s sub-treasury plan. Many populist leaders understood that the reciprocity between labor and farm interests remained essential to the future of the populist cause. What would seem a natural cultural divide between urban wage earner and rural farmers became increasingly concealed by the tacit acknowledgement of their growing interdependency; See Philip S. Foner, \textit{History of the Labor Movement in the United States (Vol. 2): From the Foundings of the A.F. of L. to the Emergence of American Imperialism} (New York: International Publishers: 1955), 287-289; 300-303; Also “Open Letters,” \textit{The Century Illustrated Magazine} 47 (November, 1893): 475; Jackson Lears, \textit{Rebirth of a Nation} (New York: Harpers Collins, 2009), 133-166, provides an excellent treatment of the similarities and tensions existing between city and rural producers, but ultimately their growing sense of interdependency.
Perhaps then it is not surprising that whether travelling on rural paths near Salem Pennsylvania or proudly walking through the crowded streets near Pittsburgh, onlookers warmly greeted Coxey’s March. His bold plan to put producers back to work, and the imagery of the marching unemployed seemed to resonate regardless of the occupation or geography of those watching it pass. Labor sympathizers who lined the streets near Homestead provided their own warm welcome just as the farmers in rural Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Maryland reached out to support a spectacle that represented their core concerns. Coxey’s plan for a national system of good roads challenged the powerful railroads and their land speculators because it would leave no farm community without access to markets. Coxey’s plan focused on poor rural communities which did not have the means to build or repair roads. In his view, these were precisely the communities that needed good roads the most.33

Therefore, though one cannot exclude the class paradigm when discussing late nineteenth century populism, when applied to Coxey it must be in the context not just of workers, but of producers writ large. Indeed, Pollack, who had earlier adopted a more Marxian view of populism, would later come to describe it as a movement that respected the tenets of an earlier entrepreneurial market capitalism which valued private property, as long as it respected the rights of others. Pollack thus saw the Populists as presenting a viable critique of the ascendant corporate capitalism, seeking instead a more democratic

market system that valued the producer. What they sought, as Pollack wrote revisiting populism again later (1990), was a market that operated independent of the state, and an independent state that operated without enabling the largest enterprises at the expense of the smallest.  

In their representation of the March as a hopeful procession of producers, Coxey also valiantly tried to counter the long held stigmas that had associated the unemployed with weakness. The men were distinguishable not because of their own inadequacy, but because the corporate system denied them employment. “They are travelling for a principle,” Coxey would say as they left Massillon, referring to his plan to put the unemployed back to work by building good roads. The sympathetic Vincent observed in his contemporary account that the marchers were men who “had really tried to find work and failing in that, had joined the movement in the hope of bettering their conditions.” In this regard, the desire of northern industrial workers for decent jobs parallels the similar desires of southern farm workers. Bruce Palmer noted that farmers joining the southern Farm Alliance movement simply wanted to own their own land, sell their own crops, and realize the just fruits of their work. In short they asked to be in control of their own economic destiny outside of the corporate system, even if it required the government to intervene.  

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For these and for many other reasons which we now explore, placing Coxey’s March in the context of various industrial armies marching eastward, or describing it as merely a spasm of class antagonism, misses its broader connections to the needs of late nineteenth century workers, whether on the farm or in the factory. In this dissertation, the other industrial armies will receive only passing mention rather than equal treatment. While each of these, such as Kelly’s from San Francisco, Frye’s from Los Angeles, or Randall’s from Chicago, present fascinating human interest narratives well captured by Vincent, McMurry, and Schwantes, their leaders joined rather than led a phenomenon that originated with Coxey. As Schwantes notes, the only “distinguishing badge of the western Coxeyite was the stolen train.” On the other hand, Coxey’s March displayed far more. Coxey and his maverick accomplice Browne had the ideas that propelled the industrial army movement forward both in form and substance. Moreover, based upon the contributions and insights of many others, this dissertation will challenge the way Coxey is viewed; not as incidentally, but as the quintessentially populist, and challenging the very direction of the Populist Party.  

Populist Connection

The Coxey spectacle elicited both great admiration and registered deep concern because it captured the essence of the ongoing producers’ protest against the monopolists. If words such as “insurrection” and “revolution” were used to describe the impending

36 Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 195; As Pollack concluded in his second look at the producer uprising of the late nineteenth century (i.e., The Humane Economy, xi) “Populist political discourse was always primarily about power relations and the foundations of authority, and only secondarily (or when the context was appropriate) about the electoral process and politics.”
arrival of unemployed in Washington, choosing such terms simply served to reinforce how Coxey’s genuinely populist expression resonated not only with those who supported it, but those who saw it as threatening. Like the populist movement, the March bridged the rural and urban divide, extolled the dignity of the producer, spoke to a broader sense of community obligation, and reached out to African Americans. Coxey’s March rekindled a waning populist energy and challenged the direction of the loose knit coalition of farmers and laborers that had formalized under the banner of the People’s Party.

Before telling the actual story of Coxey’s March in Chapter Five, this dissertation places Coxey’s idea for good roads, his decision to march, and his presentation of spectacle in an historical context that connects them with late nineteenth century small “p” populism. This contextualization of the various components of the March occurs in the first three chapters. Coxey’s Plan, as described in Chapter One, drew from the ideas of earlier reform-minded businessmen. It displayed the same boldness that typified other populist reformers from Charles Macune’s Sub-Treasury proposal or Henry George’s Single Tax idea. Coxey’s Good Roads Plan summoned forth the republican values of America’s founders and their sense of a shared national community. It relied on a Greenback monetary outlook that aligned with a well established nineteenth-century economic philosophy that extolled the producer—whether factory worker or country farmer—as the primary creator of economic value. Carey, the intellectual godfather of producerism, said it best in his *Principles of Political Economy*, “the value of commodities, at the time of production, is measured by the quantity and quality of labour
required to produce them.” Moreover, as his views progressed, Carey came to envision an active role for government to insure the producer’s welfare, including public works. Carey’s vision as explained in the first chapter and as translated into Coxey’s plan, offered an alternative model to the suddenly ascendant corporate industrialism that both extolled and rewarded those who triumphed in the jungle of a laissez faire economy.37

Various historians have suggested, the triumph of a modern industrial capitalism was not inevitable. As Alan Trachtenberg observed, the People’s Party became the viable alternative for the small producer, believing that an “America incorporated represented a misappropriation of the name [America].” The well researched biography of Coxey by Embrey Bernard Howson, as well as works by Sidney Fine and Gerald Berk provide significant insight into this alternative producerist tradition. This outlook also contributed to Coxey’s early adherence to greenback monetary philosophy and his life-long dedication to improving the condition of working people. The producerists, as articulated in Carey’s American School of economics, envisioned a nation of small manufacturers and farmers in a cooperative network of small communities tied together by public works. They saw this atomized society of responsible producers to be consistent with the founders’ vision and later advocates of an American System, notably Henry Clay and John Calhoun. In his allegiance to this outlook and his dedication to reform, Coxey joined an alternative genre of businessmen, who challenged the corporate business model.

Though not necessarily members of the Populist Party like Coxey, their adherence to a more humane, community-based capitalism set them apart from their corporate rivals. In the late nineteenth century dialogue over the shape of the future of the American economy they still occupied much of the ground.\(^\text{38}\)

Not only was Coxey’s plan intellectually consistent with the early producerist roots of the late nineteenth-century populist agitation, but as Chapter One describes, it represented a characteristically bold populist plan for reform. Coxey envisioned the federal government underwriting $500 million that would allow any government entity to issue non-interest bearing bonds, thus raising the money necessary to fund the construction of good roads. This not only amounted to the equivalent of the entire federal budget, but dwarfed any other ideas promoted by his contemporary Good Roads advocates. When Coxey marched, what passed for a road system was simply the means to move short distances locally. Typically, America’s roads were considered uniformly bad, “and all were treated with equal neglect.”\(^\text{39}\)

Before Coxey’s idea, improving America’s dilapidated road system had emerged as a practical cause of bicycle enthusiasts who yearned for smoother surfaces. In the brief period of a decade following its formation in 1881, the League of American Wheelmen evolved from a group dedicated solely to recreational bicycling enthusiasts into a political


coalition of farmers, railroads, and industrialists. By 1892 a National Good Roads League took up the wheelmen’s banner. Led by bicycle manufacturing magnate Colonel Albert Pope and longstanding Good Roads advocate General Roy Stone, the League created an Office of Road Inquiry in the U.S. Department of Agriculture in 1893 with a whopping three employees. The Secretary quickly admonished the Office to encourage only state and local financing of Good Roads, and to leave the federal government in the role of conducting surveys of road conditions and educating the public.  

Coxey framed the idea much more boldly. He sought to transform the Good Roads idea from one of politely surveying and educating, into a massive public works construction program that would provide jobs for millions of unemployed Americans. As he would make clear later in post-March testimony to Congress in 1895, he cared far more deeply about how to finance a road than he did about building a good one. He left it to other Good Roads advocates to be concerned about road surveys, offices of Good Roads, and the techniques of road repair. Coxey’s Plan sought to infuse new money immediately into a depressed economy and put men back to work.

Yet it is unlikely that Coxey’s approach to promoting his plan would have garnered the attention it did without his purely chance meeting with the eccentric itinerant painter and sandlot activist Browne. As Chapter Two describes, Browne and Coxey began to discuss the possibility of a March to Washington at a rowdy meeting of silver and greenback advocates held in the shadows of the Chicago Columbian

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Exposition in August 1893. There the cowboy-suited Browne befriended the straight-laced Coxey. As best we can discern from the remaining records, it was Browne who convinced Coxey to undertake a physical march to Washington to convey his bold ideas. While there is certainly no evidence Coxey or Browne chose this form of democratic expression as a deliberate challenge to the political operatives within the People’s Party, there is ample evidence that both agreed a march would be the best way to dramatize the need for the adoption of Coxey’s Plan.⁴²

As described in Chapter Two, at the time Coxey marched, the leaders of the Populist Party increasingly embraced the tactics of “fusion politics.” They saw alliance with established parties as the only practical way to bring their bold ideas into the mainstream of American politics. By contrast, Coxey’s March represented the sort of direct democratic expression that had characterized earlier efforts by the Farmer’s Alliances and Knights of Labor to bypass the smoke-filled rooms of party bosses, patronage, and deal making. The idea for a genuine protest march struck a powerful chord. Indeed, Coxey’s March would offer an alternative to the stale political tactics now embraced by Populist fusionists. One contemporary observer noted that Coxey’s movement, particularly the decision to physically convey his plan by marching an army of unemployed to the Capitol steps, represented something “unique in its inception,

⁴¹ As confirmed by archivists at the Massillon Museum and as indicated by Michael Sweeney, “The Desire for the Sensational,” Journalism History 23, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997): 115, “…many of Browne’s and Coxey’s personal papers were destroyed in a fire at Coxey’s home in the fall of 1894.”
different from any other in the history of our country, and indeed, quite unlike ordinary revolutionary experiments."\(^{43}\)

In its brief moment, Coxeyism thus became the revitalized voice of populist grassroots protest. Coxeyism was a genuinely democratic expression, a “petition of boots” with roots as far away as English Chartist marches and as near as labor protest parades that moved through the Pennsylvania communities surrounding where Coxey spent his early years. This direct form of petitioning government challenged the increasingly political course of the People’s Party. The Populists, not unlike the two conventional parties it opposed, was comprised of party elites rather than the rank and file. Coxey’s strong belief in the continued viability of grassroots democracy reaffirms an important conclusion reached in this dissertation. Clanton notes Coxey’s March provided the Populists with a way to rekindle the waning democratic energy of an inchoate producer movement. As Coxey’s troops, the underdogs, left Massillon in the spring of 1894, populism stood at a crossroads. Coxey offered “a very different path” from the one that led the People's Party to be swallowed under the Democrat's 1896 banner of “free silver.”\(^{44}\)


\(^{44}\) Robert C. McMath, American Populism: A Social History 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), 186. Peter H. Argersinger, “‘A Place on the Ballot’ Fusion Politics and Anti-fusion Laws,” The American Historical Review 85, no. 2 (April, 1980): 287-306; Gene Clanton, Congressional Populism and the Crisis of the 1890’s (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1998); Gene Clanton, ‘Hayseed Socialism’ on the Hill: Congressional Populism 1891-1895, The Western Historical Quarterly 15, no. 2 (April, 1894):139-162; Peter H. Argersinger, The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1995); Peter H. Argersinger, “Populism and Politics,” in American Populism, ed. William F. Holmes (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1994) 81-89; Peter H. Argersinger notes that “the essence of Populism was that it was a political movement, prompted by popular anger with politics as usual, the indifference of political institutions, and the failure of political parties to represent the expressed interests of their constituents…. Unfortunately as it turned out, by 1890, many of the movement’s leaders thought forming their own political party, “The Peoples Party,” would be the best way to implement their ideas. They sought to realize the people’s agenda by achieving electoral majorities even if it meant compromising on some of their long held beliefs. When securing an electoral majority seemed elusive, they pragmatically turned to ally or “fuse” with their
The very spectacle created by Coxey and Browne gave prominent display to the disparate strands of populist fervor that Populist fusionism seemed to be suffocating. As discussed in Chapter Three, this drab ensemble of the plodding unemployed at times seemed almost the anti-spectacle. Yet in its realistic representation, it aligned well with the period’s mimetic preference as expressed in a so-called “New Naturalism” that defined Gilded Age literature. Coxey and Browne did not set out to deliberately challenge the direction of the Populist Party, nor did they intend to create a spectacle. Yet they did seek to draw attention to Coxey’s ideas for Good Roads and full employment and in this they succeeded beyond any reasonable expectation. The March became a vivid representation of the conditions of the four million unemployed throughout America.

Browne went to lengths to put his artistic skills to work, draping the accompanying wagons with colorful banners that suggested the second coming of Christ consistent with his own conversion to Theosophy, a religion with origins in Asian mysticism. Moreover, by giving prominent roles to Native and African Americans, the March seemed a logical extension of the Commonweal’s religious essence. It also exuded a tolerant attitude that posed a challenge to the pervading racist climate of this Jim Crow era.

Perhaps motivated by witnessing the futility of conventional populist political expressions, Coxey and Browne chose a more dramatic way to express the frustration of sympathizers in the established Republican and Democratic parties. As a political institution, the People’s party thus came to be dominated by its own party operatives. Names such as national People’s Party Chairman Herman A. Taubeneck represented the sort of pragmatic political elites now dedicated to the tactical machinations of how to achieve electoral majorities. As Argersinger argues, when energetic small “p” populism transformed into an institutional big “P” Populism by forming its own political party, the movement seemed to lose its spontaneity, its energy, and its evangelical fervor. By the time Coxey marched, the political operatives within the People’s Party were well on their way toward this so-called “fusion” with the Democrats under a banner of free silver. Coxey meanwhile seemed to be marching in another direction that summoned the passions of the people in their protest against the concentration of wealth under a system of corporate capitalism.
producers. Their march had roots in the symbolic politics of protest parades. It also
 gaudily displayed religious and millennial iconography in a way that might draw
 attention to Coxey’s Good Roads Plan for full employment. At the same time, the reality
 of a small troupe of drably dressed men marching across the countryside toward their
 nation’s capital provided a sort of anti-spectacle which seemed to resonate with hundreds
 of thousands of well wishers. They eagerly flocked to roadsides along the almost four
 hundred mile route in order to connect with this movable representation of the bleak
 economic reality that had overtaken the country. The spectacle of Coxey’s March clearly
 offered an alternative to the tactics of Populist politicians.

 This disparity of themes subsumed under the banner of the Commonweal of
 Christ was on display from the outset. Coxey and Browne chose Easter Sunday to depart
 because it represented a day of redemption and hope. An observer could behold in this
 spectacle, symbols that spoke to economic justice, national community, and racial
 diversity. Browne painted banners announcing “Peace on Earth, God Will towards Men,
 But Death to Interest on Bonds.” Coxey’s older son, Jesse, mounted on a blooded
 stallion, wore a blue gray ensemble to signify the union of opposing forces in the Civil
 War. Jasper Johnson Buchanan, an African American standard bearer, held the American
 flag at the front of the procession.

 As this Spectacle departed Massillon it was indeed an ensemble of diverse and
 intriguing images. Two years after the historic strike at Homestead, one of its leaders,
 Hugh O’Donnell was prominent at the procession’s lead. Bedecked in his usual cowboy
 fatigue, Browne was mounted upon a white stallion. Behind Browne came Doc
“Cyclone” Kirkland, the astrologer from Pittsburgh who had predicted the next month “to be a hummer in a cyclonic way.” J. Thayer at the lead of the brass band conducted a variation on *Marching through Georgia*. To add to the colorful send off, some thirty colorful banners, prepared by Browne over the course of several weeks, now flapped in the breeze. One banner featured Browne as Christ. Another depicted Browne as the cerebellum of the Commonweal. Yet another presented Coxey as its cerebrum. The banners were a montage of illustrations and cartoons, images and sayings. A figure the press would anoint as “the Great Unknown,” perched on his own majestic brown stallion, darted back and forth shouting orders to the rank and file. The March Quartermaster, “Weary” Bill Iler, drove the colorful Panorama Wagon, but seemed despondent he could not ride separately at the head of the parade. In all, the procession consisted of four covered wagons containing “camping outfits, baled straw, and several quarters of beef.” Behind the dozen or so men on horses, came the carriage carrying the Coxey’s and their infant son, Legal Tender. 45

Indeed, this eclectic ensemble of characters and imagery reflected not only populist themes but populism’s essential lack of coherence. The spectacle appeared to some more cynical observers to be like a departing circus parade. Expanding upon

45 As with any historical accounts there are significant conflicts in various versions of the March’s departure. For example in “Mr. Coxey’s March,” *The Bismarck Daily Tribune*, 26 March 1894, the time given for departure is 12:30, which was the published time in original schedules; but both Browne and Baker say the March departed at 11 a.m. The composite description of the March’s departure provided here is from several sources including, “To Sing for the Army,” *The Chicago Record*, 21 March1894; Browne, *When Coxey’s Army March (sic)* (San Francisco: May, 1944) 8-9; Baker, *American Chronicle* 13-15.; McMurry, *Coxey’s Army* 46-48; Schwantes, *Coxey’s Army*, 42-48; and “On the March,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 26 March1894; “Stewart’s Advice,” *Rocky Mountain News*, 26 March 1894; “In Camp at Canton,” *Chicago Daily News*, 26 March 1894;George A. Gipe, “Rebel in a Wing Collar,” *American Heritage* 18, no.1 (December, 1966):25; “Off for Washington,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, 26 March 1894.; There also within these accounts discrepancies in the numbers of men who departed but Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 56, put the number at 122 and Schwantes *Coxey’s Army* agrees and McMurry refers to the “hundred industrials,” and others generally counted 75 to 200 actually belonging to the Commonweal as it departed.
interpretive themes suggested in a treatment of the March by Michael Barkun, Chapter Three describes how much of the March’s imagery connected to the millenarian.

Browne’s speeches stressed that the second coming was at hand and would be realized once the march reached the Capital. As Barkun asserts, “Coxey’s Army was at least as much a religious movement as it was an economic one.” Populists often integrated religion into their economic message. The Farmers Alliances typically exuded a religious aura and filled a void that the established churches could not fill in times of economic distress. Writing about the bonds between farmer and laborer, one preacher observed that the larger established churches did not engage in reform and in fact took liberal amounts of donations from “modern pirates.” The Alliance meeting places on the other hand increasingly became attractive havens for a more evangelical religion that conformed to the populist message.46

Related to the Commonweal’s representation of itself as the second coming of Christ the March also invoked a utopian vision associated with Edward Bellamy’s best selling utopian novel, Looking Backward (1888). It was Bellamy’s novel that helped popularize the very term “industrial army,” a term that became conveniently affixed to the March. Bellamy described how workers assembled in “industrial armies” could be humanely organized in order to produce the goods society needed. Bellamy envisioned a future economy with supply and demand in harmonious balance and wealth evenly distributed. Amongst Browne’s most spectacular murals were two entitled “The Prayer,”

(see Figure 4) and “The Prayer Answered,” (see Figure 5) which were based on Browne’s interpretation of Bellamy’s vision of a worker’s paradise on earth free of the tyrannical oppression of corporate tycoons.  

Yet juxtaposed against the millenarian and utopian, the March simultaneously presented to some the appearance of a nomadic “tramp army” preying upon innocent communities. The marchers’ disheveled appearance reinforced prejudices that they were unwelcome immigrants, anarchists, socialists, or criminals. In this era, the open rail car invited those needing shelter and mobility. Tramping became commonplace. Former Civil War soldiers who had grown accustomed to riding the rails found it a ready source of mobility in the post war era. As Kenneth Kusmer discusses in Down and Out and On the Road, tramping grew even more prevalent during the Panic of 1893. Throughout the March, Coxey and Browne struggled to separate The Commonweal from the shibboleths associated with tramping. Just as Populists apotheosized the producer, they reviled the tramp, and so Coxey went to great lengths to characterize the marchers as self-reliant, unemployed men who simply needed work. In an era where businessmen were idolized and Horatio Alger’s stories of self-made men were wildly popular, Coxey and Browne repeatedly suggested their men only wanted to pull themselves up like “ragged Dick.” Given the stigma associated with tramps, the two faced a difficult challenge. Critics of the March like The Chautauquan’s Shirley Plumer Austin, described the marchers as “devoid of character.”

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Perhaps this very stigma created the incentive to at least feign a semblance of military order. Indeed, the March on occasion exuded some semblance of martial discipline with the Unknown often barking formal commands as the marchers attempted to approximate orderly columns. At a minimum, in the way it organized itself, the March attempted to replicate the regimentation of the popular 1871 Paris Commune that captured not only Browne’s attention, but the public’s as well. In the moments leading up to the final march down Pennsylvania Avenue, Browne actually tried to drill the marchers in military maneuvers with wooden staves as substitutes for rifles.49

Thus as presented in Chapter Three, the Coxey Spectacle presented multiple, and very often conflicting images not unlike the uneven contours of populist protest of the previous two decades. As Postel notes, those looking for tidiness in the populist movement would be hard pressed to find it. Indeed the People’s Party itself “attracted sponsors of every type of innovation, from good roads enthusiasts to supporters of phonetic spelling and dietary reform.” Presenting so many varied themes, it is not surprising the similarly untidy Coxey spectacle not only captured the attention of many inhabitants in the towns and villages through which it passed, but also millions of newspaper readers. They found themselves able to follow each daily episode as if it were a serial novel conveniently playing out on the front pages of America’s papers. The spectacle was ready made for journalism in the midst of transition. Yet the unprecedented front page press coverage the March received in large measure disconnected it from its

more serious intent and thus created a legacy that also disconnected it from its very populist moorings.\textsuperscript{50}

**Reaction**

Having placed Coxey in the context of a broad based late nineteenth century populist movement, the dissertation now turns to answering why historians have failed to place it more squarely in this context. Much of that answer seems to lie in the impact of news coverage that made the March itself a front page story across America. On the one hand, by widely popularizing the event as a serial episode, the press connected the cause of the unemployed, though not necessarily Coxey’s ideas, to untold millions of readers. On the other hand, the superficial coverage, alarming headlines, and critical editorial coverage created a legacy for the March that separated it from its more serious purpose.

Indeed the press played a defining role in how the March was received. According to an analysis by Michael S. Sweeney, the Coxey episode generated the most newspaper coverage of any event since the Civil War, with the possible exception of the disputed presidential election of 1876. Indeed, the source material for Chapter Five, which chronicles the March itself, are well over 5,000 newspaper articles available through electronic search on accessible data bases. This vast historical record results from the reportage of some 44 reporters who came to Massillon attracted there by the stories of local *Massillon Independent* reporter Robert Skinner. Skinner’s stories began appearing on the Associated Press newswire several weeks before the scheduled Easter departure.

\textsuperscript{50} Postel, *Populist Vision*, 205-242.
As the March unfolded, at least a dozen reporters remained embedded in the March. They were accompanied by a lineman, who each evening would speed their stories to an increasingly mesmerized national audience.51

During the post Civil War era newspapers had begun to shuck their political orientation and become independent commercial enterprises rather than Party organs. Improvements in newspaper technology, reporting, and availability created the perfect opportunity for the March to capture the nation’s attention. In the vicious new circle of newspaper competition, circulation had to grow to attract advertising revenues. Chapter Four draws on those histories of journalism that focus on this transition from a political to what became known as a “yellow journalism,” a term not coined until 1897. In this transitional period of so-called “new journalism,” the human interest story became the prototype attracting to the field a new genre of college educated reporters, as well as famous writers including Jack London, Theodore Dreiser, and Frank Norris. The demands placed by editors for good writing and the emphasis on capturing reality joined well with the emerging literary genre perfected by the era’s preeminent author William Dean Howells. Stories about Coxey’s odyssey seemed reminiscent of Howell’s novels, marked by their artful depiction of the ordinary, the coincidental, and the ironic. Whether describing the simple negotiations at a toll booth along the March route, or the changing attitude of the mayor in a remote Pennsylvania hamlet, the day-to-day events that made up the routine of Coxey’s March became rich fodder in this journalistic era. As

51 Sweeney, “Desire for the Sensational,”114; The Library of Congress “Chronicling America” site reports some 5,467 pages with Coxey mentioned once if not multiple times, whereas only 1,429 for President Cleveland in the year 1894. Other search engines such as Pro Quest and Newspaper Archive produce similar ratios.
contemporary British journalist William Stead concluded, “every incident in the March to Washington has been chronicled with a minuteness of detail and, let me add, with a picturesque exercise of the imagination which has seldom been surpassed.”

Unlike Coxey and Browne, who often slept in the comfort of nearby hotels, the hardy corps of young reporters ate, drank, and slept with the marchers. Yet their relationship with the twin leaders was far from symbiotic. For example, in tiny Leetonia, Pennsylvania, Carl Browne excoriated the reporters for their cynical coverage. In a phrase eerily similar to one used by his San Francisco sandlot mentor Dennis Kearny, he dubbed the press corps the “Argus Eyed Demons from Hell.” While he seemed irritated by their coverage of the March, Browne also befriended many of the reporters. He realized that the March was conceived precisely to garner this sort of attention. Coxey also reveled in his newfound celebrity. During one of his three sojourns away from the Commonweal, he spent an evening with local Chicago reporters and missed his return train. Similarly, whatever their temporary annoyance, the marchers also came to realize the reporters created the reality that became the March. And reciprocally, the reporters realized the March empowered them as well.

By the sheer volume of its coverage the press popularized the Coxey saga over its five week duration in a way scarcely imaginable to Coxey or Browne. As Chapter Four indicates, the press unintentionally became the ultimate populist medium connecting

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millions of readers with Coxey’s story. As much as Coxey invested in circulating his Plan to a national network of sympathizers prior to the March, he could not have imagined the reach this event achieved in the daily news coverage. Indeed, the newspaper’s front page stories allowed readers across the country to connect with the March just as if they were firsthand observers. Thus in Chicago the young upstart reporter Ray Stannard Baker of *The Chicago Record*, covered the March in a style that would mark him for his later journalistic success as a muckraker. Baker connected his eager daily Chicago readership with the typically warm receptions the marchers experienced, and the genuine connection farmers and workingmen made with these unemployed industrials entering their communities. He wrote to his editor, “I am beginning to feel that the movement has some meaning, that it is a manifestation of the prevailing unrest and dissatisfaction among the laboring classes.”

Chapter Four notes that though the stories written by the dozen embedded reporters were for the most part sympathetic, they typically fixated on the superficial. Virtually none of the reportage addressed the substance of the speeches Coxey or Browne gave each night. Thus the routine day to day encounters of unemployed men marching from town to town overwhelmed the substance of Coxey’s Plan. Coupled with routinely harsh editorializing and derisive headlines, the press simultaneously created for the March a farcical image of ineptitude. The arrival at the nation’s capitol only served to reinforce the legacy of Coxey’s Army as a failure and marginalized the seriousness of its purpose. On May 2 *The Boston Globe* headlined “Coxey’s Waterloo,” *The Chicago*

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Daily Tribune “Coxey’s Farce Ends,” and The Washington Post “Climax of Folly.” The last stories that trickled across the front pages days later reported the dénouement as Coxey, Browne and Jones were sentenced to 22 days in jail. Like so many other populist forays, Coxey’s March had ended in spectacular failure; another bold reform idea that suffered an ignominious end.

Yet in recounting its day to day challenges, Chapter Five suggests the March deserves another legacy. The endurance of the core of about 120 marchers who persevered over the four hundred miles is testament to their belief in Coxey’s cause. And their sheer willfulness seemed to create its own respect, and an identification and connection among those who came to the roadsides to greet its arrival. Though it did not necessarily pass through areas that affiliated with the People’s Party, with little exception, the March received warm receptions at virtually every stop. This chapter, representing a composite account from the stories newspaper readers devoured over the five week duration of the March, depicts these receptions and how Coxey’s outreach to local sympathizers engendered both material and moral support. As Coxey’s Army arrived in the Monongahela Valley and approached the Homestead steelworks, they received their most tumultuous reception. The Homestead strike of 1892 still resonated. As Coxey’s column approached the former strike site, Elmer E. Bales, who lost his job because of his lead role at Homestead, led an escort to greet the marchers.

Nothing in these daily receptions the March received along the way, nor its paltry size, nor certainly its peaceful behavior should seem to have caused officials in the nation’s capital to fear violence might ensue. Indeed in the towns and hamlets along the
way, officials who at first cast a wary eye on the assemblage, typically were soon won over. Yet the sheer volume of news coverage and its constant speculation over the size and demeanor not simply of Coxey’s March, but more violent industrial armies coming from the west, caused growing concerns amongst officials in Washington. As Chapter Six concludes, Coxey’s impending arrival in the nation’s capital prompted officials to fortify the city. Moreover, Coxey’s own words did little to assuage the fears of federal and local officials. The response to Coxey stood in stark contrast to the matter of fact response that earlier greeted thirteen Populist members of Congress that won in the 1892 election and took their seats in the 53rd Congress.

Indeed, when these newly elected Populist members arrived in town in 1893, Republicans nor Democrats showed much interest or concern. The Congressional leadership from the two established parties did not even bother to invite them to their caucuses. By contrast, it did not take long after the announcement of Coxey’s March that the impending arrival of thousands of unemployed became a subject of great concern to President Cleveland, the Congress, and local police authorities. Indeed, as the March approached Washington, Coxey’s own words in interviews did little to allay mounting anxieties of a city unaccustomed to producer unrest and possessing neither an agricultural or industrial identity. From a distance, the March of industrials seemed a much rawer expression of the people’s voice. Moreover, many of the newspaper accounts of the western armies contained vivid imagery of rowdiness and violence, detailed accounts of trains being commandeered, and what eventually turned out to be an erroneous report of federal agents being shot by members of Frye’s Army in Montana. Congressional debate
soon reflected the fears that a more violent brand of “Coxeyism” was on its way to the Capital.

Both federal and District officials thus began to fortify the city, even erecting what was referred to as Fort Thurber outside the White House. Secret Service agents posing as new recruits infiltrated the March. Attorney General Richard Olney, following meetings of the cabinet called by the President, commanded federal troops to prevent the western armies from commandeering trains. As the Chicago Tribune editorialized, “It is not surprising that the motley ‘armies’ known as the ‘Commonweal,’ tramping, begging, or stealing rides from various parts of the country to Washington as the common center, have occasioned considerable anxiety on the part of the authorities of the District of Columbia and Maryland.” Unlike most of the small towns and villages that comprised the March route, Washington was neither a farm community nor an industrial center. Its product was a staid politics replete with lobbyists that served to enable the very corporations and trusts at the root of populist fervor. As Coxey marched, the city of Washington was emerging as a truly government town with an increasing number of college educated government employees supporting a growing federal bureaucracy. It was not clear, therefore, how Coxey’s Army would be received.55

As Chapter Six describes, from the time it arrived in Brightwood Park just outside the city, thousands rode to the park to welcome the marchers, and paid just to gaze upon this spectacle. On May Day, Coxey’s Army would march by cheering

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thousands lining the streets. As the army arrived at the Capitol, crowds grew so thick and chaotic that one reporter described the throng as it:

...filled the avenue from curb to curb and choked and surged at the narrow turn by the Peace Monument like a glut in a long stream. The police almost gave up fighting their way, and fell back to breathe their sweating horses, while the crowd yelled and cheered Coxey and the Commonweal and everything else connected with the movement great quote

Though the police would soon inflict violence to disperse this crowd, there was nothing in this May Day celebration of direct democracy that Washington residents seemed to fear.56

The reception was particularly warm among the city’s growing African American population. The Capital’s major African American newspaper, the Washington Bee, had heralded the arrival of the March since it left Massillon, with its weekly Saturday editions marked by the repeating headline, “Coxey is Coming.” On the final leg of the March that began at its Brightwood Park campgrounds, the marchers were greeted at fourteenth and W streets by a predominantly black “Citizens Reception Committee.” This warm and welcoming reception reflected an appreciation for Coxey’s emphasis on racial inclusiveness evidenced not only by several blacks within its ranks, but by a black standard bearer who seemed a most welcome symbol in a town where days before the March’s arrival its police chief called the black population “vicious.” 57

Coxey’s bold symbolism in the midst of the Jim Crow era aligned with the populists’ generally different attitude toward “the negro.” Georgia Populist Senator Tom

57 Invasion that Ended in Route,” New York Times, 2 May 1894; Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 180.
Watson captured this courage when he defiantly remarked “The Chronicle said I shook hands with negro men, women, and children at Sparta. I say yes I did it and have no apologies to make….“ Though many of the overtures Populist politicians made were clearly designed to win black votes, the audacity of the challenge to the prevailing racism of the time nonetheless resonated with the black community. As Carl Degler observed, though the Populist’s overtures to the “Colored Farmer’s Alliances” may well have represented more pragmatism than idealism, in the context of attitudes toward race at the time, they could not be ignored.” Moreover, not only by placing African Americans throughout the March, but importantly in positions of prominence, Coxey himself sought no political favor. He simply and openly crossed the color line with his inclusion of people of color and his African American flag bearer in the lead of the parade boldly carrying the stars and stripes. In this period of rampant lynching and Jim Crow laws, Coxey’s courage was warmly received by Washington’s African-American community.58

While Coxey’s arrival may have been welcomed by large crowds of sympathizers, the debate within Congress over how to officially receive Coxey was drowned out by the debate over the pending repeal the McKinley tariff. While Populist members defended the advance of Coxey’s Army and argued that it should be received as any other group lobbying its cause, some Congressional Populists viewed this petition of boots as out of step with their more institutional emphasis on the open ballot, the initiative, and the referendum. In their view these conventional means for democratic expression were the

appropriate vehicles for a more direct democracy. Successive welcoming resolutions offered by Populist Senators William A. Peffer (P-KS) and William V. Allen (P-NE) failed. Coxey’s Good Roads legislation was dismissed in committee before he even set foot in Washington. And, it was not even heard in the House until lame duck William Jennings Bryan chaired a Ways and Means panel in January 1895. The Good Roads Plan like many other bold Populist ideas that sought to change the Gilded Age’s tilted economic landscape died an inglorious death.

Moreover, in the melee that ensued once the March reached the Capitol grounds, Coxey was not allowed to give the speech he had prepared for the triumphant moment. He intended to say, “We come here to tell our representatives, who hold their seats by grace of our ballots, that the struggle for existence has become too fierce and relentless.” He further planned to call on government to redress the imbalance that had drifted too far toward the “speculators and the gamblers.” Coxey wanted work for all able bodied men. Yet his call would have to wait for another day. On this May Day, Browne and Philadelphian Christopher Columbus Jones were arrested for trespassing on the Capitol grounds. Coxey later faced the same charges and was sentenced to thirty days in jail despite the entreaties of Populist senators. Federal and District officials reacting to daily reports of violence that beset the other industrial armies could not distinguish Coxey’s Army and its appeal as the Commonweal of Christ. Indeed, Coxey’s Army, absent the presence of overt violence, fits well with Paul Gilje’s definition of riots in its essential rationality, planning, and carnivalesque characteristics. It is not difficult, in light of the news coverage of the western armies and their roughshod behavior, that official
Washington could not distinguish the approach of Coxey seeing him as the harbinger of a darker reality whose followers had already broken with convention and seemed to be willing to break the law to force their point.  

**Restless Energy**

As Coxey spent his days in jail, he wrote letters and spoke with whoever was in earshot. His peripatetic energy remained in full display. He may well have reflected about all that occurred in less than a year since he first met Carl Browne in the shadows of the Columbian Exposition. Just as he did not know Carl Browne prior to his Chicago trip, it is unlikely he had heard of Frederick Jackson Turner either. Yet the month before Coxey and Browne met and began planning their march eastward to the Capitol, this newly minted historian from the University of Wisconsin came to a podium in the Exposition’s “Hall of Columbus.” On a frightfully hot July 12, 1893, Turner presented his “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” to a thinning crowd and little acclaim. In his eclectic research on the advance of America westward, Turner fixed on the disappearance of the “frontier line” which he believed marked a symbolic turning in American history.

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59 Jacob Sechler Coxey, *The Coxey Plan* (Massillon OH: Jacob S. Coxey Publisher), 49 in the Jacob Sechler Coxey Papers in the Massillon Museum, Massillon, Ohio; Paul A. Gilje defines a riot as “... any group of twelve or more people attempting to assert their will immediately through the use of force outside the normal bounds of law.” While Coxey’s March was intentionally dedicated as a peaceful enterprise with religious as well as public policy purposes, it nonetheless exhibits many of the qualities of protest exhibited by the riot. Moreover, as Gilje indicates, the term “violence” as associated with riots is somewhat problematic. He concludes that “force will mean coercion or compulsion based upon violence, or based on the threat of violence, or based within indefinite boundaries, on the ritual and habits of mob action.” See Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1996), 4-11.
Turner posited that the now suddenly vanished western frontier had since the first settlers, allowed the continuous reinvention of the republican ideal at its edge. Up until now, Turner asserted, its vast spaces allowed for development of a marketplace with individual producers scattered idyllically in smaller communities. The thirty two year old historian painted a populist vision of producers in these small frontier communities where value accrued to the benefit of local friends and neighbors, not anonymous managers in distant organizations. It was a vision that Henry Carey would have applauded, and so too Coxey had he arrived in Chicago in time to hear it.60

Turner grew up in a Wisconsin community similar to the Pennsylvania community where Coxey was raised. These small communities seemed attached to the values of family farm yeomanry and small manufacturers. Turner now feared that Jeffersonian ideals were being eroded. A new form of capitalism had emerged that celebrated both wealth accumulation and size, or, as John D. Rockefeller asserted, rewarded “the survival of the fittest.” The familiar local businesses, like Coxey’s quarries, and the traditional, familiar forms of proprietorships and simple partnerships had given way to a burgeoning corporatism and their most extreme form, the trusts. Turner’s theory at once seemed to suggest this inevitability, yet at the same time it harkened back to an earlier innocence born of contact with the wilderness.

Turner concluded his lecture by suggesting America now had to redefine its frontier. “He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise,” he presciently concluded. Little did the young historian know that in a few weeks near to the site of his lecture, Coxey and Browne were about to conceive a plan that displayed the very energy to which he alluded. It was an energy that characterized not only the Populist Moment in which they all found themselves, but one that in its concern over the concentration of power continues to challenge the contours of conventional politics.⁶¹

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CHAPTER 1: THE PLAN

“...it would give them 72 days of work each year. It would give everybody a chance to work who wants to work, and would be the greatest anti-poverty measure the United States has ever seen.”

Jacob Sechler Coxey

In the summer of 1892, a diverse array of farm and labor leaders assembled in Omaha under the fragile banner of the National Farmers Alliance and Industrial Union to agree to a platform for their new political party. They enlisted Minnesotan Ignatius Donnelly to write the preamble to what would become the defining document for their People’s Party. Donnelly, who attained celebrity from his best-selling novels but also experienced his share of aborted political ventures, abhorred the two established political parties. In Caesar’s Column (1890), Donnelly suggested a future world where a plutocracy of industrialists has created an impoverished working class that then rises up in angry revolt. At Omaha, the former Greenback-Labor Party (GLP) Congressman now novelist, tried to capture in a political statement the energy of discontent which first

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61 “Farewell to Poverty,” Massillon Evening Independent, 31 December 1891; In an interview with his home town newspaper Coxey noted that he had been thinking about his plan to construct a national network of roads for a “a long time,” and noted “Everybody concedes that our roads are a national disgrace, and that local taxes are insufficient to permit the immediate permanent improvement....”

emerged almost two decades before on the Texas prairie, and stood at the core of a more formalized Populist political insurgency.63

The Omaha Platform reflected the diversity of reform ideas extant in a two decade old movement that, as Donnelly’s prose reflected, now engaged industrial workers, artisans and miners, as well as farmers in a fragile alliance of producers. When Knights of Labor leader Terrence Powderly arrived in Omaha, he pledged that the “ranks of organized producers would fight together.” In its preamble and various planks, the Omaha document clearly spoke to the need for farmer-labor solidarity, asked the administration to take over the private railroad trusts, supported freely issued government backed legal tender to inflate prices, and called for an end to all corporate subsidies. “We believe that the power of government __ in other words the people__ should be expanded,” Donnelly wrote in the preamble, “to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.”64

The Omaha Platform contained concepts gestating in this now almost two decades old movement that included reformers of different stripes who sought to address what they perceived as the economic injustice of a Gilded Age plutocracy. They devised their own competing plans for large cooperative organizations that would reshape the economy and make it fairer for hardworking producers to compete against the monopolists. The populist reformers would substitute benevolent trusts operated by the people in the place

64 The idea to form a People’s Party was first birthed at a meeting in Cincinnati in 1891 and several other gatherings of Populist sympathizers occurred before the culminating event in Omaha in 1892. Industrial representatives consistently attended Farmers Alliance conventions in Ocala, Cincinnati and St. Louis prior to Omaha; a description of the trajectory of the People’s Party political organization is found in Clanton, Populism: The Humane Preference, 57-85; Postel, Populist Vision, 156-163; George Tindall ed., “National People’s Party Platform,” A Populist Reader (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 92.
of avaricious monopolies controlled by wealthy tycoons. Whether calling for the nationalization of the banks and railroads, or eliminating all taxes in favor of a single tax, these reformers seemed more interested in the moral probity of their ideas than in their political practicality. They responded to the new forms of corporate capitalist organization by conceiving their own grassroots market mechanisms. As a loose-knit confederation of regionally-based networks of reform-minded organizations, these producer reformers thought boldly and spoke loudly. As one historian subsequently concluded, “the populist genius lay in protest rather than in performance.”

One of these populist reformers, Jacob Sechler Coxey, a successful businessman from Massillon Ohio, unveiled a program for the construction of a national system of Good Roads financed by greenback legal tender in December 1891. He wrote a letter to both President Harrison and the entire Congress noting that the “public roads of the United States generally are a national disgrace.” In 1892, as the Populist Party took shape, Coxey formed his own “J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association” of the United States. He actively communicated with fellow Good Roads advocates and Populist clubs about his own bold plan for the construction of a national network of publicly funded roads. He formally presented his ideas before the Populists’ convention in St. Louis in February

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65 As noted in the “Introduction,” the use of the term “Populism” when capitalized in this context refers to its institutional political manifestation in the People’s Party and aligns with the way, Postel described the origins of the party: “The precise configuration of the coalition varied at the state level, but the orders tended to fall into discrete categories: farmers’ associations; labor organizations; women’s groups; and an array of nonconformists, including urban radicals, tax and currency reformers, prohibitionists, middleclass utopians, spiritual innovators, and miscellaneous iconoclasts.” See Postel, Populist Vision, 12-13; John Hicks, The Populist Revolt (Lincoln NE: The University of Nebraska Press, 1961), 299. Richard White, Railroaded (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011) 332-335, speaks of the Farmers Alliance and Knights of Labor recognizing “…the imitation of corporations as the first step toward eliminating corporate abuse and power.”
1892, and sent a written petition to Congress containing his plan. On March 29, of that year, Ohio Congressman John George Warwick, who had worked in a dry goods store in Massillon, introduced this petition to the Congress from “J.S. Coxey and others, for the issue of $500,000,000 of Treasury notes to improve public roads.” The petition was referred to the Committee on Agriculture where, like most written petitions, it died (as did Congressman Warwick himself later that summer, still in his first term). By July 1892 Coxey hoped his Plan would become part of the formal platform the People’s Party adopted in Omaha.66

Though he had amassed his own sizable fortune managing his local quarries and horse farms, Coxey’s plan fit the well established Populist tendency to propose large scale, arguably sophisticated ideas on behalf of the ordinary producer. From the very inception of his Good Roads Association, Coxey spent large sums of his own money to expand the reach of his fledgling association and promote his plan for full employment. Hardly the wild eyed radical, the unassuming, Coxey, with a straw colored mustache, gold bowed spectacles, and almost always dressed in a starched Edwardian wing collared shirt, seemed singularly determined to have his Good Roads plan adopted by making speeches, distributing pamphlets, and even paving nearby roads out of his own pocket. Indeed Coxey himself saw his plan as consistent with the Omaha Platform, though in fact the Populist’s Omaha Platform only acknowledged that transportation was “a means of

exchange and a public necessity.” Regardless of whether Coxey’s Plan was actually
subsumed by the Omaha Platform, Coxey’s commitment a nationalized system of roads
financed by greenbacks placed him squarely in the context of late nineteenth century
populism. Moreover his ardent passion for this bold idea matched the energy exhibited by
an eclectic group of contemporary reformers who championed similarly bold ideas that
recognized the producer as the lynchpin of all economic value. Their ideas and the
popular movements they aroused formed the essence of the populist moment.67

This chapter explores the several ways in which Coxey’s plan conformed to the
contours of other reform ideas loosely contained under the Populist banner. First, with its
emphasis on full employment and a national system of transportation, the plan echoed
tenets of a “producerist philosophy” traceable to the mid-nineteenth-century American
School of Economics affiliated with Philadelphia publishing heir Henry Carey. Coxey’s
plan, typical of other Populist ideas that sought to help embattled workers, can trace its
lineage to this school of economic philosophy that placed the producer at its epicenter.

Adherents to producerism very simply believed the labor theory of value. Economic

67 Postel, Populist Vision, 116-123 discusses the boldness of populist ideas such as Walter Allen’s bold idea to create a massive “Farmer’s Trust,” a publicly owned counter monopoly that would restore farmer control over prices and was much like schemes in other states; i.e., “designs for conquering the market.” Postel also discusses Charles Macune’s Texas Farmers’ Alliance Exchange, an elaborate system of warehouses and sub-Treasuries offering Texas cotton growers a centralized and regulated marketplace for exchange on a fair basis; Goodwyn, Populist Moment, XXI; Robert P. Skinner, “The Coxey Folly,” Leslie’s Weekly, 38, (April 5, 1894): 227; Skinner described Coxey’s demeanor as one of “unspeakable enthusiasm.” He notes, “Three years ago, when the country was enjoying prosperity as had never been experienced, Mr. Coxey completed the first draft of a bill promising for the issuance of five hundred million dollars of irredeemable paper money to be expended in the construction of good roads everywhere in the United States; See “Commonweal Ticket and Resolutions,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 11 March 1894, which reports Coxey offering the following resolution adopted by the Commonweal of Christ prior to departing: “Resolved, That while we affirm our faith in the Omaha Platform we do not regard that we are to remain hermetically sealed up until another national convention, but as progressive men have the right to advance over the lines of said platform, and so for the purposes of this municipal campaign that we make the Coxey non-interest bearing bonds plan the sole issue of the campaign…” See “The Omaha Platform of the People’s Party, 1892 in Unger, Populism: Nostalgic or Progressive, 37-41. Though publicly financed Good Roads were not included specifically in the Omaha Platform, they did appear in other Populist documents dating back to the Topeka Farmer Alliance Convention of 1873 that included in its demands “construction of good roads at the expense of the government;” Clanton, Humane Preference, 8-9;
value, they argued, emanated from those who produced goods, whether farmers, artisans, miners, or factory workers.

Second, and as a corollary to producerism, this chapter reveals how many advocates for the producer also championed expansion of the money supply. They argued money itself represented only a derivative symbol of labor, not in itself an intrinsically valuable commodity. These soft-money advocates thus sought to grow the economy by spreading wealth rather than allowing it to concentrate in the hands of a few. The potential that an expanding money supply of greenbacks, backed only by the full faith and credit of the United States, might cause unchecked inflation, led most Populists toward silver and a bimetallic monetary standard. Coxey nonetheless remained an ardent Greenback advocate and his Plan would push the limits of Populist tolerance for soft money.

Third, though Coxey became a wealthy businessman in his own right, he grew up as a common laborer. His idea to put the unemployed back to work indicated his allegiance to those who produced. With his idea for reform he joined an alternative genre of like-minded late nineteenth century businessmen. What set this group of entrepreneurs apart from the laissez faire outlook of their corporate counterparts was their general commitment to a more community oriented business identity. They offered a more traditional republican alternative to the ascendant corporate model that seemed predisposed to rewarding distant middlemen and remote owners, the primary targets of populist criticism throughout the late nineteenth century. While not all the community-minded businessmen who adhered to this alternative path were Populists like Coxey, their
allegiance to smaller scale, more locally oriented businesses aligned well with the populist protest against an ascendant corporatism with its obsessive pursuit of wealth to the exclusion of the producer or the community.68

Finally, this chapter explores how Coxey’s Good Roads plan in its bold scope was consistent with the sweep of many other reform ideas that characterized the populist moment. Coxey’s plan dramatically expanded on the very modest Good Roads proposals of the elitist League of American Wheelmen. These early Good Roads advocates advanced an incremental approach to improving the nation’s decrepit road system. They proposed conducting road surveys and studies, rather than undertaking actual road construction. Coxey not only proposed to build roads, but like Clay and Calhoun, a national network that connected farm and factory. Like many other populists’ ideas, Coxey’s plan offered a way to allow government to create the conditions for full employment. Coxey asked government to act on behalf of the producer not aggrandize the corporate owner by expediting the acquisition of land, granting licenses or facilitating the formation of trusts. In his call for public works rather than private fees, Coxey responded to farmers’ concerns about who would pay for local improvements. What Coxey’s plan lacked in detail and consistency, it sought to overcome by restoring a social contract that seemed broken by Gilded Age greed.

68 Clanton, *Humane Preference*, 1-24; Robert H. Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1962), 17; In discussing the transition from populism to progressivism, Wiebe notes “As the barons of nineteenth century business retired, their successors appeared to have come from a smaller mold.”
Producers

Before Jacob Coxey was a successful Gilded Age businessman he was a producer. Coxey’s allegiance to responsible producerism emerged naturally from his own modest roots. Coxey’s father was born on a ship coming over from England in 1800, and his German mother had lineage back to those who fought in the Revolutionary War. Coxey, born in 1854, by the age of sixteen curtailed his formal schooling in Selinsgrove Pennsylvania to take a job as a water boy in the Iron Mills in Danville, Pennsylvania. He steadily worked his way through a series of jobs, and after eight years, was promoted to stationary engineer. His father worked the night shift and Coxey worked during the day. During the Panic of 1873, Coxey temporarily lost his job as a mechanic. This experience with being unemployed apparently left its own indelible mark. In a later retrospective on Coxey’s life, a Cleveland correspondent to the Wall Street Journal noted that in Coxey “there beat a heart that bled for millions of miserable and pitiful American citizens.”

From these humble roots as a laborer, Coxey was to achieve his own Horatio Alger-like ascendancy. From his producer roots he worked to become a highly successful businessman in his own right. In 1878, after eight years in the iron rolling mill in Danville, he decided to join his uncle in the scrap iron business in Harrisburg. Under his uncle’s tutelage, the energetic young entrepreneur quickly learned how to buy and sell scrap iron. He seemed a natural salesman, and though not gifted a speaker, he seemed able to convince most of those around him that no challenge was insurmountable. He had

69 Howson, Coxey, 15-16; See June 30, 1924 untitled excerpt by Guy McNeill Wells, Financial editor of Cleveland Press and Cleveland correspondent to the Wall Street Journal in unfiled materials from Jacob Coxey’s papers at Massillon Museum, Massillon OH.
an infectious enthusiasm and proved to be someone who could motivate his employees to achieve beyond the ordinary. His uncle’s scrap business required him to travel to find new sources of raw material. He soon discovered that one rich source of material came from some old steel furnaces being torn down in Massillon, Ohio.70

In 1881, as he arrived in Massillon to arrange a deal for acquiring the furnaces, he learned about a nearby stone quarry for sale. He promptly decided to buy it, and from that purchase he started his own business. On July 2, 1881, the very day President Garfield was assassinated, Coxey began operating the quarry which produced high grade silica used to manufacture steel. Coxey sold his superior product to steel mills all over the eastern United States. The quarry business amassed Coxey sufficient discretionary income to allow him to begin engaging his passion for race horses. By 1888 he owned a horse farm just north of his Massillon quarry, another at Eminence, Kentucky near Lexington, which he called “Dixiana Farms,” and yet a third in Guthrie Oklahoma. Coxey was now a wealthy and much respected businessman in Massillon, then a town of about thirty thousand. Beyond Massillon, the reach of his businesses included acquisition of another quarry in nearby Dundee Ohio, less than twenty miles from Massillon.71

As it turned out, Coxey’s horse farms reportedly made him even more money than the quarries, yet also caused him to lose his first wife who despised his gambling on


71 Howson, Coxey, 15-15, 116-17; Neither Howson nor others, as will be described in Chapter Two, finds evidence that Coxey would benefit financially from his plan to build Good Roads based on the sort of material derived from his quarries which was used for glass and steel making. Steel was not used in roads at the time. In Bulletin Number One issued by The J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association on January 1, 1894 Coxey wrote in reference to his Good Roads Plan: “Neither is it a scheme to create an office or get control of money for road building for its author or to benefit him financially.”
the trotters. Yet despite this wealth, Coxey was not spared the effects of the Panic of 1893. He had to lay off about forty of his employees and sell one of his horse farms during this depression which would last until 1897. Indeed, throughout the March, rumors bedeviled Coxey that creditors were claiming back installments on his expensive forty thousand dollar race horse Acolyte.\textsuperscript{72}

To put Coxey’s wealth in perspective, by 1893 he amassed a fortune estimated to be about a quarter of a million dollars. He had built most of it while still in his thirties and it earned him about fifty thousand dollars a year. By comparison, Carnegie at age twenty-eight made some forty two thousand dollars a year and had a portfolio estimated to be half a million dollars. According to an analysis done in 1889, eighty percent of America’s households earned less than five hundred dollars a year, while the one hundred wealthiest Americans earned over a million. Coxey might not be considered in the same breath with Carnegie, who went on to be a trademark Gilded Age tycoon, let alone financiers such as J.P. Morgan who had accumulated wealth as great as one hundred million dollars. Nonetheless, Coxey clearly was a wealthy man even by the impressive standards of Gilded Age America, making his life long journey on behalf of the producer all the more remarkable.\textsuperscript{73}

Coxey’s association with an economic philosophy dedicated to the welfare of the producer, or “producerism,” as it was often called, began with his earliest working experiences in the Pennsylvania iron-making region. Here an ideology focused on those

\textsuperscript{72} The only scholarly biography of Coxey was done as a doctoral dissertation by Howson. Howson nor others, as will be described in Chapter Two, finds any evidence that Coxey would benefit financially from his plan to build Good Roads based on the sort of material derived from his quarries.

who labored in order to produce, could be found in the writings of yet another prosperous businessman, Henry Carey (*Principles of Political Economy*, 1837). Heir to the nation’s largest publishing house, Carey was a shrewd investor in Pennsylvania’s coal, iron, and steel industries. Carey’s mid-nineteenth-century economic theories--known as the American School or National System--stood at the center of an antebellum debate over the character and direction of industrial growth.74

In the antebellum north, the divide grew between competing visions of how industrialization should progress. Those who aligned with Carey’s views accepted the necessity of industrial growth while adhering to earlier notions of a more idyllic “republicanism.” Carey articulated an idea rooted in Jeffersonian notions of agrarian-based economies, though hardly one in which everyone was tied to the land. Carey championed smaller manufacturing and a protective tariff to insulate local industries from foreign competition. He ardently campaigned against the bankers and financiers who did not produce but speculated and manipulated. “The producers of the world have been, and they are now being sacrificed to the exchangers of the world,” he wrote in 1851.75

The Panic of 1837 diminished Carey’s own fortune and understandably influenced his thinking. He became an advocate for the higher tariffs imposed after the Whig victory of 1840, having witnessed firsthand their recuperative effect on the economy. This single protectionist measure restored the nation’s prosperity and Carey’s


as well. He concluded this measure to be essential if the producer were to flourish. He advocated the tariff as essential to his producerist vision of “Small towns and cities, each a local center of manufacturing serving the surrounding countryside, and providing a market for its industrial produce.” These smaller centers of commerce protected by high tariffs thus became a central tenet of Carey’s *American School of Political Economy*. In these smaller, regional economies, each man’s labor would be truly valued. Indeed this idyllic imagery comprised Carey’s, and later Coxey’s, vision of an industrialized society.76

Sometimes referred to as “Careyism,” the producerist economic point of view, much like “Coxeyism,” later, was anything but rigorous. The very appeal of Carey’s system seemed to lie in its vague vision of a stable economic order that served the everyday laborer. In Carey’s bipolar universe those who valued the producer necessarily also believed in an ever expanding money supply to provide the means for economic growth. Money served as the lubricant to the economic engine that created wealth. For Carey, much like Coxey later, money was simply an instrument to encourage productive labor. It had no intrinsic value. The speculators who objected to increasing the money supply, in Carey’s view, represented “millstones around the national neck.” In his straight talk style in the *Principles of Political Economy*, he reduced his own economic philosophy to a simple premise, noting that “labour is the sole cause of value.”77

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Though Coxey was a voracious reader and interested in economics, it is altogether likely he never heard of Carey. Yet, whether consciously or not, Coxey would share Carey’s sympathy for the value of labor. A prosperous Ohio businessman, he employed hundreds of “producers” at his own Ohio quarries. To Coxey, it was the hardworking producers, rather than the speculator or banker, who was responsible for creating economic value. “The man who receives interest receives something for which he gives no equivalent,” Coxey said as evidence of his adherence to a first principle of “producerism.” Coxey also shared Carey’s disdain for bankers who placed capital accumulation ahead of fair wages. For example, he did not understand why the government created national bank franchises and then essentially turned the money supply over to them. This put the economy in the hands of those far removed from the everyday producer, the engine of economic growth.

By contrast, Coxey wanted to put money back in the hands of the producers who created the wealth in the first place. He simply believed that every producer deserved a productive job at a reasonable wage ($1.50 a day). At his Massillon quarries, Coxey paid his own employees at wages that were equal to or exceeded those of the average non-farm wage earner. Thus it seemed perfectly logical that if the government would adopt a more liberal monetary policy, all Americans might legitimately stake their claim to “happiness.” The value of their pay should equal the value of what they produced. With his Good Roads Plan the government would issue $500 million in Treasury-backed legal tender. This would then empower producers to create a system of Good Roads that would
connect farmers and city merchants, a further iteration of the very National System that Carey promoted.  

**Greenback Economy**

Harboring this identification with his fellow iron and steel workers in Pennsylvania, it does not seem surprising that Coxey should later find himself aligned, whether consciously or not, with Carey’s producer oriented philosophy; in particular, Carey’s monetary views. Late in his career, Carey increasingly denounced a money supply fixed to a gold standard. In doing so he continued a longstanding monetary debate that dated to the founders impassioned arguments over Article I Section 10 of the Constitution, that ostensibly limited states from issuing their own paper currency but did nothing to stop banks from generating their own notes based on speculative fever rather than any real ability to redeem them in gold or silver. Carey simply followed in the tradition of those who questioned a money supply constrained by metal specie. He became a so-called Greenbacker, arguing for the issuance of currency that needed to be backed only by the full faith and credit of the U.S. government. Coxey later would reportedly spend hours arguing with his fellow producers in the iron mills about currency issues.

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78 See “Jacob Coxey” in Russel B. Nye, *A Baker’s Dozen: Thirteen Unusual Americans* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1956), 209-210; “What Interest Costs,” *Coxey Good Roads and Non-Interest Bond Library* (Jacob S. Coxey, 1896), 5; Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010) 220; Maier notes the addition of Article I Section 10 was an assertion of federal authority over the state’s ability to coin money and thus seen as a way of asserting federal control over the money supply. However this did not prevent states from issuing their own notes following the demise of the second US Bank in 1837; as Michael O’Malley notes in “Specie and Species: Race and the Money Question in Nineteenth Century America,” *The American Historical Review* 99, No. 2 (April, 1994) 373-374. In the late nineteenth century “Only gold and silver served as legal tender, so theoretically, the amount of money in the United States could not exceed the amount of precious metal—specie—the country possessed. But antebellum enterprisers chafed at this restriction.” Thus all manner of institutions issued their own notes, from barbers to bartenders. In Note 15 to Chapter 4 Howson, *Coxey*, 116; See also Howson 156, for a well documented accounting of Coxey’s wage system compared with contemporary national averages. Coxey’s wages at his quarries ranged from $1.35 an hour to $2.75.
questions and whether greenbacks printed during the Civil War should remain in
circulation. He later proudly assumed this same “Greenback” mantle as Carey. Though
raised by a staunchly Democratic father, Coxey he formally joined the Greenback Party
at age twenty and would run on the Ohio Greenback ticket for state Senator in 1885. 79

Indeed, throughout Coxey’s life and since the end of the Civil War, the money
issue prompted debate on the government’s role in the economy. Basing the nation’s
money supply on gold caused deflation, driving prices and wages down. Small producers,
the backbone of Carey’s producerist philosophy, could not earn enough to make their
businesses profitable; laborers earned less and less. At the same time, “Gold bugs”--the
mostly eastern industrialists and bankers committed to a gold standard as the only
“civilized” specie--represented an aristocracy of wealth and privilege. Gold money raised
interest rates, lining the banker’s pockets at the expense of the producer. Seasonal credit
shortages choked farmers and small businesses even more tightly. 80

This debate over currency, but in essence over the very democracy of the
economy, manifest itself in stark terms in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. The
essence of the debate centered on the central question of what represented “real money.”
Prior to the conflict, paper money was never thought to be money. Rather it was a mark
of “advanced” or “civilized” countries that such paper currency to have value must be
exchangeable in gold, or “specie payments.” But with the demands of the war thrust

80 Several excellent sources exist which detail the ongoing money debate during this period, including
Greenback Era (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964); Matthew Hild, Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and
Populists(Athens GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007) and Gretchen Ritter, Goldbugs and Greenbacks(Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ritter uses the word “Goldbugs” in her book’s title but only in the title and
subheads.
upon them, and with half the nation seceded, the North by necessity found it necessary to depart from this civilized model and turn to legal tender greenbacks. This form of paper money was backed by nothing other than the United States government itself. Thus, at the outset of the post bellum monetary debate, the opposing sides argued vehemently over whether it was necessary to retire the Greenback currency which had funded the war effort. The hard money advocates wanted to rid society of this pernicious, uncivilized currency, or “legal tender,” which was backed only by the faith and credit of the government and therefore could not be redeemed for its equivalent in gold. One ardent gold champion, Senator Henry Wilson of Massachusetts, summarized his side’s position when he unequivocally declared, “Gold and silver are money by action of the law and the survival of the fittest.” He and his Goldbug allies had their way. With enactment of the Resumption Act of 1875, all greenbacks were to be retired by 1879. Yet this only insured the monetary debate would continue. 81

This raging debate over the meaning of money surrounded Coxey as he came of age in Pennsylvania, and followed him as he began his business career in Ohio. In fact, Pennsylvania became a focal point for greenback activism with its distinctive producerist flavor. In addition to Carey, other Pennsylvania Greenback business reformers, like ironmaster and inventor Peter Cooper, helped blaze the Greenback trail before Coxey emerged with his own ideas for freely issued legal tender.(i.e., non interest bearing government backed notes that could be used for both public and private expenditures). Cooper became an outspoken advocate for currency divorced from specie. Ironically,

however, he also built the famous “Tom Thumb” locomotive that passed a horse drawn carriage in 1830. This much publicized event led the nation to invest in rails rather than roads.  

Yet despite his early business connection to the railroads, Cooper represented the inveterate reformer and political activist. He turned from being a hard money advocate to an inflationist. He became such a champion for soft money policies that he ran for President as the Greenback-Labor party candidate in 1876, though he accumulated less than one per cent of the popular vote. Cooper, as Coxey would later do, also developed a respect for the palliative impact of government intervention to smooth the rough edges of capitalist pursuit. As one of his contemporaries noted, Cooper “became more anxious to relieve the distress he saw than to question the wisdom of the measures taken for that purpose.” In his businessman-activist role, Cooper chaired The American Industrial League, an organization dedicated to promoting producerism. Throughout the 1880’s its real strength lay in the Pennsylvania iron industry where Coxey first worked.

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82 Ritter, Goldbugs and Greenbacks, 34-35; Irwin Unger, “Businessmen and Specie Resumption,” Political Science Quarterly, 74, no.1: 46-70; Ralph R. Ricker, The Greenback-Labor Movement in Pennsylvania (Bellfonte PA: Pennsylvania Heritage, Inc., 1966). Pennsylvania Representative William D. Kelley was among the most outspoken against resumption. Kelly became the spokesman for the enthusiastic opposition to Resumption by those in the iron and steel manufacturing industry. Coxey grew up in the center of this industry and would later sell his sand and silica to it. The passion for defeating resumption was plainly evident throughout the region. Writing to Henry Carey in 1869, Bethlehem Steel magnate Joseph Wharton suggested it was the British that fomented the talk of resumption. Wharton argued, “Nothing more in the interest of those…enemies and more deadly to the soldiers and champions of the nation who are in mine, mill and farm desperately fighting for her independence, could be devised.” This sort of deep seated conspiratorial view of eastern financial and banking elites thought to be associated with British interests was characteristic of the intense regional support for more expansionist monetary policies. While support for Greenbackism remained uneven in the immediate aftermath of resumption, Pennsylvania tended to be a leading vote gathering state for the Greenback Party. Rossiter W. Raymond, Peter Cooper (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), 28-51.

83 Rossiter W. Raymond, Peter Cooper (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), 100-101. Richard H. Timberlake, Monetary Policy in the United States (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 129-145; Unger, Greenback Era, 55; Yet another Pennsylvania iron man and Kellogg disciple, Alexander Campbell, toward the conclusion of the Civil War, called for an end to the corrupt National Banks. Campbell, a Kellogg disciple, wanted the Treasury to issue legal tender, and advocated federally issued bonds at three percent to be interchangeable or “incontrovertible” with federal greenbacks. So influential were his ideas that they came to be known as
Another prominent Greenbacker and successful businessman from earlier in the century, New York dry goods merchant Edward Kellogg, also laid important theoretical groundwork for how Coxey’s Good Roads plan might be financed. Kellogg wrote as early as 1849 that the value of money was derived from government, not from the specie on which it was based. He indefatigably promoted the issuance of legal tender since money had nothing to do in his view with the material from which it was made. Money, in Kellogg’s view, need not have its own intrinsic value. His monetary philosophy was summarized by a contemporary writer, “True money is not wealth any more than the deed for a farm is the farm itself; and there is no more use in having our money made of gold than in having our deeds drawn upon sheets of gold.” Similarly Kellogg wrote in 1861, “The value and prices of all products are estimated by money, the legal standard of value. In making out a bill, the articles sold are set down at the prices agreed upon, extended and footed up, and they amount to so much money.” Money, he argued, was simply attached to the products of labor. It contained no magic value in and of itself.\(^8^4\)

Before Coxey suggested government-backed legal tender based on property valuation, Kellogg argued for a system of currency loaned to individuals on the basis of local real estate values. In 1843, Kellogg conceived of a monetary “Safety Fund” which would limit banks’ interest rates based on the value of mortgages and real estate. It would expand the availability of currency and thus economic opportunity. Congruent with ideas

Coxey would espouse later, Kellogg noted, “All persons who offer good and permanent security will be at all times supplied with money, and for any term of years during which they will regularly pay the interest. Therefore, no town, county, or State, need be dependent upon any other for money, because each has real property enough to secure many times the amount which it will require.”

We can only speculate on the extent to which growing up in the middle of this strong producerist-greenback tradition in Pennsylvania influenced Coxey. He always claimed that his ideas were his own. Yet, undoubtedly, these earlier, prominent soft money advocates had their influence. Clearly his own Good Roads and Greenbacks plan, if not his identity as a businessman turned reformer, seem largely congruent with the ideas and similar backgrounds of Carey, Cooper, and Kellogg. Few of Coxey’s papers that might have provided insight into these connections survived a house fire. Yet it seems safe to conclude that his early exposure to expansionist monetary policies and the sanctity of labor as the source of value left a mark on him growing up in Pennsylvania. If not, then certainly when he arrived in his adopted state of Ohio he found himself exposed to these same ideas.

Liberal monetarism flourished in Coxey’s adopted state of Ohio. When he moved there in 1879, Coxey could hardly avoid exposure to it. A strong greenback tradition had started in Ohio following the Civil War. Washington McLean, a wealthy manufacturing

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86 Sweeney, “Sensational,” 115. Sweeney confirmed what this researcher learned from archivists at the Massillon Museum that Coxey and Browne’s papers stored at Coxey’s Paul’s Station home burned in a house fire in 1894. In the correspondence and papers available from other sources we gain insight into the march, but little about the wellsprings for Coxey or Browne’s ideas.
scion and the editor of the Cincinnati *Enquirer* squarely addressed the dilemma posed by a staggering federal debt, Britain’s hold on highly leveraged U.S. bank notes, and an excess of greenbacks in circulation. In what became known as the “Ohio Idea,” McLean’s newspaper promoted this inflationary fix to the monetary crisis.87

One of the Ohio’s most renowned politicians, Democrat George Hunt Pendleton, championed the idea during the 1868 elections. This popular Ohio native ran as Vice President on the Democratic ticket with George McClellan in 1864, and became a prospect for the Presidential nomination in 1868. Despite these traditional leanings, Pendleton abandoned his conventional hard money notions in light of postbellum economic realities. Instead he became enthralled with having the government issue just enough greenbacks to retire existing U.S. bank debt. Much of that debt resulted from the issue of controversial “five-twenties,” or notes that the government was obliged to pay in gold (at six percent) in five years, and had to redeem in twenty years. Pendleton now wanted these “five-twenties” redeemable in greenbacks. To buffer the impact of his plan, he also called for establishment of a separate and elaborate so-called “sinking fund.” Pendleton thought this would cure any aberrations in the amount of currency in circulation at any one time and thus avoid a liquidity crisis. The Senator’s so called “Ohio idea” was critiqued by opponents as likely to cause inflation and necessitate higher taxes. Nonetheless in the producerist vernacular, the Pendleton proponents appealed to Ohio’s

then still largely rural population with the slogan, “The same currency for the plow holder and the bondholder.”

Though the Resumption debate had long since abated when Coxey’s March departed Massillon in the spring of 1894, Coxey and his fellow Greenbackers nonetheless carried on a well established monetary narrative that had deep roots in the industrial communities of Pennsylvania and Ohio. Their free money views shaped their social and cultural outlook. Because they viewed money as representative rather than inherently valuable, their social views were less “essentialist” or determined, and rather more self-made and more relativistic. Their monetary views released them from the prevailing dogmas that necessitated adherence to a strict monometallic standard where a paper bill could be exchanged for its exact value in specie.

By contrast, the Goldbugs insisted on a predictable and fixed system. They resorted to the strictures of the philosophical essentialism that so characterized their nineteenth-century outlooks. These aristocratic opponents asked how any civilized country could render money incontrovertible, or not redeemable for specie? This seemed at best heretical, if not simply ridiculous. How, they asked, could money be valueless? “Metallic money having intrinsic value is made the measure of its value by its coinage

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89 Testifying before Congress on his Good Roads Plan in 1895, Coxey echoed Kellogg’s ideas on the incontrovertibility of legal tender that had the backing of government. He rhetorically asked the committee “how contracts for various articles could be made, and bills of them be made out and summed up, without money?” Coxey then gave an example of a man who works on the highways and is paid $1.50 a day in legal tender, and another man who works in a gold mine and is given the equivalent of $1.50 a day in gold bullion. The man who pays the shop merchant in legal tender with the full Congress engraving on it can pay without question. Both the customer and shopkeeper are happy. But the man who was paid in gold, Coxey contended, must go to the Philadelphia Mint and have his gold paid in that specie; i.e., stamped by the government; see “The Cause and the Cure!” Testimony by Jacob Sechler Coxey before the Sub-Committee of Ways and Means, January 8, 1895 in *The Coxey Plan* (Massillon: Jacob S. Coxey Publisher, 1914), 37-39.
based on its metallic value,” one gold proponent argued using syllogistic logic. Coxey and his fellow soft-money advocates occupied what seemed at the time a more raffish world. Reform-minded entrepreneurs like Carey, Kellogg, and Cooper argued it was government’s role to provide for the producer. And as Coxey’s plan proposed, money issued from government bonds would allow the Secretary of War to build a national network of Good Roads.90

**Alternative Model**

This interconnected producer and greenback lineage that comprised Coxey’s core outlook tied him to economic views very much in competition with an ascendant late nineteenth century model of unbridled corporate capitalism. The so-called “Upper Ten,” whose concentrated wealth and power defined this Gilded Age, occupied a separate space within the American business community. Their business model would concentrate economic power in large and distant corporate institutions. These tycoons believed the state should enable rather than constrain the concentration of wealth either by looking the other way, or granting licenses, land, and loans to foster corporate growth. Yet their claim to dominance still hung in the balance in the late nineteenth century. It competed with a more traditional model exemplified by Coxey’s local quarries. Coxey, like many other prosperous businessmen, did not subscribe fully to this liberal *laissez faire* market philosophy. The alternative model he and like-minded businessmen chose actually represented the more traditional nineteenth century notion of a market system that joined

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the profit motive with a sense of responsibility towards employees and communities.

Very often these business statesmen, like Coxey, had their own decided views on economic reforms that went beyond their immediate self-interest.\textsuperscript{91}

Steeped in the producerist tradition, this genre of business reformers recognized the value of labor and the need to reward it. Consistent with Carey’s American School, they envisioned government’s role in maintaining the appropriate distribution of wealth by focusing on the health of smaller manufacturing centers. Because their ideas were ultimately overwhelmed by those subscribing to the corporate model, these business reformers have received little historical attention. Some historians simply cast them aside by suggesting their world view was grounded in nostalgic notions of rural versus urban, or small versus large. To some, they seemed to look backward toward a Jeffersonian model of economic organization where the artisan stood side by side with the farmer. While the alternative model they chose was not formally associated with the Populist Party, their ideas for smaller more community based enterprises that recognized a broader public interest seemed very much aligned with the Populist outlook. In order to compete with the massive concentrations of private wealth and power now amassed in the trusts, these anti-monopolist, business reformers offered alternative ways to organize amongst themselves, notably in large scale cooperatives that would allow them to compete more fairly in an economy increasingly alien to their values\textsuperscript{92}

\textsuperscript{91} Michael McGerr, \textit{A Fierce Discontent} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7; McGerr notes “In a land of some 76 million people, the “upper ten” were no more than a tiny minority; a mere sliver of the nation.” The term derived from British terminology used to describe the very richest in English society; “In 1890 America, two hundred thousand citizens controlled 70% of the national wealth.” See Douglas Steeles and David O. Whitten, \textit{Democracy in Desperation} (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 20.

\textsuperscript{92} Hofstadter in \textit{Age of Reform}, 62 writes, “The Populists looked backward with longing to the lost agrarian Eden, to the republican America of the early years of the nineteenth century in which there were few millionaires and,
The ideas presented by Coxey and others who comprised this alternative genre, did not represent _“knee jerk”_ reaction to a world passing them by. Nor did it stem from a paranoia borne from a sudden urge to transition from a state of idyllic yeoman like simplicity to one of urbane business-like sophistication. Rather, their ideas emerged from a well argued and at times dominant economic tradition that placed the producer at the center of the economy, and often sought the government’s intervention to keep the playing field level. In fact, their ideas for greater economic justice and government involvement in the economy represented less a reaction to the emerging corporate capitalism and more an extension of already well developed alternative ideas.93

Indeed Coxey formed his own business when the model for business organization was in transition. The corporation’s preeminence as the dominant model still remained an open question. From the end of the Civil War, the staggering growth in manufacturing meant that industrial output rose by almost 300 percent. The emerging American economic juggernaut now stretched across a continent, and in the remarkable period of its growth after the Civil War it eclipsed England and Germany as the dominant industrial economy. Accompanying this meteoric rise, the successful businessman became an admired figure in American society, bolstered by the many Horatio Alger-like stories that characterized the rags to riches ascendancy of tycoons like Carnegie, Rockefeller, or Morgan. Witnessing firsthand the rise of

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93 Hofstadter, _Age of Reform_, 22-59; Howson, _Coxey_, 37. Berk, _Alternative Tracks_, 15.
these industry titans, Americans were constantly reminded that if they worked hard and only exercised the same self-reliant values that Benjamin Franklin had espoused they too could experience the sort of upward mobility at the root of America’s promise of happiness.94

Yet not all successful businessmen subscribed to the new winner take all corporate model. Coxey can be viewed in the context of this alternative and often overlooked genre of American entrepreneurs whose names are not often associated with Gilded Age wealth. While no less motivated by the profit motive, their greed seemed constrained by a sense of obligation and responsibility to those same communities where they did business and where their employees lived. While Carnegie, Rockefeller and Morgan’s philanthropic generosity was impressive and lasting, it was nonetheless managed at a distance. Carnegie would run his business and his philanthropy from his Skibo castle in Scotland. Coxey lived in Massillon for his entire life, knew many of his employees, and walked into Massillon each day greeted by friends and neighbors. His was not a distant, impersonal corporate model.

The alternative genre of businessmen like Coxey adhered to republican norms concerned with the fair distribution of wealth, the value of competition, and a humane government that would level the playing field so smaller businesses could compete.

94 For an excellent encapsulization of America’s industrial ascendancy see Alan Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 52-60; John C. Cawelt, “Portrait of the Newsboy as a Young Man: Some Remarks on the Alger Stories,” The Wisconsin Magazine of History 45, no. 2 (Winter, 1961-62): 79-70; Robert Vlahakis, “Ragged Dick by Horatio Alger,” The English Journal 68, no. 2 (February, 1979): 40; Charles R. Morris, The Tycoons (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), xi-xii, 13-24; Jay Gould who became the leading financier of the nation’s powerful railroad system started at sixteen in his family’s hardware business. John Rockefeller, who amassed an enormous fortune in oil production, began at sixteen as an assistant bookkeeper at a produce firm. And, Andrew Carnegie, who oversaw America’s largest steel company started at twelve as a bobbin boy in a cotton mill. Like Coxey, each of these examples of Gilded Age success were so called “self made men.”
Coxey’s Good Roads Plan spoke to each of these. Though hardly monolithic in outlook or even spoken of as a group, the views of businessmen like Coxey challenge our impression of the haughty tycoon as the dominant stereotype in this age of Gilded Age corporate ascendency. The champions of the *laissez faire* business model argued for an unfettered corporate liberalism enabled by government intervention on their behalf. In contrast, those more local and temperate business entrepreneurs like Coxey seemed less concerned about expanding beyond their local economies and more concerned with what government might do to give their loyal employees the opportunity to compete. Their reaction to *laissez faire* corporate capitalism was nothing new. Rather it simply represented the more traditional way business was done. It emerged seamlessly from earlier well established concepts of social obligation and responsibility that date to the founding. The existence of these more civic minded business leaders, equipped with their own bold ideas for reforming the economy and its politics, foreshadowed the role some business leaders would play throughout the Progressive era. Coxey in sum thus seems very much a part of a reform-minded genre of business advocates that developed their own separate narrative that aspired toward a more democratic capitalism.95

Coxey was not alone in adhering to this alternative model. For example, having started several successful businesses that helped shape Terre Haute, Indiana earlier in the century, Chauncey Rose purchased the Terre Haute and Indianapolis Railroad, a regional

 line where a young Eugene Debs went to work. Rose saw the welfare of the community as part of his business interest. He saw the success of his business as essential to sustaining the community’s welfare, and his concern for both were manifest in the way he operated his business. Indeed Debs’ own disillusionment with the capitalist class began shortly after Rose sold his interest in the local rail line to corporate owners in Chicago. The new bosses were distant, removed from the community, and seemed oblivious to the well being of the people of Terre Haute. As Debs would later observe, the new owners callously prioritized their own self-interests as paramount over those of employees. Experiencing this transition firsthand and observing its impacts on his family and friends sent Debs cascading in another direction. He would soon become one of the nation’s most revered labor leaders. Yet Debs recollection of Rose as an honorable, civic minded businessman remained strong. So strong, that in 1925, after a generation spent in labor and socialist activism, Debs would return to Terre Haute to commemorate Rose’s death. He honored Rose’s selfless, civic spirit with his own eulogy to a businessman that gained his respect. In much the same vein, after Coxey’s arrest in Washington following the March, Samuel Gompers, head of the American Federation of Labor, reached out to Coxey to see how he might support his release.96

Midwestern businessman, Nelson O. Nelson, the owner of a large plumbing fixtures manufacturing company, serves as another example of this alternative path. He began his career as a conventional nineteenth-century businessman. “... I got railroad

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96 Salvatore, Debs, 4-22; 342-345. For a fulsome discussion of the struggle between the political and social ethos of competing business philosophies see Berk, Alternative Tracks; “Coxey Like a Leech,” The Massillon Evening Independent (May 3, 1894).
passes for myself and salesman and those rebates on freight bills whenever I could get them,” Nelson would observe about himself retrospectively. However, over the course of his career, Nelson became troubled by the growing labor unrest that led to the Haymarket Riot in 1886. He readily acknowledged that businesses, by holding onto excessive profits, caused wages to stagnate. According to Nelson scant wages paid by corporations to their workers that “barely enable the workman to live when he has work, make him a tramp when he has none, and finally drives wage-workers into counter combinations for self-protection.” Moving his company from St. Louis to southern Illinois, Nelson built housing not simply for himself, but for all of his employees. However unlike other employee towns characterized by paternalism, Nelson’s LeClaire Illinois operated on the basis of a labor-management partnership, and in particular, a novel form of profit sharing that Nelson pioneered. “Simple co-operation, by which every participant in work should participate equally in the product, would appear to be the natural remedy,” he said in an 1887 article in The North American Review. Nelson saw profit sharing not only as an incentive to higher productivity, but an extension of the Golden Rule. In 1887 he went so far as to place a tenth of his wealth in a fund for disabled employees, and a tenth in a fund to prepare for possible reverses in profitability.97

Not only did many of Coxey’s contemporary businessmen share his fair-mindedness and sympathy with the producer, but they also shared his commitment to reform. Unlike many of his railroad compatriots, A.B. Stickney, President of the Chicago

Great Western Railway saw opportunity in the so-called Granger Laws. These laws, the result of earlier populist unrest amongst organized farmers after the Civil War, sought to check unregulated regional rail rates and force greater rate equality across the country. Stickney scolded his fellow railroad owners for failing to cooperate with farmers and their Grange representatives. Instead he saw the natural cooperation between shipper (farmer) and carrier (railroads) as essential to the future of the rail system. He thus came to embody the outlook of a minority of rail owners or “regionalists,” who sought a transportation system that very much aligned with Carey’s “society of little towns and cities, each a local center of manufacturing serving the surrounding countryside and providing a market for industrial produce.” Theirs was a vision that competed directly with those who wanted to centralize the power of the rails and allow the national rail lines the unfettered ability to charge indiscriminately. By 1892, Populists decided that the railroads needed to be nationalized and owned by the government. Despite Stickney’s valiant caution to his fellow railroad men, and his own embrace of the Granger laws, the trajectory or rail consolidation continued unabated. The trend toward large privately owned national railroads that could impose discriminatory rate structures at the expense of farmers and small local manufacturers moved forward at full speed, despite calls for public ownership.98

The challenges Rose, Nelson, Stickney and others like Coxey posed to the predominant laissez faire capitalism took many forms. Yet most met with limited, if any success. In their allegiance to both the community and their own employees, these

98 The discussion of this alternative genre of American businessmen is well documented in a treatment of its manifestations in the rail industry where “regionalists” like Stickney pitted themselves against those “centralists” like James P. Hill and Pierpont Morgan; see Berk, Alternative Tracks.
alternatives found their lineage as far back as Enlightenment notions of serving the common good by constructing an equipoised social contract. Indeed, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a “strong sense of moral obligation” seemed to constrain the pursuit of business wealth. Over a century later, these businessmen reformers though perhaps not consciously aware of the tradition they upheld, seemed fully committed to constructing a more responsible social contract between business enterprise and the state. Thus Coxey’s Good Roads Plan called directly on the state to create a greater sense of economic justice. “Our weal is a common weal,” said contemporary economist Richard Ely, articulating the need for a stronger government role in the economy. As Coxey took his band of unemployed from Massillon in the spring of 1894, he called it “The Commonweal of Christ.” (See Figure 6).

Yet under the new corporate model, monopolists saw wealth accumulation as justified by the very laws of nature. So committed were these latter corporate icons of the Gilded Age to larger and larger enterprise, that they boldly invoked Darwinian principles to justify their behavior. The Gilded Age tycoons that succeeded in the new corporate economy readily appropriated British social philosopher Herbert Spencer’s bastardization of Darwinian theories of natural selection to the economic sphere as justification of their superiority. They constructed a “Gospel of Prosperity,” which rationalized their business

99 James Klopfenberg, “The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,” Journal of American History 74, no.1, (June, 1987): 9-33; Adam Smith is quoted on page 18 saying In his Theory of Moral Sentiments Adam Smith, while praising the role of self-interest in economic affairs, also observed that “How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him.”; W. Woodruff, “History and the American Businessman,” The Business History Review 30, no. 3 (September, 1956), 243. Wiebe, Businessmen and Reform, 9; Fine, Laissez Faire, 202. For an insightful account into accusations and motives of those who accused Richard Ely of being a socialist while a professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin, see Theron F. Sclabach, “An Aristocrat on Trial,” The Wisconsin Magazine of History, 47, no.2 (Winter 1963-64): 146-159;
acumen by citing the laws of nature as presented by Darwin. The Gospel’s basic tenets made acquisitiveness a virtue, and a trait to be rewarded by the natural selection of the fittest. Under their elaborate construct, the so called Upper Ten could “unite under one generalization everything in nature from protozoa to politics.” Or, as Yale Professor William Graham Sumner matter of factly observed, the rational language of the business contract comprised the essential fabric of all social relationships. The government was either to move to the side, or to enable the concentration of wealth. As Populist commentator Henry Demarest Lloyd concluded, “The prize we give the fittest is monopoly of the necessaries of life.”

Notable clerics of the period responded to this gospel of the rich by developing their own “Social Gospel,” that encouraged practices more akin to the community-producerist ethos of businessmen like Coxey who adopted a different capitalist model. Noteworthy religious figures such as Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch preached a moral capitalism concerned less with legitimizing the behaviors of the acquisitive, and focusing instead on the gulf between haves and have-nots. The Social Gospel sought to create a middle ground between laissez faire corporate capitalism and the publicly-feared prospect of worker upheaval leading to anarchy or socialism. Gladden would repeatedly remind his critics that he believed in individual freedom and free enterprise. But he expressed his colleagues’ sentiment when he said, “As a bird cannot fly without two wings, so the community cannot rise and advance without the

integrity of the individual on the one hand, and the thorough identification of the individual with the life of his fellows on the other." \(^{101}\)

Coxey’s plan sought to chart this course, petitioning government to help rejoin idled American producers in myriad farm and factory towns to a larger national community of shared interests and greater economic justice. The consistent desire of populists from their earliest expressions envisioned government not as paternalistic, but as a leveling force for the producer. As Donnelly’s July 4 preamble to the Omaha Platform, declared in commemorating the founding of the nation, “We declare that this Republic can only endure as a free government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other…” Thus if Coxey’s plan sought the government’s help in building good roads, it was in this spirit of a government that needed to intervene when necessary “to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.” Restoring the social contract did not mean big government, but government that did not tip the scales in favor of corporate interests at the expense of the producer.\(^{102}\)

The Omaha Populist planks thus, for example, called for ridding the railroads of ownership of idle land and requiring government ownership of the railroads as a “public necessity.” Populists sought government intervention against the railroads to restore what they believed to be a social contract broken by corporate abuse. The railroads


\(^{102}\) See discussion of whether populism was paternalistic in Clanton, *Humane Preference*, 129-132. Before Omaha, earlier expressions such as the Cleburne Demands of the Texas Alliance in 1886, sought to “secure to our people freedom from the onerous and shameful abuses that the industrial classes are now suffering at the hands of the arrogant capitalists and powerful corporations.” For excerpt from Cleburne Demands see Norman Pollack, *The Populist Mind* ((New York: The Bobbs-Merrill and Company, inc., 1967), xxxiii; Texts of the Ocala and Omaha Platforms can be found in Tindall, *Populist Reader*, 88-96.
should not be able to push out farmers from land ownership or charge penurious rates simply for taking their products to market. Indeed, there was no underestimating the power of the rail and other corporate lobbyists to tilt the playing field in their favor. As a Louisiana legislator remarked on observing the power of the rail lobby in his state, “We thought the railroad and bank directors would no longer have it all their own way, and fill all the chairs in our Legislature. But money is ahead of us yet.” In the Omaha preamble, Donnelly lucidly described the power of Gilded Age corporate lobbies and their cozy relationships to their plutocratic friends. He noted they had created a situation where ironically “from the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires.” By contrast, and like other business reformers of his day, Coxey subscribed to the notion of a societal Commonweal, and offered a plan to improve the condition of his fellow man. To demonstrate his own commitment to this principle, he led his own “tramp army” to Washington to petition for good roads.103

**Bold Ideas**

From the outset it seemed the populist response required ideas large enough in their reach to match the scale of those ideas and institutions beginning to populate the new corporate economy. Coxey’s bold notion of a national system of Good Roads fit well with an already established pattern of large ideas that characterized populist reform. Such bold ideas, typically national in reach, emerged in faraway places like Lampasas County, Texas. Indeed historians of this period have conveniently defined the Populist Moment as beginning in a tiny wood cabin in Lampasas Texas in 1875 with the creation of the first

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Farmer Alliance. There one of the foremost leaders of the prairie agricultural uprising, Charles Macune, spoke passionately about not abandoning the next generation to enslavement to the banks and railroads. Macune stressed cooperation between farm and factory producers in order to compete against the new corporate capitalism. “I hold that cooperation …will place a limit to the encroachments of organized monopoly and will be the means by which the mortgage-burdened farmers can assert their freedom from the tyranny of organized capital, and obtain the reward for honesty, industry and frugality.”

Macune’s far reaching plan to establish so-called “sub-treasuries” in order to alleviate the oppressive burdens of farm credit called for the wholesale creation of a new system of regional, cooperatively owned and administered warehouses, offices, and banks. Within this alternative cooperative system, farmers could bring their crops for storage and then borrow up to 80 per cent of the market price for their goods at a low rate of 2 percent. This plan was later amended to accommodate plains state farmers whose farms were heavily mortgaged under the weight of the crop lien system that allowed merchants and middlemen to squeeze farmers on their crop prices. Under the lien system a middleman by leveraging famers from one year to the next could effectively gain control of a farmer’s land. In the decades of the 1870’s and 1880’s, as farm prices generally fell due to overproduction, literally millions of poor farmers descended into what amounted to desperate tenantry.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Descriptions of the evolution of the Farmers Alliance may be found in Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 25-154; For a good description of Macune’s sub-Treasury idea see Piott, *American Reformers*, 43-57; Goodwyn depicts the impacts of the crop lien system in detail in *Democratic Promise* 25-36.
Macune’s grand idea was to immediately add $400 million into the farm economy in order to stimulate growth and create a level playing field for those who labored each day in the fields. Moreover, the sub-Treasury plan became a central component for earlier platforms of the Farmer’s Alliance, as well as Populist platforms at St. Louis in 1889 and Ocala in 1890. Yet the concept struggled for political legitimacy in Congress. Despite a national campaign organized by Macune, the sub-Treasury bill died without a vote in committee. Macune’s idea, like Coxey’s later, seemed beyond the capability of most Gilded Age politicians, or for that matter businessman, to fully grasp.\textsuperscript{105}

Such bold proposals that emerged from the populist energy were not the sole province of farm advocates such as Macune. For example, in 1878, at the very formation of the nascent union movement, Knights of Labor leaders Robert Schilling and Terrence Powderly offered their “Reading Platform.” Included among its planks were equal pay for equal work for both sexes, the eight hour work day, and the issuance of government backed legal tender. However, the platform also went beyond the demands over hours and wages, putting forward a new way to organize business itself in order to more effectively compete and reduce the choke hold of the Trusts. Thus, in addition to their demands for fair worker conditions, labor leaders offered an idea known as “market unionism,” that sought to organize specific industries in ways that would benefit workers as well as owners.\textsuperscript{106}

John McBride, best known as President of United Mine Workers, and who also helped to found the Ohio People’s Party, presided over the earliest iterations of market

\textsuperscript{105} Goodwyn, Democratic Promise, 135-139; Regarding the inability to grasp ideas of this scale see Goodwyn, Populist Moment, 110.
\textsuperscript{106} Hild, Greenbackers, 45-47;
unionism. Under his leadership, the UMW experimented with large-scale cooperatives to better organize the coal industry. McBride saw a fractured and decentralized coal industry that was subject to the same type of corporate victimization as the small farmer. Thus his plan like other examples of market unionism, sought to create the same sort of cooperative spirit among small eastern coal operators as existed in the local and statewide Farmers Alliances in the southern and prairie states. By organizing in this way McBride felt miners might better leverage themselves against electricity and machinery suppliers, as well as compete more effectively against larger coal operators. 107

Plans for reconstituting the economy emerged from those in the intellectual class as well. For example, writer and political economist Henry George’s “single tax” crusade spawned over 131 “Single Tax Clubs” at its peak in 1891. George’s proposal for a single tax on the unimproved value of land would, he suggested, create incentives for land improvements rather than attract profit speculators such as the railroads and banks. In his best selling Progress and Poverty he argued “We must make land common property,” and he suggested that by allowing unfettered construction and improvements to land, the single tax would promote unprecedented economic growth. The single tax movement was embraced by many Populists, notably “Socklesss” Jerry Simpson of Kansas who claimed it would help level the playing field for farmers and laborers. Producers must have claim to land unfettered by the monopolists and banks he said in support of George’s idea. “If by granting special laws and legislating special privileges for monopolies you have deprived your brother of a chance to live, he must go back to you and buy the right to

live,” Simpson asserted. Not only did Simpson advocate the single tax idea passionately in the halls of Congress, but George’s idea became part of the Texas Farmers Alliance party platforms in 1891 and 1892. Indeed the Omaha Platform noted that land “is the heritage of all the people and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes.”  

In a similar spirit of boldness, when Coxey conceived his own blueprint for Good Roads, he charged past the modest ideas emanating from a two decade old Good Roads movement. To put Coxey’s Plan in perspective, the $500 million dedicated to constructing roads amounted to the equivalent of the entire federal budget. Coxey recognized that the railroad monopoly, with its preferred rates and routes, left much of America stranded from the possibility of prosperity. A national network of publicly owned roads that would connect remote rural towns to big city markets could keep produce from rotting in barns and bring value to stranded rural farms. Most importantly, following the devastating impacts of the Panic of 1893, it would begin to put the unemployed back to work.  


109 Shirley Plumer Austin, “Coxey’s Commonweal Army,” *The Chataquan*, 9 (June, 1894): 332; Plummer attributes Coxey’s interest in roads to an encounter with a mud hole. “An encounter with this now historic mud hole, some three years ago, fixed most firmly in the mind of Jacob Sechler Coxey the crying need of good roads”; Howson, *Coxey*, 119; Howson notes: “Coxey enthusiastically wrote letters to Congressmen and editors, spoke at meetings, and issued pamphlets and broadsides about Good Roads. Often neglecting his business, he travelled to conventions, organized clubs, and according to several accounts, bore the costs of improvements on public roads near his quarry with the result that Lawrence Township had the ‘best roads in Ohio.’” Coxey’s Good Roads proposal represented an exceptionally bold bill. Its $500 million budget represented approximately the equivalent of the federal budget in 1894. Moreover, current House and Senate appropriators use a single price index to assign current dollar values to historic budget levels. For the year 1900 (the closest year to 1894 in which such an index is available), $500 million, if converted to today’s dollars, would equate to $10.6 trillion, when using the average construction inflation index (estimate provided by David Gibbons, Professional Staff Member; United States House of Representatives at request of the author on February 23, 2009).  

108 Skinner, “Coxey Folly,” 227; Introduced in the Senate on March 19, 1894 by Kansas Populist Party Senator Peffer and in the House by in the House by California Congressman Thomas J. Geary, who was an
Coxey’s bold idea and dedication to public improvements not only emerged from a rich intellectual fabric, but in its very form resembled the plan of Henry Clay and John Calhoun for an American System; an economy united by public works including roads and canals built with the help of the federal government. Treasury Secretary Albert Gallatin’s 1808 report to Congress clearly stated the need for a system of national infrastructure with roads at its core. Yet in Coxey’s time this vision was far from realization. Ever since Cooper’s small locomotive defeated a horse drawn carriage in 1830, the national investment in rail dwarfed that in roads. Throughout the nineteenth century, the railroad came to symbolize America’s emergence as an industrial power on the world stage. Noting the superiority of railways to highways, Carnegie observed, “The old nations of the earth creep at a snail’s pace; the Republic thunders past with the rush of the express.” Governments at every level sought creative, if not corrupt incentives to aid railroad construction, and towns and villages throughout America seemed willing to pay whatever price to have railroads boost their local economies. Political corruption enabled railroad magnates such as James Hill and Jay Gould to eviscerate any remaining vision of a national system of roads. By the 1880’s, the nation had achieved an integrated network of railroad lines, with consolidated national rail systems operating from 5,000 to 10,000 miles of track and gobbling up smaller local and regional lines.\(^{110}\)

Good Roads

The decrepit road conditions Coxey’s men endured during their March to Washington reflected this century long legacy of rail dominance. Coxey’s Army often found itself marching on the National Pike, a declining artifact of Clay and Calhoun’s eighteenth century American System. In the spring of 1894, what was now referred to as the Cumberland Road symbolized the decline in America’s roads during the nineteenth century. This was hardly the magnificent National Road that its proponents envisioned stretching from the Maryland tidewaters well into the Ohio frontier. The road had not only become unworthy of its original name, but had so deteriorated that it was not unusual to see bull dogs tied to the wagon’s wheels with their necks bulging against their collars as they strained to move their heavy loads forward on its most treacherous stretches.111

In short, America’s rail system had simply evolved into its principle means of efficient movement. For those like Coxey, the path toward revitalizing our national road system remained rocky. Since Senator Martin Van Buren blocked additional National

34-36. According to Maurice Baxter, Henry Clay and the American System (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), 47, Clay was forceful in his advocacy of a “…chain of turnpike roads and canals from Passamaquoddy to New Orleans, and other similar roads intersecting the mountains, to facilitate intercourse between all parts of the country and to bind and connect us together.” President Madison went so far in his annual messages to Congress in 1815 and 1816 to propose that even a Constitutional amendment might be in order to develop such a system of national roads. See also Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 65. Schwantes summarizes the impact of the railroads that had essentially bypassed the idea for roads linking farmers with markets that Coxey ably pursued; referring to the rail’s views of rural America: “This was a primitive and isolated land, bypassed by the railroads and thus by the mainstream of American history since the Civil War.” As White suggests in his more recent treatment the Railroads were far more effective in exploiting this space for profit and charging farmers penurious rates than they were interested in efficiently linking farmer to market; see White, Railroaded, 140-174.

111 Thomas Brownfield Searight, The Old Pike: A History of the National Road (Published by the author, Uniontown, PA. 1894), 111.
Pike funding in 1828, the federal government could not get out of the road-building business fast enough. By 1832, Congress gave authority for the National Pike to Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Each state became responsible for developing its own system of tolls in order to minimally finance road repair. State and local governments were left to finance the repair of roads as a result of the federal government’s relinquishment of its role in their construction and upkeep. By the end of the nineteenth century, the National Pike remained woefully incomplete. The law in Coxey’s Ohio, not untypical of many states, actually required farmers to perform two days of labor on highways, contiguous to their property just to keep them in some semblance of repair. Known as the “working out tax,” this led to inconsistencies in road repair and reduced the amount localities raised in revenues. It proved as ineffective a mechanism for northern road maintenance, as convict labor did for the upkeep of southern roads.\footnote{Searight, \textit{The Old Pike}, 111; Speed, “The Common Road,” 547.}

Before Coxey emerged with his Good Roads plan, the impetus to revitalize the national infrastructure emerged from a most unlikely source. In 1877 Colonel Albert A. Pope, a decorated Civil War hero, began importing bicycles into the United States. After he began manufacturing them in America in 1879, the bicycle craze truly took hold. With the advent of the pneumatic tire (air filled), bicycle riding left the rinks for the roads. The seeds of what two decades later became “highway federalism” began to slowly take root with these early bicycle riders. By 1880 riders formed their own association, the League of American Wheelmen (LAW). With
chapters in virtually every state, they figuratively began paving the way for an improved road system throughout America. In the span of a decade, beginning with its formation when “a little band of gentlemen” met at Newport Rhode Island, the epicenter of Gilded Age elite culture, to its later hard earned engagement of farmers to help finance road repair, the LAW went from being an elitist recreational amusement into a broader national movement dedicated to Good Roads. 113

As bicycles came down in price and gained public acceptance in the 1880s, the LAW engaged in a robust campaign to convince a stubbornly hesitant farm community that good roads were essential to agricultural prosperity. Despite the momentum the LAW generated, rural Americans generally did not see good roads as in their economic best interest. Early Good Roads advocates as early as the 1860s perceived a widespread public acceptance of bad road conditions. Americans farmers generally opposed road improvements they might have to pay for. Nor, having grown accustomed to bad roads, did they realize that new technologies could dramatically improve their local roads. Occasionally, a wet winter in the Midwest would draw some passing attention to the economic impact of bad roads that were preventing essential goods from moving to market. Even city fathers frequently

complained that the condition of rural roads prevented outlying residents from visiting their stores.¹¹⁴

Throughout the 1880s, agitation for good roads increased in farm press commentaries, as did calls for state legislation to address the situation. “Let anyone drive over most American roads in the spring, with open eyes and wits, and see what unchecked destruction is at work,” commented the syndicated “Country Gentleman” in April 1884. In October of that same year, the American Farmer expressed hope that soon Good Roads would be the rule rather than the exception. An Ohio farmer, losing money with every day that his goods could not reach market, calculated that maintaining one brief stretch of Ohio road that becomes impassable to any farm load during wet weather cost each of four road districts $1.50 a day to maintain. The farmer calculated that this amounted to $6,000 over twenty years, or more than enough for the gravel to pave it. Meanwhile, revealing the provincial jealousies inherent within the road movement, Michigan farmers thought themselves to be far worse off than their neighbors in Ohio because their climate was worse. The Michigan advocates saw themselves as limited only to moving goods in the “season of good roads.” Meanwhile they contended their Ohio neighbors could move grain to market in “half the time and with half the expense.” These sorts of squabbles

amongst road advocates in the nascent national movement typified the effort and left the roads in a state of disrepair.\textsuperscript{115}

Simply taking the Good Roads debate directly to farmers tested the effectiveness of the Good Roads movement. In its earliest stages of organization, the LAW selfishly focused public concern on the restrictions localities imposed on cyclists own recreational mobility. With their attention narrowly focused on access to city streets, wheelmen found they had little in common with their most important rural audience. Moreover, to farmers, wheelmen appeared rich snobs oblivious to economic realities. Their comparatively fast paced travel and strange looking contraptions caused horsemen and wagon drivers to react with alarm. As they peddled through busy city streets or darted along country roads, they became ripe targets for heated confrontations and an occasional fist fight. City policeman chased down racers, also known as “scorchers,” and innocent pedestrians recoiled in fear.\textsuperscript{116}

The economic condition farmers now found themselves also clouded their perception of good roads advocacy. In Coxey’s Ohio, farms had decreased in market value by 220 million dollars following the 1890 census, and by 1893 the Panic made this situation worse. Between 1870 and 1890, fueled by the heady railroad expansion, the number of farms increased by four fifths, but so too did crop production and farm mortgage indebtedness. Long before the Panic of 1893, the farm economy suffered. Corn sold for 75 cents a bushel in 1869. By 1890 it sold for 28

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cents. The Panic only made this situation worse. Farmers, reeling under these economic pressures, hardly wanted to incur new costs for road upkeep. This raised their level of skepticism about the financial schemes Good Roads advocates peddled. Moreover, to the small farmer, Good Roads could be seen to represent the relentless advance of modernity and the unwelcome urbanization of rural culture. Good Roads might be seen as yet one more example of alien corporate influences encroaching on rural life. Thus, though the Grange and other farmer associations would eventually join the call for Good Roads, most farmers initially remained skeptical of the idea and used the “rhetoric of populism” to voice their opposition to this unwelcome advance of modernity.\footnote{Steeples and Whitten, Democracy in Desperation, 14-41; Potter, “The Work of Wheelmen,” 351; Frank B. Latham, The Panic of 1893 (New York: Franklin Watts Inc. 1971), 5; Aronson, 306; Ronald R. Kline, Consumers in the Country (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2000), 60-62. Writing anonymously in the Ohio Farmer in 1882, “Buckeye” noted the reaction of his seventy year old neighbor to the prospect of new taxes to pay for improvements to the road system. Noting he had already paid for improvements over the fifty-year life of his farm, Buckeye’s neighbor complained: “…my farm barely pays taxes, keeps up improvements and keeps me. Now I am assessed eight hundred dollars to build pikes, neither near enough to do much good. This is simply robbing me of what I have reasonably earned;” see “Turnpikes,” Ohio Farmer 62, no. 9 (September 2, 1882): 131.}

Coxey’s own state of Ohio had not taken any action to improve the roads system. Ohio legislators had looked at the prospect of putting a charge on the weight of heavy wagons as a way to raise revenue for road improvements. But the bill failed to move. In January 1893 the state’s own chapter of the National Good Roads Association met to debate controversial alternatives to funding road repair and construction. But they adjourned with little resolution on how to solve the problem. For this very reason, some of Coxey’s fellow Ohioans soon were drawn to his plan to nationalize the costs of highway construction. A conference of farmers meeting in Athens warmed to the idea, and one reporter noted that a majority of the state’s
citizens seemed to like the notion of states and municipalities being able to borrow money from the federal government at low interest rates and then issue bonds that would not come due for thirty years.118

Moreover, despite the farmer’s reluctance over any financing scheme for Good Roads that left them with the bill, the Good Roads movement itself continued to gain substantial momentum. The LAW remained active distributing over five million pamphlets. Circulation of their Good Roads Bulletin grew to over one million in its first three years of existence. The Governor of North Carolina proclaimed “This movement for Good Roads has attained remarkable strength.” Good Roads advocate Charles Pratt, noted the “newspapers lend their columns almost daily” to Good Roads and “magazines and periodicals are filled with the subject.” With well over 15,000 members and nearing a million bicycle riders nationwide, the LAW unanimously agreed at its 1888 national meeting to take on the issue of Good Roads and mount a national campaign through a new National Committee for Highway Improvement.119

Yet Coxey’s version of a Good Roads plan and that of the Good Roads movement were far apart. The elitist tinged League sought to take careful steps toward a new road system. For example, long time Good Roads champion General

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119 Mason, 74-75; “National League of Good Roads,” The American Farmer 28 (February 15, 1893): 5. Mason, 108; “North Carolina News,” The Atlanta Constitution, 2 January 1893; Pratt, “The Road Reform Movement” 219; Potter, “The Work of Wheelmen,” 349; By 1896, only sixteen years after the LAW formed, Potter noted that the organization had grown from one dedicated to gaining bicyclers access to any roads at all, to a million rider national advocacy movement for Good Roads throughout America.
Roy Stone thought those advocating for Good Roads should welcome virtually any financial plan for improvement regardless of whether housed at the federal, state, county, or municipal level. At the same time, Stone clearly tried to encourage what he perceived to be some gathering momentum for federal support of local road improvements. “Public opinion is fast crystallizing in favor of national aid in building country roads and it can hardly be a debatable question that the government will again turn its attention to assisting the states in this work,” he proclaimed at the November 1892 Chicago meeting of the newly formed National League for Good Roads (NLGR). As Coxey’s own Good Roads Association churned out its own pamphlets and circulars, the NLGR also dedicated itself to combining the efforts of all those working for Good Roads and generally encouraging broader interest in the movement throughout the country.

General Stone’s own proposal modestly asked that each jurisdiction of government share the costs of county bond issuance. Speaking in Chicago on October 21, 1893, he proposed that Good Roads be financed by the issuance of county bonds to be guaranteed first by the state, and ultimately, only if necessary as a last resort, by the federal government. However, unlike Coxey’s bold plan, Stone’s did not envision what amount would need to be raised to create a national road system. Moreover, he left it for local governments to choose to participate or not. Only if local governments defaulted on their obligations would these roads be mortgaged to the United States. Stone seemed to reflect the will of the Good Roads
movement that the national government be in the rear rather than the lead, though he at least acknowledged the federal government had a role to play.\textsuperscript{120}

Stone, therefore, did not rule out some modest federal involvement. He also supported legislation offered by the President Pro Tempore of the Senate and coincidentally also the President of the NLGR, Nebraska Senator Charles Manderson, that would create a National Highway Commission to investigate the scope and costs of road repair. Stone wrote to the Nebraska Senator reminding him how both Clay and Calhoun “declared it the duty of Congress to bind the republic together with a perfect system of roads and canals.” Given the condition of America’s roads it was now time for the federal government to again play a role, even if the modest one. Stone’s letter insisted the federal government must lend its own faith and credit to states and localities for the purpose of constructing this national network of Good Roads.\textsuperscript{121}

James R. Dunn, coincidentally also from Massillon, and who chaired the LAW, stayed in Washington following a July 1892 LAW convention in order to join Stone in lobbying for Manderson’s bill and the House companion offered by Congressman Philip Post of Illinois. Their lobbying efforts were initially successful and the bill quickly passed in the Senate. Modest in its aim, the bill established a National Commission to study the need for Good Roads. The bipartisan panel would


\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Congressional Record}, July 5, 1892: 5765.
consist of members of Congress and five Presidential citizen appointees who would make general inquiry into the condition of highways.\textsuperscript{122}

However, Manderson’s bill quickly floundered in the House. Revealing concerns over any national presence in road building, the Speaker and his allies labeled the bill “dangerous” and an abuse of “state’s rights.” In the wake of certain defeat Stone tried to hold his ground. “It is true,” he remarked, “that national aid in road making involved a wide departure from present practice, but it is only a return to the ideas of sixty years ago [Clay’s American System].” However, realizing the inevitable, that their legislation was going nowhere, Manderson and Stone quickly changed their tactics, now eschewing Congressional action and calling for the President to establish a separate Office of Road Inquiry to be quietly established in the Department of Agriculture.\textsuperscript{123}

The idea for an Executive Office belonged to Pope, who like Stone, seemed a constant financial and intellectual presence in the Good Roads movement. As part of his effort to popularize the concept, Pope had compiled a catalogue of publications on Good Roads which he made freely available to libraries across the country. In

\textsuperscript{122} From 1890 to 1892 James R. Dunn, also from Massillon, served as President of the LAW. Dunn, who stirred controversy with his rules governing bicycle racing expenses, also spoke eloquently on the need for Good Roads and lobbied tirelessly on their behalf. And though there is no evidence Coxey knew Dunn, it is hard to believe that in a town of just over ten thousand, Dunn’s notoriety escaped Coxey’s attention, or vice versa; Dunn spoke to an overflow crowd at the Grand Opera House, where he “poured into the ears of the vast assemblage before him sound doctrine on the subject of road improvement;” see Chris Wheeler, “Outing for May,” \textit{Outing 18}, no. 2 (May, 1891): 137-141; Howson, \textit{Coxey}, 118-119; and Mary Vogt, \textit{Towpath to Towpath: The History of Massillon Ohio} (Massillon, Ohio: Bates Publishing, 2002), 223; Vogt places Massillon’s population circa 1890 at 10,092; see also Richard Weingroff, “Portrait of a General: General Roy Stone,” (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration), 2 (see http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/stone.cfm)

\textsuperscript{123} Congressional Record, July 27, 1892: 6846.

March 1893, a year after Congressman Warwick introduced Coxey’s Good Roads Petition, Pope, joined by Governor William McKinley of Ohio and twelve other Governors, petitioned Congress to establish a National Road Department. Pope insisted his idea was not to intimate that the federal governments build roads, though some, including the Governor of New York, thought that to be precisely Pope’s intent. Rather, Pope had laid out his modest views in detail in the March 1892 issue of *Forum*.  

Noting the growing momentum for Good Roads in this article, Pope advocated that state governments take the lead role in owning, controlling or maintaining roads in order to connect the main towns one to another. He reported to the League that he had over one million signatures in support of his plan to empower the states to take the lead in road construction. Pope admitted that town governments might lose some control, but extolled the public benefits Good Roads potentially offered for an increasingly dispersed population and more economical movement of goods.

Pope’s tactic of working directly with the executive branch resulted in more tangible success. On October 3, 1893 a new Office of Road Inquiry under the leadership of none other than Stone himself received its authorization from the

Secretary of Agriculture. The new office within the Department was chartered “to make investigations with regard to the best methods of road making.” As its first meeting, Office Director Stone received a letter of welcome from J. Sterling Norton, the Secretary of Agriculture. But the letter was more than a simple courtesy. Rather the Secretary admonished his new colleague that highway costs remained the responsibility of the states and that his department would not endorse any initiatives that would “furnish labor to the unemployed or to convicts.” Stone’s tiny Office of Road Inquiry was clearly constrained. His earlier vision of a modest federal financial role in road construction now seemed moot. For the time being it thus seemed clear that it would be left to state and local officials to take a lead in financing, building, and maintaining good roads.  

The struggle to establish even this modest position in the Department of Agriculture seemed lost on Coxey, however. The plan he promoted beginning in 1891 did not tax the farmer or any other entity, but relied on an expansionary monetary philosophy to infuse $500 million new dollars into the economy and put idled producers back to work. The Ohio People’s Party Platform, the Populist Party’s voice in his home state, endorsed Coxey’s idea because it represented a way to create vast numbers of new jobs immediately without imposing any taxes or road upkeep fees.  

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127 “Extract from Ohio People’s Party Platform,” Coxey Good Roads and Non-Interest Bearing Bond Library: Cause and Cure, (Massillon: Clay Block, 1895) 1, no. 2 (March, 1895): 28-30. Indeed Coxey’s Good Roads scheme not only put people back to work, but people to work “on something that was not up for sale,” the Platform noted.
Meanwhile, Coxey lobbied with great enthusiasm in favor of his bold plan, based on producerist principles and tied to his closely held Greenback monetary beliefs. By 1893, California Democratic Congressman Thomas J. Geary and Kansas Populist Senator Peffer had introduced two separate and briefly worded pieces of legislation in their respective chambers that sought to translate Coxey’s Plan into the law of the land. The identical bills that would be introduced in the House and the Senate, called for the Treasury to issue $500 million in what Coxey described as “full legal tender Treasury notes, making them full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and appropriate to each State and Territory pro rata with the number of miles of road in each state” The vague and confusing mechanics of Coxey’s plan resulted because he ostensibly allowed each government entity the authority to assess up to one half the property values in its jurisdiction, and then to issue interest free bonds on the basis of this assessment, thus allowing redundant assessments on behalf of overlapping jurisdictions.  

Members of Congress would later challenge Coxey on this feature of his program since it seemed to allow the same property to be assessed multiple times, thus creating the opportunity for significant over valuation. Quite simply, under Coxey’s Plan the same property could be assessed once by a county and a second time by a township, and thus separate bonds could be issued by these overlapping jurisdictions based on the same

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128 Skinner, “Coxey Folly,” 227; Introduced in the Senate on March 19, 1894 by Kansas Populist Party Senator Peffer and in the House by in the House by California Congressman Thomas J. Geary, who was an acquaintance of Carl Browne’s, the identical Good Roads bills as introduced appear in Appendix I of The Cause and the Cure, Statement by Mr. J.S. Coxey of Massillon Ohio on the Currency Question Before the Subcommittee of Ways and Means January 5, 1895 in Ray Stannard Baker Papers at Library of Congress;
property assessment. Nonetheless, Coxey tried to reassure the skeptical Congressional panel that the Treasury could indeed issue legal tender currency to each political subdivision, regardless of size or location, up to a combined total of $500 million. His only caveat was that when issuing bonds, each government entity was required to hold back a small percentage of the revenue raised for administrative costs. The four million men, by Coxey’s estimate, who would be returned to full employment as a result of this legislation, could therefore be paid $1.50 a day in greenbacks that would be backed by the deposit of low interest bearing twenty five year bonds. The second bill implementing Coxey’s Good Roads Plan simply called for the Secretary of War to administer this “general county-road fund system of the United States” for road improvement. The industrial army of unemployed would be returned to work under the Secretary of War’s direction.129

Despite the grand scope of Coxey’s Plan, the bill’s which embodied his Plan consisted of but a few paragraphs. Though each bill contained scant detail on precisely how property would be assessed for purposes of valuing the bonds, or how the Secretary of War would allocate $20 million dollars each month for Good Roads construction, when Coxey testified, he went to great lengths to explain how it would work. Legislators were curious as to how his Plan would prevent jurisdictions from double or triple counting the same property as they issued bonds? Coxey stumbled through an answer, saying essentially he would default to the current laws governing bond issuance. But then

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129 Coxey, The Coxey Plan, 28; This volume also contains the transcript of Coxey’s appearance before the Ways and Means Committee on January 8, 1895, 19-44; Regarding the testimony Coxey provided in 1895 where he stated the plan would result in $1.50 an hour wage, he earlier referred to $1.25 an hour in 1891 when he was interviewed by his local newspaper, see “Farewell to Poverty,” The Massillon Evening Independent (December 20, 1891).
he went on to detail how his system would infuse cash into the beleaguered economy, disable the British chokehold on U.S. currency, create public ownership of the railroads, and, most importantly put four million producers back to work.\textsuperscript{130}

The rules for assessing property values that served as the basis for bond valuation would be maintained, he assured a Congressional panel, with the important caveat that the nationalization of the railroads would allow these valuable properties to be assessed for their value, which currently accrued to their distant owners. This would allow the interest rate for the municipal bonds Coxey proposed to be reduced to virtually zero and allow them to be backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. Treasury. Coxey went into great detail explained how his bold plan would result in full employment and thus revitalize a depressed economy. He reassured the Congress that with an expanded tax base resulting from full employment, combined with the now public revenues and receipts from the government ownership of the railroads, his Plan would more than compensate for the usual 4 per cent interest outlay required for the bond issuance, and thus easily provide the revenues necessary to pay back the principal to the Treasury. By employing millions of unemployed men, Coxey said his Plan would lead to more purchase of surplus goods from farms and factories thus revitalizing the depressed economy. “I realize that a man can be too radical in anything,” Coxey testified. “I am

\textsuperscript{130} Introduced in the Senate by Kansas Populist Party Senator Peffer and in the House by Congressman Geary of California, the identical bills as reprinted in \textit{The Cause and the Cure}, Statement by Mr. J.S. Coxey of Massillon Ohio on the Currency Question Before the Subcommittee of Ways and Means January 5, 1895, The Ways and Means panel before which Coxey testified, was ironically chaired by none other Nebraska Democratic Congressman William Jennings Bryan, recently defeated and then serving as a lame duck. Bryan seemed dutifully attentive through the hearing the winter after the March, but also seemed wholly unimpressed. Bryan would soon return to Nebraska and find his fate hatched to those practicing more pragmatic political aims in the election of 1896, where fusion politics reached its penultimate fate; see \textit{Cause and Cure} in Ray Stannard Baker Papers at Library of Congress and at Coxey papers at Massillon Museum; See also Jacob Sechler Coxey, \textit{The Coxey Plan} (Massillon: Jacob S. Coxey Publisher, 1914), 28
trying here to accomplish something that will be beneficial to the people of the
country...,” he concluded.  

However, Coxey’s Plan, like most Populist ideas, stalled in Congress. With
the railroads still the predominant form of transportation and a predominant lobby in
Congress, the entire federal role in road making would, for the time being, be left in
the hands of three people in an office in the bowels of the Department of Agriculture.
Moreover, the Secretary of Agriculture clearly made sure the federal role retained
this Lilliputian status. With Gilded Age politics so thoroughly influenced by the
powerful railroad lobby, it seemed inevitable that the railroads would retain their
dominance. The agents and lawyers employed by the railroads dominated state
capitols and the halls of Congress. Something more dramatic seemed required if
Coxey’s petition was to be heard and attention drawn to the questions of decrepit
roads and the plight of the unemployed.  

Nonetheless, with his own bold Plan, Coxey staked his claim in this populist
moment, upholding a long established nineteenth century tradition of producer advocacy.
Though a prosperous businessman from Massillon, Ohio, Coxey, whose own self interest
seemed bound by a sense of conscience and community, had clearly joined in the
Populist protest against the banks and the railroads, and what he referred to as the idle

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131 Statement by Mr. J.S. Coxey of Massillon Ohio on the Currency Question Before the Subcommittee of
Ways and Means January 5, 1895 in Ray Stannard Baker Papers at Library of Congress; See also Jacob Sechler Coxey,
The Coxey Plan (Massillon: Jacob S. Coxey Publisher, 1914), 19-44.

132 As Alan Trachtenberg notes, “The hold of business on the top ranks of the parties increased in the course
of the Gilded Age....” See Trachtenberg, The Incorporation of America, 164; See also Richard White, Railroaded: The
describes how “In their cultivation of friends within the government, in their development of the modern lobby, in the
‘inwardness,’ as nineteenth century Americans referred to things different from how they appeared on the surface, of
much of the legislation of the period, the corporations underlined how the political economy was—and is.”

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“speculators and gamblers.” He fully engaged with his fellow producers in an ongoing struggle, one that had existed since the Founding. It pitted those, like Carey, who envisioned a harmonious nation of smaller centers of commerce tied together by government owned systems of transportation and protected by tariffs, against those, like Carnegie, who espoused a *laissez faire* capitalism that saw the state as a convenience to enable their monopolist practices, just as Darwin rationalized their winner take all behavior. Coxey’s bold Good Roads Plan displayed the most prominent characteristics of the long gestating populist movement that had first exploded on the prairies and in the south and now joined with factory workers in the cities and miners in the west. As Isaac McCracken, Chairman of the National Agricultural Wheel said in 1889, “I feel warranted in making the assertion that there is no antagonism existing between the wage workers and agriculturalists. We have a common organized enemy to fight.”

Indeed, this producer alliance throughout the late nineteenth century was not simply consumed by attacks on the reigning plutocracy, but on conceiving ideas that competed in both scale and substance with the newly dominant corporate form of business organization. Like the bold ideas of Macune, McBride and George, Coxey’s Good Roads Plan, though vague on detail, sought to tie farmers to their urban markets, and put four million men back to work in an ailing economy. In calling on government to issue five hundred million dollars in legal tender Coxey’s populism took its boldest turn as he sided with those who saw an expanded currency as key to the struggle against corporate interests protecting their position with an essentialist gold standard.

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133 Hild, 123.
Yet the challenge for Coxey, like other Populist reformers, remained bringing attention to his ideas. Congress seemed deaf to Populist pleas, while at the same time enamored with enabling the excesses of the monopolists. As Thomas L. Nugent, the Populist candidate for Governor of Texas in 1892 said, “Capital could never have attained such ascendancy, but for the legislation which has given it unjust advantages and enabled it to monopolize both natural resources and public functions and utilities.”

Indeed Coxey shared this view. Like his fellow Populists, he grew increasingly concerned over the relentless force with which the “lobbyists of the trusts and corporations” had undue influence denying the true representatives of the producers. Coxey shared the views of the People’s Party standard bearer in the 1892 election, James Weaver who warned “No member of the body politic can become so great as to rise above, none so insignificant as to fall below the control of the Sovereign will.” Indeed as a businessman committed to an alternative path to that taken by an ascendant corporate model, Coxey’s business model, though self interested, recognized the interests of the broader Commonweal. As contemporary Populist commentator Lloyd stated it, “Liberty recast the old forms of government into the Republic and it must remold our institutions of wealth into the Commonwealth.” As the Populists went down to defeat in 1892 and the bills incorporating Coxey’s Plan languished in Congress, the unassuming businessman from Massillon searched for another way to bring his Plan to the attention of Congress by taking his own symbolic Commonweal to the steps of the Capitol.134

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CHAPTER 2: THE PETITION

“The idea came to me to organize these idle men into a ‘petition with boots on,’ and march to Washington as an object lesson to Congress and the country as well.”  

Carl Browne

While Coxey promoted his bold plan for Good Roads, the Populist standard bearer in the 1892 election, General James B. Weaver, spoke optimistically about the fortunes of the new People’s Party. Weaver waged a fierce campaign for President, supporting the Omaha Platform as he travelled across fifteen states in an unprecedented campaign. Though his rivals in the two established parties stayed at home and relied on surrogate spokesman, the Civil War veteran came up well short of his electoral expectations. He amassed only eight percent of the popular vote though he did win in the Populist stronghold of Kansas, as well as the silver producing states of Colorado, Idaho, and Nevada, thus portending the subsequent path of the People’s Party toward the “free silver” cause.  

Though disappointed by his 22 electoral votes, Weaver nonetheless remained enthused about the new party’s chances. He returned home to Des Moines Iowa to give a campaign valedictory. While he amassed barely four percent of the vote in his home state, he remained optimistic. He truly believed this new third party defined by its Omaha

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135 Carl Browne, *When Coxey’s “Army” Marcht (sic) on Washington 1894* (San Francisco: May, 1894), 5.

136 In the 1892 Presidential election the largest number of electoral votes for the People’s Party came from the Populist win in Kansas with ten electoral votes, and the states of Colorado, Nevada and Idaho; see [http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1892](http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/national.php?year=1892)
Platform stood as a powerful force against “corporate aggression.” Exhausted from his unprecedented campaign, the old warrior found the energy to summon his Iowa audience. He used military terminology from his past to provide a vision of the Populist’s future. “The field is ours,” he enthusiastically exclaimed to his home state admirers, “and we must occupy it without delay.”

Perhaps he was right. In the wake of the election of 1892, Populists received what seemed the perfect opportunity to seize their moment. Only four days after the grand opening of Chicago’s World Columbian Exposition on May 1, 1893, the markets crashed in what came to be known as “Black Friday.” This economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude would eventually lead to massive farm foreclosures and unemployment. As with other depressions, a complicated fabric of economic factors including overproduction of manufactured goods, inflated agricultural credit, and dependency on foreign currency seemed to converge to cause panic in the financial markets. While there are no systematic, reliable estimates of unemployment during the ensuing four year depression, the reputable business journal *Bradstreets* suggested about nine hundred thousand had lost their jobs in its first few months. By December of 1893, AFL leader Gompers, though naturally biased, estimated that three million workers were on the streets. Similarly, members of Congress, regardless of affiliation, routinely cited

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137 Frederick Emory Haynes, *James Baird Weaver* (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1919), 325-341.
three or four million as the number of Americans out of work. This represented at least a fifth of the population, and represented almost one in every four men eligible to work.138

The Panic revealed the depth of a long simmering economic collapse. Already the agricultural expansion of the 1880’s led to overproduction and dramatically falling prices. Farmers throughout the south and Midwest found themselves victims of increasing debt and unable to repay because of falling prices. Foreclosures multiplied as wheat, corn and cotton prices tumbled in the early 1890’s. While those who joined the Farmer’s Alliances argued the railroads as much to blame for all of this with their penurious cop lien system, the amount of new track being laid across America began to decline as early as 1887. Since railroads accounted for ninety percent of America’s rolled steel output, the increasing failure of the rail lines also shook the foundations of America’s industrial economy. Compounding these underlying signs of weakness, conditions in Europe grew weaker and British investors began to sell their investments in U.S. currency already strained by a run on gold.139

By the beginning of 1893 the signs of a falling economy were everywhere. Gold outflows resulting from greenback redemption, declining Treasury reserves, a growing


139 Steeples and Whitten, Democracy in Desperation, 19-23; Mitchell Bard, “Ideology and Depression Politics I: Grover Cleveland (1893-97), Presidential Studies Quarterly 15, no. 1 (Winter, 1985) 77-88;
federal deficit, and an increasing number of business failures accelerated the trajectory toward Panic. The Philadelphia and Reading Rail Line had already failed in February. By the end of the year, 119 railroads were out of business and 642 banks went broke. By the end of 1893, the U.S. government reported 15,242 business failures. The steady run on gold that many attributed to the Sherman Silver Act of 1890, exacerbated by Britain’s continued retreat on its investments in the U.S., sent tremors through the New York Exchange, and stock prices plummeted. As faith in the fixed gold standard diminished, so too did the value of America’s blue chip companies. National Cordage’s stock, for example, dropped from a high of 138 to begin 1893, to a low of 20 on August 7. The tremors from the Panic would last throughout the decade. As President Cleveland made his own journey by train from Washington to New York in July 4th weekend for a secret operation to remove a tumor from his mouth, he stared out the windows at the “mudsill,” or the poorest of the poor, some reported to be eating grass from their own yards.  

From the Populist perspective, the Panic of 1893 presented a just verdict on the failure of the Gilded Age’s corporate economy and therefore seemed to create the perfect political conditions for enticing disgruntled Democrats to abandon the Cleveland administration. In fact, under these economic conditions Populists reached out to entice members of both established parties to ally with the People’s cause. Indeed conditions seemed right for political realignment. In the unsettled economy, angry unemployed men

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140 Douglas Steeple and David O. Whitten, Democracy in Desperation (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 34-37; These two authors provide the most sophisticated analysis of the causes of the Crisis. They factor the strength of business cycles and the downturn particularly in the agricultural sector beginning in the late 1880’s, and eschew more contemporary accounts, notably Lauck Jett’s 1907 analysis which emphasized the run on gold caused by the Sherman Act (1890), the loss of confidence in Britain, and the general European economic downturn beginning in 1890; See Lauck W. Jett, The Causes of the Panic of 1893 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1907), 97-109; Matthew Algeo, The President is a Sick Man (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2011), 83-84.
turned to violence breaking store windows, raiding farms, and taking to the road in a
desperate search for shelter, food, and work. The number of hungry steadily increased,
particularly among the new immigrant population. Evictions from tenements rose in the
cities, just as many farmers left their farms in the plains. Not discriminating in its
hollowing out of farm and factory, the nation seemed suddenly visited by increasing
“poverty, gaunt hunger, physical and mental anguish, and brooding despair.” Yet, the
severe impacts of the nation’s worst ever depression, seemed lost on the Upper Ten. An
estimated two hundred Americans now possessed over seventy percent of the nation’s
wealth. Even with the Panic of 1893 and the steadily rising waves of unemployed, the
wealthiest atop the economy seemed insulated against the impacts of a depressed
agricultural sector that, along with a collapsing European economy, caused such
devastating economic impact throughout the U.S. As the rolls of the unemployed grew,
the Upper Ten stubbornly clung to their well established beliefs in a federal government
that enabled corporate growth and a Gold standard that further concentrated wealth.\textsuperscript{141}

The Depression clearly offered Weaver and his fellow political operatives the
opportunity to push forward their Populist agenda. But how exactly would a diverse
ensemble of reformers and their followers, referred to as Populists and now marching
under the banner of the People’s Party, seize this opportunity? How in the wake of their
defeat in 1892 would they move forward on a political battlefield where they remained a
distinct minority? Weaver and his fellow operatives in the Populist Party now charted
what they thought a more practical course. If they could not win a majority as a single

party, they would place greater emphasis on their ongoing strategy of “fusion.” Very simply they would modify their platform and choose candidates on a state by state basis that appealed more broadly to those disaffected members of the two established parties. With their emphasis on political tactics over principle the formalized Populist Party now sought to gain simple electoral advantage as the way to most effectively press their cause in statehouses and in Congress.

This chapter will address how Coxey’s idea of physically marching to Washington to petition the government challenged the path toward fusion taken by the political operatives in the Populist Party. In examining the lineage for the idea to march, the chapter focuses on the chance meeting between Coxey and Carl Browne, an itinerant painter and former sandlot agitator, in August 1893 at the Chicago Music Hall. The two arrived in Chicago as delegates to the Bimetallic Convention where silver advocates and greenback proponents gathered in a futile effort to stem the political tides that would lead to repeal of the Sherman Silver Act later that year. The rowdy convention itself, and the nightly speeches given by all manner of agitators along the Lake Front, served as ample demonstration that the populist energy still seethed.

Browne himself seemed the embodiment of the broad range of discontentment, critiques, and bold plans that still manifest itself in the energy of small “p” populism. As this chapter explains, Browne persuaded Coxey to try something dramatic to draw attention to Coxey’s Good Roads plan. In conceiving their novel approach to bringing attention to an idea, Coxey never expressed any specific frustration with the direction of the Populist Party, its leadership, or with fusion politics. Yet with their very decision to
march and deliver a petition right on the steps of the capitol, Coxey and Browne challenged the path taken by Populist Party operatives who took their concerns down the path of conventional party politics by seeking opportunistic alliances with the established political parties. Coxey and Browne would literally march down a different path. Though protest marches had ample precedent, a march to Washington of the sort they now planned never occurred before.  

Coxey’s March doubled down on a century old tradition dating from the first Congress allowing groups to submit written petitions to express the need for relief, assistance, or “for the redress of grievances.” Indeed the right to petition the government emerged clearly in the First Amendment to the Constitution. But up until Coxey and Browne conceived their “petition of boots,” this right consistently took the form of written petitions that were received and sometimes heard in a formal legislative process. Coxey and Browne, convinced that their ideas for reform needed a different kind of attention, decided to venture significantly beyond this accepted process. of written petitions that were received and heard in a formal legislative process. While formally submitted written petitions, particularly those filed by abolitionist groups throughout the ante bellum period, often aroused tumultuous emotional debates, they remained confined within a process that demanded regular legislative order. In the Gilded Age that order now seemed increasingly corrupted by corporate lobbyists. In their specific use of spectacle, or a “choreography of protest,” to draw attention to his plan, Coxey’s “petition in boots” represented the acting out of the petition process. It thus stood in sharp contrast

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142 See Footnote 3 in Chapter 1 of Barber, March to Washington, 234. According to Connecticut Senator Joseph Hawley the demonstration was “without precedent;” see also Congressional Record, 53rd Congress, 2nd sess., 20 April, 1894, 4:3884.
to the maneuverings of Populist political operatives who sought electoral advantage by opportunely fusing with the established political parties.\textsuperscript{143}

**Fusion Politics**

Fusion politics was a well established practice in the late nineteenth century, and the Populists were not the first third party to try their hand at gaining a majority by employing this tactic. Fusion consisted of agreement by two parties to support the same slate of candidates and thus list them on their party ballots. In the wake of the Panic of 1873, the Populists immediate predecessor, the Greenback Labor Party (GLP), routinely sought to ally with the Democratic Party. Coxey himself joined the GLP at 20 and Weaver, first elected a member of Congress from Iowa on the GLP ticket in 1878, ran as that Party’s candidate for President in 1880, though he received only three percent of the popular vote.\textsuperscript{144}

Indeed fusion politics seemed the norm in statewide elections, particularly in the Midwest and West long before the 1892 elections. The victory by third parties such as the Greenbackers in the decades of the 1870’s and 1880’s resulted from just this very sort of practical alliance with the established Democrats. In fact in the immediate aftermath of

\textsuperscript{143} Robert V. Remini, *The House* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 19-20, 41-42, 128-130; For descriptions of the influence of corporate lobbyists on Gilded Age politics see Richard White, Railroaded (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2011), 109-118 and Mark W. Summers, *Railroads, Reconstruction and the Gospel of Prosperity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 98-117; For the phrase “choreographies of protest,” see Susan Leigh Foster, “Choreographies of Protest,” *Theatre Journal* 55, no.3, (October, 2003): 395-412, in which she discusses protest acts in terms of the physical movements of those participating as well as the body language of those resisting. In addressing the insights derived from observing ordinary acts within a society, Clifford Geertz suggests that almost everything cultural can be viewed in the context of spectacle: ‘As interworked systems of construable signs (what, ignoring provincial usages I would call symbols), culture is not a power, something to which social events, behaviors, institutions or processes can be usually attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly __that is quickly __described. See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 197), 14.

reconstruction, white Democrats in the South turned to fusion politics as a way to expediently genuflect to large numbers of blacks suddenly eligible to vote. The GLP and the People’s Party might not independently achieve majorities by advancing fusion tactics. However, from 1878 until the election of 1892 third parties held the balance of power in statewide elections at some point in every state but Vermont. Indeed, in contrast to the lackluster results of the People’s party in the 1892 Presidential race, in that same election in three quarters of the states neither established major party received a majority of votes. Thus in statewide elections fusion politics seemed to stand a chance and Populist political operatives embraced it.  

In the late nineteenth century, leaders of the two major parties found it increasingly beneficial to find ways to reach out to the leaders of third parties and to either place them on their own Republican or Democratic tickets, or to adopt specific platform planks to attract sympathetic voters. The Populists reliance on fusion was thus nothing new. Rather it simply borrowed from already well established political tactics. The very nature of late nineteenth century elections begged for fusionist tactics. In this period before adoption of the Australian ballot, voters would be supplied straight line party ballots by partisans. While arguably these ballots could be kept secret in ones pocket or purse, corruption often occurred with the simple identification at the polling station of the kind of print type, or the color of a specific party’s ballot. These obvious

signals made ballots easily recognizable to partisan election officials and invited tampering.  

Meanwhile, the Populists faced the same inherent electoral weakness that plagued third party attempts both before and since. The 13 seats occupied by Peoples Party representatives in the 53rd (1893-95) Congress coincided precisely with the very same number that the GLP occupied in the 46th Congress (1879-1881). In the 1870’s though GLP leaders attempted to unite with the established parties on a state by state basis, their efforts met with only limited success. In the 1890’s the Populists faced similarly dim prospects, yet had some reason to believe election outcomes might be different. In surveying the political landscape, they noted in earlier elections many candidates swore allegiance to Farm Alliance principles even before the formal creation of a People’s Party. For example, in the 1890 election in the south alone, nineteen of the twenty seven Congressmen elected pledged to support Alliance principles. Similarly with eight separate state legislatures dominated by Alliance members, the Alliance could claim at least eight sitting Senators appointed by these legislatures as sympathetic to Alliance principles. 

From this foundation of modest electoral success, fusion seemed the expedient means to enlarging the reach of the Populist Party. Indeed it may also have been the obvious political necessity. As the now politically organized Populists began their ascent

in the early 1890’s, membership declined in the regionally independent, cooperative organizations that for almost two decades provided the core energy of the producer’s movement. The Farm Alliance, in its many varied state iterations in the late 1870’s and throughout the 1880’s, represented large scale working class cooperatives that sought to change the economic rather than political landscape. Though it deliberately eschewed formal political engagement, many candidates from both parties embraced Alliance tenets and campaigned for the votes of its members. Yet as a new decade dawned, the Alliance movement, the very backbone of the farm-labor alliance that shaped the People’s Party, seemed to be gradually unraveling. The National Farmers Alliance that had claimed some one million members as recently as 1891, from this point steadily lost membership and momentum. The Populist Party it seemed would have to now represent the energy of producer unrest.148

The very year before Weaver ran for President “most of the Alliance cooperatives in the South and West were losing energy, and with them died the fundamental reason why many had joined the order.” In tiny Lampasas Texas where the energy of the Populist Moment first emerged, the veterans of the early Farmer’s Alliance disassembled the very cabin in which they first met. They decided to send it in pieces to Chicago for reconstruction at the Columbian Exposition. Meanwhile, the labor side of the producer alliances attenuated as well. The Knights of Labor had grown in ranks culminating in its

148 A contemporary account of the membership strength of the Alliance may be found in Robert Palgrave, ed. Dictionary of Political Economy (New York: Macmillan and Company, 1896), 24: “The National Farmers Alliance and Industrial Union is at present the greatest farmer’s organization in the United States, and is perhaps the most powerful organization of farmers known to history....The National Farmers Alliance and Industrial Union may be traced back to a local society in Lampasas County Texas. The precise date of its birth is a matter of dispute, but is somewhere between the years 1870 and 1875; Lawrence Goodwyn notes in The Populist Moment (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 66, “… the Alliance created the world’s first large-scale working class cooperative and proposed comprehensive democratic monetary system for America., the world’s emerging industrial leader.”
formalized union with the Southern Alliance at a St. Louis Convention in 1890. Yet it too
began to lose membership. Its formal support for Weaver’s 1892 campaign would mark
the last political hurrah for both the Southern and Northern Farmers Alliances as well as
the Knights of Labor. None of these loosely allied organizations would ever play as
active a role again in national or even Populist politics again."149

Yet Populist political operatives marched forward undeterred. They went about
building political alliances state by state in the South and Midwest, joining with
disgruntled Republicans and Democrats. Of course not all Populists agreed on fusion as
a commendable tactic. Critics of fusion fell into two categories. For one group, fusion
seemed anomalous to basic tenets of Populist movement, not the least of which was the
repeated Populist call for the Australian ballot. In their less formalized early stages,
reformers in the producer movement railed against the two large political machines and
what they perceived as the corrupt world of “politics as usual.” Populists generally sought
to create a more transparent politics, opening the windows of those party boss dominated
smoke filled rooms where decisions favorable to the plutocrats remained the order of the
day. For the second group of critics, fusion would ultimately cause Populists to embrace
the silver cause to the exclusion of more important producer priorities. These fusion
critics asked how they could they possibly be wedded to the corporate proponents of
silver production who envisioned little regard for those workers actually mining and

149 Clanton, Populism: The Humane Preference 57-85,126; Goodwyn, Democratic Promise, 18-24; For an
excellent summary of the political ineffectiveness of the populists see Gene Clanton, “‘Hayseed Socialism’ on the Hill:
Congressional Populism, 1891-1895, The Western Historical Quarterly 15, no. 2 (April, 1894): 139-162; John Hicks,
The Populist Revolt (Lincoln NE: The University of Nebraska Press,1961) 299; Robert C. McMath, Jr., American
Populism 1877-1898 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992) 178. See picture of the Lampasas County cabin in Lawrence
Goodwyn, Democratic Promise (New York: Oxford University, 1976) 37. Discussion of the trajectory of the Knights
of Labor and its ultimate demise (175) in Hild, Greenbackers, 122-175.
refining silver? These Populists grew concerned that too much emphasis on silver diluted the other vital parts of the Peoples Party platform. With the election of 1896 their fears proved true.\(^\text{150}\)

With these Populist critics nipping at the heels of Populist fusion proponents, the tactic naturally garnered significant criticism in the Populist press. In 1892 the Nebraska Broken Bow *Beacon* noted, “it is disgusting to think about this abominable fusion and it is hard to find language sufficiently strong to condemn it.” Moreover, fusion had articulate Populist critics like Colorado Governor Waite who thought Populists should not relinquish their unique perspective on policies related to bimetallism. Henry Demarest Lloyd, a pioneering journalist who defended many of the early labor uprisings, would famously call the silver cause the “cow bird” of the populist movement. And among the prairie populist press, came dire warnings to both Weaver, as the leading advocate of fusion, and H.E. Taubeneck, the national party chairman and devout fusionist, that in their allegiance to silver they ignored the other fundamental tenets of the Omaha Platform. These critics warned that the fundamental Populist demands to break up the railroad trusts or nationalize the banks would rapidly recede in importance if the silver cause became the raison d’etre of the populist cause. These doubts grew as the practitioners of fusion politics seemed increasingly opportunistic, seemingly at the expense of their producer principles.\(^\text{151}\)

\(^\text{151}\) Pollack, *The Populist Response*, 103-143.
Bimetallic Convention

In the midst of this internal debate within the Populist Party over the wisdom of fusion, the essential energy of small “p” populism had yet to run its full course. Despite attenuating membership in the Farm Alliances and Knights of Labor, the producer movement still sought to find a larger voice. Indeed, the echoes of earlier producer gatherings from Cleburne (1886) to Omaha (1892) reverberated in the August 1893 Chicago Music Hall gathering of the Bimetallic Convention. Meeting in the shadows of the World’s Columbian Exposition, the assembled delegates hoped to mount an effort that would stop Congress from what appeared the certain repeal of the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890. The Sherman Act marked an early victory for the anti-monopolists. While not permitting the free coinage of silver as the staunchest silver advocates demanded, it nonetheless increased the amount of silver the government purchased each month and the amount of money in circulation backed by silver. Silver “had the benefits of specie currency without the faults of gold.” Silver was viewed as “natural money,” and its advocates included many Populists. The very prospect of imminent repeal caused six Populist Senators to travel to Chicago. Repeal was viewed as anathema to those seeking to restore economic balance into a system seemingly captive to corporate interests. Return to a strictly gold standard would cause further economic depression, further concentration of wealth in the hands of the monopolists, and even more massive unemployment. Thus not surprisingly, also in attendance was General Weaver himself, as well as Knights of Labor leader Robert Schilling. The boisterous crowd roared when a telegram from Colorado’s two Populist Congressmen, Lafayette
Pence and John Bell, was read aloud. It urged “The people must arouse or become the subject slaves of the gold power.”

Regardless of their specific monetarist views, the bimetallist delegates gathered in Chicago with a growing sense of urgency. These soft money advocates, including Coxey, could agree about the need for a “flexible,” “elastic” money supply, and for modest rates of inflation. Inflation lowered interest rates and raised prices, and by putting more money in people’s pockets it stimulated economic growth by encouraging people to buy now, rather than waiting. Soft money, these representatives hoped, would break the chokehold banks and large corporations had gained. Soft money forces differed. Some favored a pure paper currency, like the legal tender greenbacks as used in the Civil War. This faction continued the policies of the GLP. Another faction wanted inflation, but sought to get it by monetizing silver. Minting money backed by silver as well as gold would increase the money supply significantly, and mark a return to the bimetallism established by the first secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton. Indeed the “silverites” worried about a pure paper currency since, like the Goldbugs, they shared in knowing that money needed to be backed by precious metal. However, though they spoke with multiple voices, whether advocating for the continuance of greenbacks or for silver coins, the bimetallists all opposed a return to the gold standard.

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152 Clanton, *The Humane Preference*, 99,119-147; For a discussion of silver currency and the Sherman Act see Ritter, “The Battle of the Standards: The financial debate of the 1890’s,” in Goldbugs, 153-207; “Stewart and Bryan Speak,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 August, 1893; “To Shout for Silver,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 July, 1893. 153 Ritter, “The Battle of the Standards: The financial debate of the 1890’s,” in Goldbugs, 153-207; Regarding the state of currency in the 1890’s, Ritter notes in footnote 3 on page 154, “The monetary system of the 1890’s was a complex mixture of gold and silver coinage, gold and silver certificates, government legal tender notes, and national bank notes. The standard measure of value for all of those was the gold dollar. Every other type of dollar was redeemable in gold bullion.” While still complicated this was a far more coherent system than existed ante bellum and before Resumption (1875). As O’Malley reviews in “Specie and Species,” the different kinds of currency, their
Their opponents, who now dominated the political debate, saw gold money as both naturally valuable and advanced. The Gold Bugs imagined gold specie as the only morally correct foundation for an honest economy and indicative of a civilized culture. Gold was the money of Anglo-Saxon nations. They felt “debased the currency,” and they held Britain up as the monetary role model with its pure gold standard. The Goldbug’s essentialist proposition held that value was naturally derived from the precious metal itself, entirely opposite of Coxey’s legal tender proposition where the government’s “full faith and credit” was sufficient collateral. The Goldbugs even rejected the precious metal sister silver as a lesser metal of lesser peoples. They insisted they had only compromised with the silver forces in 1890 as a political necessity to achieve their long sought after McKinley Tariff, which imposed protective duties on selected foreign imports in order to further secure the economic choke hold of the monopolists over the domestic economy. Indeed Senator John Sherman of Ohio, the author of silver legislation, was himself hardly a silver advocate. Browne would later call him “that gray haired rat.” The fact that Sherman’s name affixed to the final compromise that bears his name reflected political reality rather than any desire on his part to stray from gold. The admission of six new western states in 1889 and 1890 meant that Sherman’s Republicans, though the majority, were also divided on the silver issue, with the newer western silver state Republicans in favor of Kansas Populist Preston Plumb’s free silver authenticity and value were all highly subjective prior to the War. “Counterfeit journals” flourished as a way to establish currency that at least had some authenticity, though its value depended on whether it was backed by a “reputable” bank or one that became captive to local boosters and speculators and thus might be found to be worthless upon redemption; See O’Malley, “Specie and Species,” 372-375.
coinage measure. Thus Sherman rose to a political cause rather than one he believed in principle.\textsuperscript{154}

Whatever their persuasions on monetary policy, the bimetal delegates shared an uncommon energy. They urgently needed to stem the gathering momentum in Congress for repeal of the Sherman Act. Whether pleading for the continuance of silver or for Greenbackism, the convention punctuated the ongoing and unresolved debate over whether there was the need for continued expansion of the money supply as a means to leverage economic growth. Whatever their idiosyncratic differences on monetary policy, the bimetallists saw an elastic currency not rigidly tied to “almighty gold” as the lynchpin for economic recovery. In their loud protests against the banking and moneyed elites of the east, they stood on their chairs and waved banners railing against the gold standard. The delegates to Chicago were united in their views that return to a purely gold standard served only the narrow selfishness of an increasingly aggressive and doctrinaire form of corporate capitalism that seemed to be eroding long held notions of a republican community of shared interests. Said one bimetallic proponent in denouncing the Gilded Age’s ruling capitalist plutocracy, “We are the conservative men of the land. It is the bankers and those who sit behind their money who are the anarchists.”\textsuperscript{155}


Very simply, the bimetallists who gathered in Chicago, thought that repeal of the Sherman Act would place artificial boundaries around the earning prospects the nation’s producers, constrict their basic economic rights, and stifle their hope for a happier future. To these monetary populists, tying the money supply of a burgeoning industrial juggernaut to the gold standard seemed reactionary and fundamentally anti-democratic. At this “last fling” for the bimetallists, Keynoter Thomas M. Patterson, Editor of the *Rocky Mountain News*, brought the crowded to its feet concluding, “This contest is therefore a life and death struggle. But if this country is to remain the land of the free—if it is to remain a country where government by the people is to continue—they must win and they will have only won when the money of the constitution has been restored by bimetallic coinage.”

The “populist howlers,” as one account called the representatives to this convention at Chicago’s Music Hall, exuded an energy that seemed typical of such populist gatherings. The reaction against them was equally predictable. These bimetallist delegates represented a noisy bunch, equipped with standard diatribes against bankers and railroad men. Yet they also argued just as much with each other. Some observers speculated that the “rattle and din” of the oratory against repeal of Sherman was such a decibel that it exceeded the efforts to raise the roof at the 1892 Democratic national convention held just the year before in this same hall. “To Shout for Silver” proclaimed the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in the headline to an account of the rowdy assemblage. To elitist Boston Brahmins like Henry Adams, or apologists for the Upper Ten, like

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infamous Congregational preacher Henry Ward Beecher, the pleas of bimetallic reformers and their demands for an expansive money supply seemed just one more lonely siren song from those who did not understand the modern corporate economy. An editorial critical of the silver gathering in Harpers Weekly condescendingly noted that states further west were very simply woefully unsophisticated in their backwards notions of capital and monetary supply when compared with their more civilized eastern counterparts. Alas, the Harper’s editors concluded, “A young country, left to itself, rarely resists the temptation to issue money to excess,” and it chided the bimetallist’s demands for continuing silver coinage. Indeed the momentum for repeal of the Sherman Act seemed insurmountable.\textsuperscript{157}

Yet, nonetheless, though the bimetallists and their more radical greenback sympathizers like Coxey might disagree on how to inflate the currency, they all believed a more elastic money supply continued to be critical to economic recovery. Regardless of the nuances of their individual views on monetary policy, the delegates agreed that basing the money supply on gold alone allowed middleman the opportunity to continue charging penurious rates, inhibited economic growth, and benefited only the wealthy bankers and industrialists of the Northeast. Coxey wanted a loose money supply, preferably paper money divorced from metal and backed by the full faith and credit of the U.S. If he could not prevail in advancing acceptance of so-called Legal Tender, then he at least wanted…

Congress to preserve a “bimetallic” currency, backed by silver as well as gold, as intended in the Sherman Act. Yet in Washington the bimetallist’s message floundered. Only a few days after the Bimetallic Convention adjourned, West Virginia Congressman William Wilson would introduce a bill to eliminate silver money. The legislation was backed by the Cleveland administration and on a path to certain passage in the House, and inevitably in the Senate as well.158

However, these bleak prospects did not dampen the enthusiasm of the Bimetallic delegates. In his opening speech, ex Congressman A. J. Warner, the President of the Bimetallic League rhetorically asked them, “Would we be better off if this new money [silver backed] should be dropped out of currency or it had never been issued?” Chicago Mayor Harrison, himself a self-proclaimed silverite, in his welcoming speech attacked the gold standard advocates. Now serving a fifth term the Mayor seemed to have overcome blame for the Haymarket riot which caused his ouster in 1886. Now sporting his own graying beard, he spoke to the other “silver beards,” gathered, noting that though the press would call them all crazy, “It is conservatism wrapped in his

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158 The delegates to the American Bimetallic Convention believed that preserving the bimetallic standard was essential to economic recovery. Since the Bland Allison Act in 1878, paper money backed by “silver certificates” had entered circulation. Then with the Sherman Silver Act of 1890, the government’s subsidization of silver backed currency increased. Many gold advocates now argued that a primary cause of the Panic was a run on gold reserves since, under this bimetallic system, it was possible to redeem currency in either gold or silver. “Freedom of Silver,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 2 August 1893; Daniel Klinghardt, The Nationalization of American Political Parties (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 184; Regarding the 16:1 silver to gold ratio, see McMath, American Populism, 183, where he notes “From the founding of the Republic until 1873, both gold and silver had been theoretically part of the money supply, at a traditional ration of 16:1; O’Malley, “Specie and Species, 273; Timberlake, 434. By August 28, 1893 The House already had voted (239-108) to repeal the Sherman Act, with all of the populist members voting against repeal. Despite a rancorous Senate debate, by the fall, the President ended the free silver era by signing into law the repeal of the three year old Sherman Silver Purchase Act.
money bags who calls you crazy,’’ he said. When I call you “lunatics,” he went on, “it is
with affection.”159

The eclectic ensemble described by one reporter as a “picturesque crowd,”
included Kansas Populist Henry Vincent. Vincent would be recruited by Coxey the next
spring to write the first narrative account of the March, entitled simply The Story of the
Commonweal. Along with his two brothers, Vincent had devoted his early career to
politically organizing Kansas Populists. The Vincent’s secret organization, known as the
Videttes, allegedly plotted a dynamite explosion in Coffeyville Kansas in 1888, would
become better known for his crusading journalism. He served as the editor of a populist
paper in Kansas known as The Non-Conformist. He dedicated his journalism to restoring
a “republican” America that valued the producer and placed the larger community in
front of narrower self-interest. When Vincent met Coxey in Chicago he was a reporter for
the Chicago Express. Soon he would found the Chicago Searchlight, which became a
bellwether, populist reform newspaper. Like Coxey and Browne, Vincent seemed typical
of the bimetallists gathered in Chicago still having to find creative ways to have their
voices heard.160

Conestoga Cowboy

During his days at the Bimetallic Convention, Coxey like many other delegates
would sometimes leave the rowdy and raucous formal sessions at the Music Hall, to join

159 “Freedom of Silver,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 2 August 1893; “Opening Address of General A. J. Warner,
President of the American Bimetallic League,” delivered before The Silver Convention at Chicago on August 1, 1893
160 “To Shout for Silver,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 30 July 1893; “Henry Vincent Leader of the Kansas
‘Videttes’ of 1888,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 23 April 1894; and Piehler, Henry Vincent, 1-25 depicts the Coffeyville
incident in which an agent of the Pacific Express Agency took a package he was to deliver the next day to his home
where it exploded injuring his wife and daughter. Later the Kansas legislature investigating the incident as the work
of the Videttes (Vincent testified) could not reach a unified conclusion.
even more boisterous debates at Lake Front Park, which that summer became Chicago’s equivalent of London’s Hyde Park. Here the bimetallist speakers joined other populist agitators referring to bankers as “anarchists,” and worse. In the previous decade, Chicago had become nationally regarded as a gathering point for radicals, intellectuals, and immigrant anarchists. A famous protest rally in the city’s Haymarket literally and figuratively exploded before a national audience in 1886. The Haymarket riot caused the city to react in near panic and led to Harrison’s ouster as Mayor during the “Red Scare” reaction that ensued. However, in the summer of 1893, Harrison again presided over a Chicago known for its “tolerant soul and progressive spirit.” Here along the lake shore, Coxey seems first to have encountered the flamboyant persona of Carl Browne. Browne had already gained a reputation for his considerable rhetorical gifts with the Chicago press corps. Typically dressed in a sombrero and buckskin coat, he was by trade an itinerant painter with a decidedly activist background. One reporter referred to him as the “flower of American demagoguism.” Chicago newspapers went so far as to publish the time he was scheduled to give one of his rabble rousing speeches on the Lake Front. On one evening the deep throated Browne unabashedly engaged his fellow bimetallic delegate, the famous Ignatius Donnelly himself, in a debate that captured Coxey’s attention.  

Browne hardly seemed the intellectual match for Donnelly. The Californian’s resplendent appearance, with an outfit that he would later wear for the

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popular “Wild and Wooly West Show” at the Columbia Exposition, seemed to satirize a western frontier that, according to one historian, had exhausted it promise. A young University of Wisconsin historian, Frederick Jackson Turner, at the Exposition just a few weeks before, having meticulously examined the census of 1890 proclaimed the frontier had vanished and thus Americans needed to find a new space to exercise their restless energy. Browne seemed to embody this restlessness Turner described as still extant. The Chicago press in describing his buckskin jacket and sombrero referred to him as the “Cowboy from California,” or the “Conestoga Cowboy.” Other less complimentary descriptions noted that though he seemed to have some force as a thinker and speaker, “he affects the cowboy style of dress to the extent of a disgustingly filthy leather suit set off by high boots and sombrero.” A young Chicago Record reporter named Ray Stannard Baker, who would the next year accompany the March as his first major assignment, captured the essence of the theatrical Browne describing “The spectacle of him speaking at night from his wagon with the kerosene flare uncertainly lighting his grotesque cartoons [meant to refer to Browne’s graphic murals], his coattails flying in the wind, while he demolished the Rothschild’s and the Rockefellers…. (See Figure 7). It was just these rhetorical gifts that allowed Browne, according to most accounts, to win his debate against the celebrity Donnelly. In their encounter, Browne insisted that land needed to be considered as an alternative form of currency, a message that appealed to this populist audience, but which Donnelly rejected. For Browne to best Donnelly, “the Minnesota Sage,” was no small accomplishment. Donnelly was not only a Populist icon, but
according to one contemporary, “no one could more easily make the worse appear the better reason, and no one delighted more in doing so.”\textsuperscript{162}

Having caught Coxey’s attention, he and Browne from this point apparently began to share ideas about the Ohioan’s Good Roads plan to give hope to those now unemployed as a result of the Panic of 1893. Though no evidence of their discussions that summer survives, we know Coxey asked Browne to return with him to Massillon to help him develop his plan for Good Roads. The relationship between Browne, the flamboyant and imaginative artist, and Coxey, the unassuming and thoughtful businessman, grew deeper in the months that followed this first encounter in Chicago. Coxey needed a dramatic way to draw attention to his Good Roads plan; one that might attract the attention of a nation and resonate with Congress. Coxey and Browne sought a novel form of democratic expression that could escape the concert halls, meeting houses, and lecture rooms that confined political speech. How could they best express the frustrations of those who felt suffocated under the weight of a new form of corporate capitalism and a growing depression? The newly formed Peoples Party represented a large tent under which gathered reformers of every stripe. Yet its political voice seemed marginalized by the election of 1892. Now the Goldbugs sought to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act, one of the rare political victories of those who wished to change the structure of economic ownership. Thus Coxey and Browne decided to

petition their government in a different way, one that would distinguish Coxey’s Plan from the other spasms of protest that marked the populist moment.\footnote{As previously described in note 86 in the Introduction a fire at Coxey’s home in the fall of 1894 destroyed many of his and Browne’s personal papers that are associated with the March. The remaining Coxey papers, largely housed at the Massillon Museum in Massillon Ohio do not provide much in the way of insight into what Browne and Coxey discussed during their chance meeting in Chicago at the Bimetallic Convention. Yet the intensity of those discussions is confirmed by Coxey’s invitation to Browne to continue their discussions by coming to live with him at his home in Massillon. As Browne noted in his own biography, which he wrote with the assist of Wm. McDevitt and was published in May, 1914, “The Idea of the ‘March’ originated in Chicago.”}

The two men could not have been more different in their backgrounds and demeanors. If the straight laced Coxey stood apart from the other delegates it was not in his dress, but in his steadfast devotion to greenback monetary philosophy. By contrast, his soon to be accomplice, Browne epitomized the maverick persona in style if not in substance. Contrarian in dress and confrontational in rhetoric, Browne seemed comfortable in creating the sort of controversy that drew attention to himself and ultimately the March he helped Coxey conceive. Born in 1849 and six years Coxey’s senior, he had apprenticed in a printing shop in Illinois, and then, after the death of his mother migrated to Iowa to learn to become an artist. It was only the beginning of an itinerant career that included stints as an artist, rancher, journalist, carnival barker and labor organizer. While little is available about his past prior to the March, according to Vincent’s account, his first painting was of the Lord’s Supper. In 1869, inspired by reading about the west, he migrated there, painting scenes in Yosemite and wandering throughout the region before eventually settling in Berkley California in 1872 with his young wife, Alice Currier. There he continued his painting, a talent he would employ to good use during the March, designing elaborate and provocative murals that became part of our public memory.
of the spectacle. Coxey also would ask Browne to use his artistic talents to graphically illustrate the many Good Roads publications being distributed out of Massillon.¹⁶⁴

However, by his own admission, it was the Great Rail Strike of 1877 that transformed Browne’s tranquil career as a wandering painter to that of an active reformer. This nationwide strike “aroused his sympathies for his fellow men,” like nothing else had in his life. He soon jumped into the mob violence that characterized the San Francisco street that summer, befriending the “sandlot” agitator Dennis Kearney. Browne became Kearney’s Secretary, much like he would become Coxey’s trusted lieutenant. Kearney was an Irish immigrant who fast became the central figure in the formation of California’s Workingman’s Party that rallied in support of organized labor during the 1877 strike. In sympathy with labor and its cause, Browne began writing, illustrating, and publishing his own paper called the Great Strike. When San Francisco vigilance authorities threatened him with hanging if he continued to publish it, he started an openly anti-Chinese newspaper called Open Letter. This publication gave voice to Kearney who stood fiercely opposed to the railroads and their use of Asian labor.¹⁶⁵

At the height of the San Francisco sandlot violence, on July 23, 1877, a crowd that officials in San Francisco labeled as “hoodlums and vagrants,” went on a violent binge through Chinatown causing some ten thousand dollars in damage, burning stores, smashing windows, and taking lives. Later that October, undeterred by the omnipresent show of force by so-called “Committees of Vigilance,”

Kearney led an unruly crowd up Knob Hill in San Francisco to the doorstep of the mansion of Charles Crocker, chief architect of the Central Pacific Railroad. Fearing the houses of some of San Francisco’s most wealthy patrons might be destroyed, officials deployed troops in the neighborhood, while three U.S. naval vessels loomed offshore theoretically serving warning to Kearney.166

Sporting this activist lineage, Browne left his San Francisco Argus press credentials at the door of the rowdy Bimetallic Convention and declared himself a bona fide delegate from California. As his debate with Donnelly revealed, he could be among the most vocal of populists, well trained in the art of agitation and with a distinctly activist pedigree. Therefore, it is not surprising that Browne initially declined Coxey’s offer to return to Massillon with him following adjournment of the Bimetallic gathering, opting instead to stay in Chicago and engage in further lake front activism. With Coxey now back in Ohio, Browne joined the nightly gatherings of unemployed in Jackson Park along Chicago’s lake front. In spite of the teeming throngs of tourists to the Exposition, during this summer of economic panic Chicago experienced its own massive unemployment. An estimated one hundred thousand were unemployed in Chicago alone. Mayor Harrison named a Relief Committee, but the social refuges could not hold all those in need of shelter. Many of the homeless unemployed invaded City Hall where they slept on the hard stone stairways.167


The patchwork of volunteer relief programs could not attend to the needs of all the men yearning for a job. Only 5,000 persons in Chicago received relief from this make shift welfare network. Without a modern welfare system, work relief efforts in America’s major cities generally proved inadequate. The saloons of Chicago provided more free lunches to the poor than did the Central Relief Association. What passed then for work relief included doling out tasks such as stone-breaking or wood cutting as a means to obtain a daily ration of food. Everywhere Chicago suffered. As British minister and writer William Stead sent to observe the Chicago experience lamented, “the unemployed are our industrial deficit which yawns wider and wider and refuses to be choked.” When Stead addressed the Presbyterian Social Union later that December he chided them, “On the last day when Christ asks you what you have done for these your brethren who were cold and miserable, will you answer that you know not that they just slept without supper at the Harrison Street Station while you dined sumptuously at the Grand Pacific?”

In the midst of these deteriorating conditions, Browne would unleash his attacks against the Gilded Age corporate elites. Along the windy Lakefront he would stand on a barrel and display his colorfully painted canvas murals with their caricatures of Wall

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168 Browne, When Coxey’s Army Marched (sic), 5; Thomas J. Schlereth, Victorian America (New York: Harper, 1994), 172-75; Brands, The Reckless Decade, 161-176; and Smith, Urban Disorder, 112; Stead, “Coxeyism,” 49. John E. Semonche, Ray Stannard Baker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 52-3; William F. Stead, Chicago Today, or the Labour War in America (London: Review of Reviews Office, 1894), 7; William F. Stead, If Christ Came to Chicago (Chicago: Laird and Lee Publishers, 1894), 140; William G. McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 152. Rezneck, “Unemployment, Unrest and Relief,” 329-332: Rezneck on page 332 points out the view of public works at the time: “Benjamin Flowers, the utopian editor of the Arena, protested in 1894 that many worth-while projects, such as roads and the Mississippi levees, might have saved the day, but for the fact that “gold is more precious in the eyes of our legislators than independent, self-respecting citizenship...Millions for armories and the military instruction of the young, but not one cent to furnish employment to able bodied industry in its struggle to escape the terrible alternatives of stealing or starving--such seems to be the theory of government in the United States today.”

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Street tycoons, carrying plump politicians in their inflated pockets. Often his long speeches and those of other reformers aroused the crowds to take action. On the evening of August 24th, 1893, some 1,000 men started marching through the streets of Chicago. Finally halting their procession at the statue of Columbus outside the Exposition they heard more speeches about the need for jobs. Then, despite police orders, they spontaneously started marching toward the lake front. Reminiscent of what would follow the next spring during Coxey’s March, a flag bearer carrying the American flag led the procession along with a banner which read “One flag, one country, and work.” When they reached the lake front, reports of violence and rioting swirled through the crowd. The press alleged most of the protesters to be “foreigners.”

By late August, these gatherings of the unemployed, which Browne regularly frequented, again turned violent. On August 28, the speeches incited an unruly mob to march through the streets. When one of the leaders, many thought to be Browne, yelled “Siegel and Cooper’s!” the angry crowd turned and headed toward one of the city’s largest department stores. As customers and employees of the store headed toward the exits the police swooped in to make arrests. While others might have been more responsible for this incident, Browne clearly continued to be among those most prominent with his rabble rousing speeches. Coincidentally, on the west coast, at almost exactly that moment, Browne’s own journalistic career came into question and he was subject to law suits from fellow journalists who attacked his integrity in an effort to undermine his already dubious journalistic reputation. At the very moment Browne was

haranguing the plutocracy on the shores of Lake Michigan, the *Los Angeles Times* was running an editorial describing him as a “long haired, bear skin coated freak of nature who calls himself an artist….”

Meanwhile for Mayor Harrison, who recalled all too well the harrowing details of the violence in the Haymarket in 1886, the time had come to put an end to these nightly episodes. Having experienced weeks of Browne’s unruly behavior, the unusually tolerant Mayor lost patience with Browne’s speeches on the Lake Front. Browne’s radical rhetoric had tested the Mayor’s patience to the breaking point and Browne was summoned to Harrison’s office. The Mayor rebuked Browne for over an hour and then told him that for the “good of the city you better get out.” Browne and his fellow activists who had continued to meet at the Lake Front now were forced to disband and discontinue their nightly gatherings. Displaced, Browne now opportunistically took Coxey up on his offer to come to Massillon, fulfilling the Ohioan’s standing invitation from earlier that summer. Finally, the planning for the march to Washington the next spring could begin in earnest. The populist energy which the Bimetallic Convention

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170 “Attack on a Store,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 August 1893; “Editorial Notes,” *Mendocino Dispatch Democrat*, 15 December 1893; The editorial criticism of Browne in *The Los Angeles Times*, 14 August 1888 dates from earlier law suits and accusations. Browne was accused by the editor of the *San Francisco Weekly Star* of being a lackey for the railroads and a fraud as a representative of the United Labor Party. In 1890, articles again appear citing Browne’s judicial woes. Accused of trying to extort money from Willie Childs in return for suppressing an article in Browne’s *The Cactus*, Browne is ultimately acquitted in an 1890 trial; see “Acquitted,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 13 October 1890. Browne nonetheless seemed to have employed similarly dubious tactics of those for which he was accused as a means for raising revenues for his activist newspapers. For example, he would run a political candidate’s picture in his newspaper and then send a lackey to secure money from the candidate for doing so. One candidate, it was reported, rebuked the “collector:” “You son of a dog, if you ever say another word to me on this subject I’ll break every bone in your body,” and the wretch got out of the candidate’s way in double quick.” See “A Blackmailer,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 12 October 1888. In footnotes in his *Coxey’s Army*, historian Donald McMurry also cites the many stories swirling about Browne’s anti-union activities (see McMurry, *Coxey’s Army* footnote 1 page 30); and quotes the leader of an industrial army from San Francisco, Charles T. Kelley as charging “Carl Browne is a conceited ass and he has no one to support him.” (see McMurry, *Coxey’s Army* footnote 2 page 189) See also “Bounced,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 6 September 1893, and also “Article 1-No Title,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 7 September 7 1893.
captured and Browne embodied now sought to expand to a new frontier by conceiving a
march of the unemployed east to the nation’s capitol.\footnote{Smith, \textit{Urban Disorder}, 233.}

To March

Coxey met the Chicago refugee at the rail depot in Massillon on October 9, 1893. He returned him over ill kept roads to his well appointed home in Paul’s Station four miles north of town. As the planning for the March proceeded, Browne took over virtually every detail. As one news account described, Browne as chief marshal “becomes seer, prophet, organizer, general manager and press agent.” In this role, Browne had Coxey’s complete confidence. Browne, the career agitator, had his own graphic ideas of how to draw attention to Coxey’s novel ideas and create the sort of spectacle that would draw attention to Coxey’s Good Roads Plan. As one writer observed, “It was an Ohio product sprung from a Western seed.”\footnote{Osman C. Hooper, “The Coxey Movement in Ohio,” \textit{Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications}, IX (Columbus: Fred J. Heer, 1901), 155;}

Vincent suggested the two men had become so intellectually and spiritually entwined that it was foolish to try and delineate whether it was Browne or Coxey that first had the idea to march. Vincent, who accompanied the March in its first few weeks and remained close to both men, split the difference by saying “Together they conceived the March to Washington.” At the same time, however, the March’s full time chronicler unequivocally suggested the idea actually originated with Leonidas Polk a onetime President of the Farmers Alliance. Vincent thought it doubtful Coxey had heard of Polk’s

\footnote{Smith, \textit{Urban Disorder}, 233.}
idea, when he and Browne began to plan for the March. Yet Vincent concludes Polk as the “first to suggest presenting a ‘living petition’ to Congress.”

The idea for marching to Washington would seem to derive more logically from Browne’s earlier experiences and interest in drawing attention to Coxey’s plan. Moreover, notwithstanding his earlier sandlot experience with Kearney, or his more recent episodes of reform marches in Chicago, Browne actually claimed credit for the idea. As he recounted his own version, the idea to march occurred when Coxey asked him to return to Chicago in December to gain the endorsement of the AFL-CIO for the Good Roads Program. Wandering through Chicago’s streets, Browne claimed he visited with some young Chicago newspaper boys one night when the idea came to him for delivering to the nation’s capital what amounted to a “petition in boots.”

It might seem logical to take Browne at his word and credit him with the idea. Many experiences in Browne’s activist background could lead him to present Coxey with the idea to March to Washington. However, his credibility seemed suspect on many

173 Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal, 49.
174 Subsequent historians of the March, notably McMurry, Coxey’s Army, 38-40) and Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 32 view Browne as the originator of the idea and the leading force in its design and execution. Even Vincent suggests Coxey delegated the execution of the March to Browne.” With regard to the AFL position, Browne attended the American Federation of Labor convention in the old City Hall, where John McBride, a friend of Coxey’s, introduced a resolution in support of the Good Roads Bill which Browne claims the AFL endorsed, but Gompers denies. Gompers claim seems to be corroborated by the fact that there is no mention of Coxey’s idea in the twelve point AFL platform adopted in Chicago. Moreover, McBride was Gompers principal opponent for President of the AFL. Nonetheless, Gompers clearly had affection for Browne and liked Coxey’s idea. Browne returned to Massillon and in the first Bulletin where he called for a Mass Meeting in Washington, he also acknowledged that in addition to five thousand petitions for Good Roads already sent throughout the country, representing that Coxey’s plan had the AFL endorsement (though it officially did not), another two thousand were being prepared to be sent to local unions and urging them to deliver them at the May Day meeting in Washington. The platform the AFL adopted contained many measures for nationalizing various sectors of the economy. But there is no mention of the Good Roads plan emerging from the Chicago 1893 AFL Convention. Rather the platform is summarized as having twelve plans, including “Compulsory education; direct legislation; a legal eight hour work day; sanitary inspection of workshops, mines and homes; liability of employers for physical disability; abolition of contract labor in all public works; abolition of the sweating system; municipal ownership of streetcars, electric light and gas plants; nationalization of telegraph, telephone, railroads and mines; and collective ownership by the people of all means of production and distribution.” See “Federation of Labor,” The Atlanta Constitution 15 December 1893; “Gompers Wins Again,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 17 December 1893.
points. For example, he also claimed to have written the Good Roads legislation, a claim clearly false. Yet, beyond his association with Kearney’s October 1877 march up Knob Hill, perhaps the most credible evidence that Browne may indeed have actually broached the idea to Coxey to march to the nation’s capitol was Browne’s subsequent participation in Kearney’s August 1878 pilgrimage to Washington.¹⁷⁵

For indeed following the earlier sandlot violence, Kearney decided to travel east the following summer of 1878 in an attempt to replicate on a national level his success in the formation of a Workingman’s Party in California. He sought to identify a possible Presidential candidate for the national Workingmen’s Party. A central focus of his journey eastward was to petition Congress to put an end to the use of Asian labor in the construction of rail lines. Like the period in which Coxey marched, Kearney’s journey to St. Louis, Chicago, Boston and Washington was made during an industrial depression and the year after the Great Strike. Kearney had Browne at his side when he entered the White House for a meeting with President Rutherford B. Hayes, a man that Kearney had referred to publicly as a “fraud.” After a brief exchange of pleasantries, Hayes deflected Kearney’s question as to whether the written petition for federal intervention into the Asian question reached his desk. The President respectfully noted that though he could not recollect the precise fate of the Workingmen’s Party petition, the preponderance of communications that he reviewed on the subject of Asian labor were in favor of some form of federal intervention.

¹⁷⁵ Browne, *When Coxey Marcht (sic)*, 5.
The President’s response only served to further irritate Kearney. So the next day Kearney and Browne took their campaign to the steps of the Capitol, much as Coxey would do sixteen years later. Arriving at the Capitol steps, the sandlot activist dared authorities to arrest him for making a speech to what was described as “a very large crowd.” Kearney, however, was allowed to give his speech and the crowd that had gathered, many of whom were government officials, listened intently and then dispersed quietly. Indeed, in helping design Coxey’s March, Browne revealed just how much he borrowed from the 1878 experience with Kearney. This included Kearney’s incessant criticism of press behavior. In 1894 Browne would be no more sparing of the accompanying press corps than the sandlot activist Kearney was in 1878. Kearney referred to the tailing reporters as “these villainous serpents, these shiny imps of hell.” Browne invoked similar satanic allusions when he described the reporters who covered Coxey’s Army as the “Argus Eyed Demons from Hell” (See Figure 8).176

Browne’s experience with Kearney would seem compelling evidence for his claim that he originated the idea for “Coxey’s March.” Yet Coxey could also credibly lay claim to having originated the idea. According to the account of David Heizer, a candidate for Governor in Kansas, Coxey spoke of a March to Washington as early as 1892. Heizer told the Emporia Gazette that he met Coxey at a horse fair in Lexington Kentucky nearly two years before the March and it was there that Coxey apparently broached the idea for a march to Washington during idle conversation. After discoursing on the virtues of Good Roads, Coxey suggested to Heizer and an Army Captain named

Woodson from Reno, that he thought a company of horsemen might ride to Washington and directly petition the Congress to enact Good Roads legislation. By the time Coxey rose from the table, Heizer claimed, he had decided and that his mind was fully made up. Heizer’s own reputation seems intact. A leading agriculturalist, Heizer held several public offices when he resided in Colorado earlier in his life, including jobs as a census taker and registrar. It is not clear what incentive Heizer would have to falsely attribute the idea for the March to Coxey.\footnote{The March to Washington, The Emporia Gazette, 26 April 1894; see reference also to Captain Reno in Stan Hoig, Fort Reno and the Indian Territory Frontier (Fayetteville AK: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 150; and further reference to David N. Heizer in “David N. Heizer Former Official of G.A.R. Dead,” Chicago Daily Tribune 28 March 1932; see “Early Barton County History,” by D.N. Heizer (see: http://skyways.lib.ks.us/genweb/archives/barton/history/1912/051.html).}

Such conflicting evidence makes it hard to delineate precisely whether Coxey or Browne played the larger role in conceiving the March. There is scant written record that allows one to unequivocally attribute the idea to march to Browne or Coxey. We do know that in the First Bulletin of the J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association of the United States, written shortly after Browne returned from his trip back to Chicago in January 1894, there is mention of “a mass meeting in Washington City at 10 a.m. on May 1\textsuperscript{st} of that year on the steps of the nation’s capital at which all the petitions will be received.” Clearly both Browne and Coxey in their ongoing discussions that summer of 1893 discussed the best way to carry their message to Congress, and somewhere between them, the idea clearly emerged.\footnote{See Bulletin Number 1 of the J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association of the U.S. in Ray Stannard Baker’s Papers at the Library of Congress (Box 23 Reel 24); Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal, 46-7.}

Regardless of whether Coxey or Browne deserves more credit for the idea to march, protest marches themselves were nothing new in the nineteenth century. British
Chartism, itself a “paradigm of populism,” permeated English political life from 1839 to 1848. This working class movement is characterized by its heavily monitored and patrolled mass gatherings, such as the demonstration of an estimated one hundred and fifty thousand on Kennington Common on April 10, 1848. English factory workers drafted petitions garnering hundreds of thousands of signatures demanding Parliamentary reforms and asking for voting representation. But these demands actually served as a surrogate expression for a more deep seated feeling among British workers of wholesale discontent with their economic plight. In the pivotal moment for the Chartists at Kennington, their petitions exceeded a million signatures. Marchers had gathered at various points throughout London and then converged toward the common. The Chartists custom of simultaneous meetings along with “torchlight parades” in the major industrial cities of England became trademarks of the Chartists. At Kennington, when it became apparent that the police commissioner would enforce a prohibition against a procession to Parliament, the leaders took the document in a cab to the steps of Parliament. Much like Coxey’s troops, they were not to be deterred.179

In fact, in his visit to Chicago, Stead, the British reporter and reformer, drew precise parallels between Coxey and the Chartist movement (1838-1850). During the British Chartist's parades, colorful banners and bands accompanied the marchers creating a sense of the spectacular. Coxey and Browne would employ similar imagery. By the mid-nineteenth century, the peaceful yet powerful Chartist phenomenon had supplanted

earlier spasms of violent protest in Britain. The Chartists strictly adhered to a discipline of peaceful expression. In one of their largest displays in support of their right to vote, a May 21, 1838 Chartist march from the Glasgow Green stretched some two miles, contained some 43 different musical bands, and about 300 banners that proceeded in an orderly, quasi-military march. The Chartists demonstrated that the spectacle of protest in and of itself possessed its own inherent power. The sheer attention such spectacles received removed any incentive to resort to violent tactics. Similarly, Coxey’s March, with its colorful banners, ornamented wagons, and changing montage of characters, took on an irregular appearance that alternated between military order and urban disorder, but stressed always the non-violent, peaceful nature of its protest.180

In America, early labor demonstrations often resembled those of seventeenth century French artisanal group protests that spilled out of taverns and shops into the streets, gathering sympathetic bystanders on their way to the seat of authority. Like the later Coxey phenomenon, French labor parades drew strength from sympathizers who joined them as they passed by, if even for a few brief moments as a way to show support. Similarly, in the newly industrializing cities of colonial North America, like

180 Ray Stannard Baker refers to W.T. Stead as “the famous English journalist and reformer who had set himself the task of reforming the moral, social, and economic conditions in Chicago; see Baker, American Chronicle, 27; Malcolm Chase, Chartism: A New History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, 1; W.T. Stead, “Coxeyism,” 47; Plotz, “Crowd Power,” 88-90. Reverend W.N. Molesworth, The History of the Reform Bill of 1832 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1865), 17. Molesworth notes that despite the notoriety of the Chartist movement, a less heralded British phenomenon of 1817 in many ways serves as a more logical antecedent to Coxey’s March, though again there is no evidence Coxey used it as a model. Molesworth details a large demonstration on St. Peter’s field in Manchester, where working men increasingly disgruntled over the lack of representation in Parliament, decided to walk to London and present their grievances directly to the seat of government. As Molesworth noted, “It was proposed that each of the petitioners should take a blanket with him so that they might sleep on the way in any sheltered place they might find and the food which would be required.” They were in short to live off the land much as Coxey’s men would do later in the century. As a result, these protesters were long remembered by the name of the “Blanketeers.” Their dramatic approach to free expression caused great alarm in London, much as Coxey’s march would cause among official Washington. Ultimately, Blanketeer leaders were imprisoned, with nothing to show in the way of Parliamentary response, not dissimilar to Coxey’s fate.
Philadelphia, the strike parade would merrily march through the streets in an affirmation of worker identity. These parades became the antecedents for the sort of strike processions that became more prevalent as a form of dissent throughout the nineteenth century. As craft and trade unions emerged in mid-nineteenth century America, “the public meeting, the festive celebration, the mass demonstration and the procession all became tools for popularizing various causes.”

Growing up in the coal regions of Pennsylvania, Coxey undoubtedly heard the tales of the recurrent strikes that marked the region in the late nineteenth century. He would have been fourteen when about two hundred coal strikers armed with clubs appeared one afternoon in the streets of nearby Wilkes Barre about fifty-six miles from Danville where the Coxey’s then resided. The miners were part of a larger labor protest moving from the Mahoney to the Schuylkill and then on to the Wyoming Valley. The men marched between mines and shops rallying others to stop work. As they approached Pittston, they had grown to over five hundred men who, though armed, acted peacefully in their entreaties to fellow workers. They successfully forced a Pennsylvania Coal Company train to stop dead on the tracks. Led by an Irishman James Lamlert, they gained in strength as they approached Scranton. The sheriff of Luzerne County asked them to stop, but they kept on in their peaceful protest against conditions in the mines. Unlike any previous demonstrations, this upheaval in the coal valley of Northeast

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Pennsylvania moved from place to place gathering strength along the way, a welcoming much like the one Coxey’s Army would receive.\(^{182}\)

We do not know the extent to which Coxey knew about this movable labor protest that arose near where he came of age. Coxey undoubtedly also witnessed the pageantry associated with Election Day processions of workers on their way to cast their vote, mobilized by one party or another, and typically showing off gaudy and masculine displays with banners, flags, bands, and bonfires. In sum, ample precedents existed for Coxey and Browne to have conceived of the idea to march as a way both to demonstrate and to draw attention. Both in their personal experiences and as a matter of common historical knowledge, ample precedent existed for conceiving the first March to Washington.\(^{183}\)

### Planning

While we do not know the precise dialogue between the two that led to the idea to march, we do know once the idea hatched, Coxey evinced some initial trepidation. Coxey had already actively promoted his Plan and sought to draw attention to it in more conventional ways. He put forward his idea for Good Roads in thousands of flyers and bulletins he issued as part of Coxey’s Good Roads Association. In the weeks leading up to departure, Browne in his swashbuckling, maverick style hyped the idea to anyone in earshot. Yet the more practical Coxey seemed burdened by an enterprise he would have


\(^{183}\) David Montgomery, “Wage Labor, Bondage and Citizenship in Nineteenth Century America,” *International Labor and Working Class History*, no. 48, (Fall, 1995): 12. The question remains as to whether Coxey and Browne were consciously influenced by any of these historical precedents. Henry Vincent not only attributed the idea to Polk, but he compared Coxey neither to the Chartists nor the Blanketeers, but to the Irishman Jack Cade who led a peaceful fifteenth century protest of Kent peasants against Henry VI; see Henry Vincent, *The Commonwealth of Christ* (Chicago: W.B. Conkey Company, 1894), 39-48.
to financially support. His own businesses had suffered in the Depression’s early stages and it seems to have colored his views of whether a March to Washington at this time was practical to undertake. Indeed at several points early in the March, Coxey left by train to attend auctions in an effort to sell some of his prize trotters or find other sources of contribution to keep the cause alive. His own silica sand business was not doing well and he had to lay off some forty of his own workers. Even before he had left for Chicago in July 1893 to attend the Bimetallic Convention, he had to sell his Lexington Kentucky “Dixiana Farm” and ship the rest of his stock back to Massillon. While during the March Browne would sit astride a $7,000 stallion from Coxey’s stables, the General found it necessary to sell others of his prize trotters to raise money for the March. As Lloyd noted, Coxey “left large property interests to suffer while he has devoted himself to educating the people of his ‘Good Roads’ Plan….”

To assuage Coxey’s doubts about proceeding, on February 8, 1894, Browne wrote to Coxey on the company office stationary addressing him as “sir and brother.” In the letter, Browne noted that May 1 would be International Labor Day, the appropriate occasion to “protest in the name of bankrupt people, against any further robbers by interest upon paper notes (banks) based upon the public credit, when that same credit could be used to issue other pieces of paper (notes) without interest or profit to national banks.” Browne went on to fully embrace Coxey’s monetary policies, and the

remainder of the letter, scribbled alternately in print and script in his uneven hand, seeks to assuage any doubts Coxey may have harbored about how the March would be organized. Browne described what seemed an orderly regiment comprised of communes, cantons and communities, led by assigned marshals, which in its sum would be called the Commonweal of Christ. The next week on a drive with Browne to one of his sand quarries, Coxey agreed that the March was the best way to bring attention to the Good Roads idea. The planning now took on a new dimension and new sense of urgency. As Coxey’s first wife noted, once her former husband made up his mind, he remained resolute.\footnote{February 8 Letter from Browne to Coxey in Ray Stannard Baker’s Papers at the Library of Congress (Box 23 Reel 24); See “Peace Army Growing,” \textit{The Chicago Record}, 16 March 1894; Browne, \textit{When Coxey’s Army Marched (sic)}, 5. See also McMurry, \textit{Coxey’s Army}, 35; See Bulletin Number 1 of the “J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association of the U.S.” in Ray Stannard Baker’s Papers at the Library of Congress (Box 23 Reel 60); Howson, \textit{Coxey}, 116-117.}

Many in Massillon observing the two in almost constant close company thought Coxey had fallen under the hypnotic spell of Browne and his theosophical religion. As Chicago reporter Baker reported on his arrival in Massillon the week before the March, “The neighbors cannot believe that Coxey, known and reputed as the wealthiest and shrewdest farmer in the country, is the leader of an enterprise so peculiar as the Commonweal Army.” Coxey himself had to deny to reporters that insanity ran in his own family. But other prominent citizens quickly rallied to his support. As word of the idea for a March to Washington departing on Easter Sunday spread throughout Massillon, prominent supporters emerged. J.H. Hunt, the cashier of the Massillon National Bank and W.R. Woodford a manager of the Cleveland Railroad were among the first of many donors. Many locals throughout Massillon offered up their ideas for how to
house and clothe what they anticipated to be thousands of unemployed men descending
on the city. In addition Browne and Coxey reached out to notable populists and labor
leaders. Coxey had met with Samuel Gompers, President of the American Federation of
Labor in New York on February eighth, and secured, as Gompers would later
acknowledge, the iconic labor leader’s personal support, though not that of the AFL’s.186

Coxey and Browne proceeded to engage a nationwide network of
populist sympathizers in support for their ideas. They reached out to recruit those who
might logically join the March and engaged others to support it financially. They seemed
much like the very same consummate organizers within the Farmers Alliances that
established their own “educational machines” with attendant publications and networks
of individuals who helped spread their messages. J.S. Coxey’s Good Roads Association
Bulletins beginning with Bulletin Number 1 issued on January 1, 1894 promoted his idea
for Good Roads to a network of sympathizers. The Bulletin suggested that communities
along the route would be expected to support the Commonweal with food and shelter.187

As an astute businessman, Coxey lent considerable organizational skill
and practical business sense to the endeavor. However, as his first wife also commented,
his fascination with race horses also satiated his desire to gamble. The planning of the
March represented both aspects of Coxey’s personality. On the one hand, as a shrewd

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186 “Coxey’s Men,” St. Paul Daily News, 20 March 20 1894; See also “Join Coxey’s Army,” Chicago Daily
News, 23 March 1894; and “Says Coxey is Sane and Patriotic,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 24 March 1894; Ray Stannard
Tribune, 17 December 1893; Baker, American Chronicle, 6; See February 8, 1894 Letter from Carl Browne to Jacob
Coxey in Ray Stannard Baker Papers at the Library of Congress (Box 23 Reel 24); “General News from New York,”
187 See Bulletin Number 1 of the J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association of the U.S. in Ray Stannard Baker’s
Papers at the Library of Congress (Box 71 Reel 60); Postel, Populist Vision, 45-69 speaks of the populist emphasis on
education and the networks of sympathizers that rallied around their various bold ideas for reform through networks
similar to what Coxey established for Good Roads.
businessman, he meticulously planned the physical route the March would take. With the scheduled departure for 12:30 on March 25, he carefully oversaw the planning for the March’s exact route, and the precise destination for each night’s camp site. He had hired a Pittsburgh engineer, J.H. Dippold, to carefully plot each day’s mileage and destination. He based his estimates on the assumption the men might march twelve to fifteen miles a day. An advance party of engineers travelling a day in advance of the March would be assigned to prepare the next camp site and make preparations including promoting the nightly Coxey-Browne lectures, which ingeniously were used to raise money for the enterprise. But for all that the accompanying commissary wagons could hold in food and supplies, Coxey knew that the success of the March would also depend on the supplies it received in each community along the way. This was the gamble he took. Without generous donations of food and material from both rural hamlets and labor towns, the March could not survive. Thus Coxey the precise planner also left much to chance. Would this March on behalf of the unemployed people, and those who sympathized with their cause, be supported by the people along the way and propel it all the way to the steps of the nation’s capital?¹⁸⁸

Perhaps Coxey’s faith in the generosity of producers led him to have confidence in this strategy of living off the land. He had, after all, been communicating widely with a large network of fellow populists. Perhaps it was simply the reality that the March could not transport five weeks of food. Regardless, as he prepared, the shadows of the populist moment seemed to be growing. Populist commentator Lloyd

¹⁸⁸ “Route of the Commonweal” in Box 71 Reel 60 of Ray Stannard Baker papers at Library of Congress attributes route to J.H. Dippold, 1st engineer, marshal from Pittsburgh Pa. See McMurry, Coxey’s Army, 59-60 for description of the March’s average pace and distance.
contemplated the future of the populist movement; would it be able to expand upon the incipient farmer-labor alliance, or had the silver cause now become its “cow bird?” Following its legacy of political ineptitude, the trajectory of the populist movement inexorably moved toward fusion with the Democratic Party. By 1896 William Jennings Bryan would stand as their candidate, and their fusion with the Democratic Party, for better, or, as it turned out for worse, would be complete.  

Yet in the spring of 1894, the populist energy that had churned for almost two decades seemed again very much alive as Coxey and Browne conceived the idea to leave Massillon with their Commonweal of Christ, and march all the way to Washington. The nation, suffering the most severe depression in its history, now saw the specter of unemployment on a scale never before witnessed. Yet the established parties reflexively turned to repeal of the Sherman Silver Act as if contracting the currency and returning to a gold standard would have the desired effect on a struggling economy. Even the newly minted Populist Party, taking its own calculated path toward fusion with the established parties, seemed similarly inept at addressing the fundamental causes of the economic calamity. Coxey and Browne must have sensed the futility of it all when they arrived for the Bimetallic convention on the eve of repeal of Sherman. The delegates to this convention displayed the same genuine populist energy that characterized the movement since Lampasas, but they seemed equally impotent in their last ditch attempt to stem the political tide that made repeal of Sherman seemingly

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inevitable. Frustrated, Browne himself took to the Lake Front as did many others who continued to seek a louder if not more effective way to challenge the monopolists.

Clearly after almost two decades populism stood at a crossroads in its battle against corporate greed. The essential energy force of Browne’s Lake front protest rants and the bold ideas embodied in Coxey’s Plan needed some more dramatic demonstration. Thus, in the shadows of the great White City, the penultimate expression of Gilded Age wealth, Coxey and Browne began formulating their idea to physically march a petition for the issuance of $500 million dollars in new currency and the construction of Good Roads towards Washington. In conceiving this first March to Washington, Coxey and Browne drew from a well established lineage of protest parades. Yet no group had ever marched to the nation’s capital to present a petition. Perhaps just such a dramatic gesture would draw the necessary attention to Coxey’s bold idea. Perhaps just such a bold form of expression was necessary to magnify the political influence of a now two decade old movement of producers, whose Populist Party representatives already seemed consumed by the ways of Washington. Coxey and Browne would now challenge a movement seemingly captured by political operatives more intent on finding common ground with the Democrats.  

Preparing to leave Massillon, Coxey and Browne knew their industrial recruits would have to walk some four hundred miles to succeed. Though it was not uncommon for people to hike long distances in this time, the planned march needed to be a sustained expression that would last for more than a month. Coxey stood resolute about their

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intention. “They are travelling for a principle,” he would say before their departure, “and nothing will daunt them.” Vincent observed, “The world has never until that time witnessed such a spectacle,” and indeed it appears, up until this moment, no group had marched to Washington to petition for their cause.¹⁹¹

CHAPTER 3: THE SPECTACLE

“To accomplish it means the second coming of Christ, and I believe in the prophecy that He is to come, not in any one single form, but in the whole people.”

Carl Browne

In an interview with the Chicago Daily News two weeks before the departure, Coxey suggested the March would accomplish its ends without having to rely on “political parties.” As the professional politicians in the People’s Party now marched in the direction of fusion politics in order to achieve majority status, Coxey and Browne prepared to march a community of the unemployed toward Washington to convey a bold plan for full employment. Their moving spectacle, which they entitled “The Commonweal of Christ,” would not only petition the government to address the plight of the producer, but in its very form challenge the more institutionalized modes of expression now pursued by the professional political operatives within the Populist Party. Coxey’s unprecedented March of the unemployed to Washington was designed as an event that would impress upon Congress “the necessity for giving immediate relief to the four million of unemployed people and their families, consisting of twelve to fifteen million more.”

193 “Rally Round Coxey,” Chicago Daily News, 19 March 1894; Coxey in the interview curiously said, “We can accomplish our end without women or political parties.” While women would later try and join the March, often disguised as men, Coxey and Browne clearly preferred to keep this an all male affair (see later discussion of his views toward gender later in this chapter); Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal, 50 - 51.
This chapter reveals how Coxey the March displayed a montage of seemingly disparate themes that conflated the millennial and the utopian; the martial and the carnivalesque. At times the imagery of a dreary band of unemployed men assuming the pretense of military bearing seemed in stark contrast with the March’s emphasis on a millenarian optimism. Though particularly Victorian in its treatment of women, by contrast the racial images the March presented conveyed progressive attitudes that challenged what Baker later referred to as “the color line,” which other Populists continued to press as well. At the same time, the lively array of colorful personalities, religious banners, and frequent signage revealed a spontaneous energy that a now institutionalized People’s Party no longer captured. The March expressed frustration with conventional political procedure and its failures to respond to the wide range of dissenting voices.

This chapter will also argue that each of the disparate images conveyed by Coxey’s March actually connected in its own way to basic “small p” populist instincts. In its very dissonance it stood in stark contrast to the coherence and sophistication of the Goldbugs and monopolists, all the while exuding a democratic energy and a predisposition to have its message heard. This seeming lack of coherence allowed it to exude the essential untamed energy of discontent that so characterized this diverse late nineteenth century producer movement. In the dissonance created by its varied imagery it appealed to both tillers and toilers, while providing ample fodder for those who wished to satirize it. By operating outside not just the established Party structure, but also the
established forms of political discourse in the public sphere, the March became both fascinating and vulnerable. It reframed political activity as public spectacle. Unpacking the March’s varied representations in the context of the spectacular allows us to better understand the diverse and inchoate strands that comprised the populist moment and how the March neatly fits within it.\(^{194}\)

Though neither Coxey nor Browne would refer to the March as a spectacle, the two deliberately set out to create an event that would command the attention of the entire nation. The shy, unassuming Coxey, under the influence of the charismatic Browne, well understood the transcendent value of creating an attraction which might draw attention to the substance of Coxey’s good roads and greenbacks ideas. The very act of marching to Washington, Browne said before they left Massillon, “would awaken the attention of the whole people to a sense of their duty in impressing upon Congress the importance of Coxey’s Good Roads Plan.” From the very outset, Coxey and Browne appeared to well understand the potential to expand their reach by staging such an event. When they issued Bulletin Number One on January 1, 1894 they called for cooperation of good roads advocates throughout the land, and enlisted their fellow citizens in petition drives endorsing Coxey’s plan which was as much about expanding the nation’s money supply and putting it in the hands of producers as it was about their building roads. “Send for your petition and get everybody to sign,” the Bulletin concluded. More importantly, it then suggested the need for “a mass meeting to be held at 10 a.m. on May 1, 1894 on the steps of the

\(^{194}\) As Henry Vincent noted the march “has been ridiculed beyond all reason.” Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 9.
nation’s capitol, at which all the petitions received up to that time will be displayed, prior to being given to Congress.” The March, as Coxey said, was the way to draw attention “to the greatest question that has ever been presented to them (i.e., Congress)—the money question.”

In their blurring of the good roads program and the money question, and in their deliberate creation of a spectacle to accomplish political ends, Coxey and Browne’s staged event built on a tradition of political theatricality. In colonial America, crowd actions such as the Stamp Act riots arose out of a long established tradition of mob violence begrudgingly accepted as a necessary consequence of British constitutionalism. In these early protests, the line between the theatrically spectacular and the brazenly violent often seemed fuzzy. Acts such as the hanging of British authorities in effigy, the tarring and feathering of tax collectors, or the staging of mock stamping acts, teetered on this precipice—a tradition of “rough justice” or chivalric extra-legal violence. Perhaps the singular most recognized, spectacular act of defiance in colonial America, the Boston Tea Party, foreshadowed the Coxey spectacle in its challenge to an accepted ritual of authority. The making and serving of tea marked a “genteel ritual,” equipped with carefully choreographed movements, decorated serving paraphernalia, and attentiveness to manners. Thus in defiance of British order, in the Boston Harbor on December 16, 1773, theatrically costumed Indians, a uniform deliberately chosen to symbolize a

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frontier disregard for custom and civility, staged the mock making and serving of tea that challenged this sacred British custom.196

Yet if the Tea Party represented a raucous spectacle complete with the violent dumping of tea into the Boston Harbor, Coxey’s March represented a peaceful spectacle of supplication that was designed to be orderly and dignified. If the Tea Party mocked British custom, Coxey’s Petition on Boots was meant to give life to the most fundamental of American forms of petition as embodied in the First Amendment. Less spontaneous and unlike the Tea party months in planning and execution, the March Coxey and Browne conceived aligned well with the form the spectacular frequently took in the post Civil war era. By the 1890’s, the art of deception as manifest in circuses, minstrelsy, automatons, and ventriloquists, remained very much in vogue. Mimetic spectacles that depicted reality in all its dimensions conformed to the new popular technology of photography. These new forms of life mirroring spectacle occupied the thin boundaries between reality and art. Increasingly the camera became a significant influence in late nineteenth century American culture, projecting a new form of representation where “photographic images brought a vast cyclopedia of world culture and symbols into the eye of the parlor.”197

197 James W. Cook, The Arts of Deception (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1-29; 133-135 describes the genius of P.T. Barnum, who, from the mid nineteenth century, captured attention with spectacles that tricked and deceived. They simultaneously attracted, yet also empowered their audiences by allowing the individual viewer to probe the ambiguities of exhibits like “What Is It?” the actual name of one “boundary blurring hybrid.” Barnum’s spectacles increasingly included life like “dioramas, panoramas, models of Niagara, Dublin, Paris, and Jerusalem,” that played back to the audience the very reality they could experience. Miles Orville, The Real Thing (Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press), 33-39;
This devotion to replicating reality as conveyed in the imagery of photographs coincided with an age of artistic and literary realism. As Coxey marched, this growing taste for the life-like seemed to infuse virtually all forms of aesthetic experience. In the literary world it became known as the “New Naturalism.” Challenging the sensibilities of the self anointed Gilded Age custodians of art and literature who saw art as “lifting us above the mire of degrading things,” writers such as Hamlin Garland and William Dean Howells now allowed their stories to expose the tawdry realities of the lives in the most ordinary of circumstances. Exposes of the routine challenged the reader with often shockingly disturbing while unsparingly banal depictions of reality.  

In this new “Culture of Imitation,” where art and performance sought to replicate life, the imagery of Coxey’s humble body of men in drab frock coats and bowler hats quietly walking toward their nation’s capital carrying crudely drawn banners, challenged the alternative corporate forms of the spectacular parading themselves across America’s newspapers and magazines in the form of elaborate advertisement. Juxtaposed with the late nineteenth century’s New Naturalism, a nascent advertising industry simultaneously sought to enlarge its client’s marketplace with new forms of appealing art and copy. It did so by borrowing a gaudy imagery that stressed fecundity rather than scarcity, and in doing so created its own spectacle of abundance. In this commercial milieu, individual identity came increasingly to be defined in advertising by what one consumed rather than what one produced.

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By contrast, in the wake of the Panic of 1893, Coxey’s March mirrored back the reality of scarcity rather than the fantasy of abundance. Unlike the spectacles created by commercial advertising, which often drew upon voluptuous female imagery, the male dominated March seemed almost the anti-spectacle. Its imagery resonated or repulsed millions on either side of the corporate economic divide. In the Panic of 1893, as Gilded Age tycoons dominated an increasingly incorporated economy, it seemed this moving advertisement for the plight of the unemployed by a community of the displaced urging the reconstruction of a broken social contract seemed the perfect anti-corporate, populist symbol. As Coxey prepared his May Day speech he wrote, “We come and throw up our defenseless hands and say “Help, or we and our loved ones must perish.” In the spring of 1893, Coxey’s spectacle dramatized the reality of at least three million unemployed producers, and it appealed to those who sympathized with their plight.200

Like the increasingly popular forms of mimetic art and literature, the March allowed its audience to remain at once detached, and yet at the same time very much joined to the event. Even Coxey and Browne kept their spatial distance. In the special vernacular of the spectacle, its creators remained at once detached from the column of men while being very much joined to its purpose and symbolism. Coxey left the March

by train no fewer than three times. He and Browne both stayed in hotels rather than sleep with the men, and neither marched. Browne rode a horse while Coxey rode in a phaeton. Along the four hundred mile route an enthusiastic audience found its own way of connecting with the Spectacle. People often ran in excited anticipation to the roadsides, waved bouquets from balconies, and enthusiastically welcomed their guests with food or clothing. Many found themselves so swept up in the moment they joined the March for a few miles. They became connected to the very spectacle they observed, and, like the new pictures now increasingly adorning parlor walls, could belong to it just by observing it. In this way, the public reach of Coxey’s March greatly exceeded its physical size. In fact, as it proceeded the physical size of the March came to matter less than what the spectacle itself represented.

If, in its essential form, spectacle represents a crude theatric art, then Coxey and Browne clearly seemed comfortable in the act of producing, directing, and staging this five week drama that would play to a national audience. They raised the money for its production, designed the set, and recruited its actors. From the moment the two creators met in the shadows of the World’s Columbian Exposition of Chicago in the late summer of 1893, they busily began preparing for its departure.

**Millennial**

From the outset, the creators of “The Commonweal of Christ” sought to represent the March as a peaceable assemblage seeking to restore a social contract that served “the commonweal of all.” Though Browne himself would later call the marchers to military
order and drill them as if they were soldiers in a battalion, in his first “Marshal’s Order,” he clearly stated “We are not a military organization.” Browne convinced Coxey to present the March as representing the second coming of Christ, and in this way as this chapter now explores, aligned with the Populists’ routine use of religious rhetoric that sought to place the Populist cause in a millenarian context. In Bulletin Number 3 issued in February 1894 just weeks before the March departed, Browne explicitly declared that to accomplish the March “…means the second coming of Christ, and I believe in the prophecy that He is to come, not in any one single form but in the whole people.” In another early proclamation, Browne noted that ‘His (Christ’s) coming is not in the flesh of any one being, but reincarnated in the souls of all those who wish to establish a co-operative government through such legislation as this proposes, to take the place of the cut-throat competitive system that keeps alive the crucifixion.”

As Browne later reflected, even if Christ did not appear at the time of the March, he might still have his presence felt much in the same way as occurred in the Sermon on the Mount. So he said “…that there was incarnated in Mr. Coxey and myself so much of that spirit that if the people cooperate with us, Christ’s “Second Coming,” was at hand ___ at least the John the Baptist of it.” Browne therefore painted a picture of Christ on one of the banners accompanying the March, a likeness some felt resembled the painter himself (see Figure 9). Browne’s obsession with extending life beyond the temporal, with his constant allusions to reincarnation, even took its own commercial turn. Believing the body renewed itself every seven years, he advertised his own “quack” potion known as

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Carl’s California Cure” to speed up the renewal process and “prolong life indefinitely.”

Browne combined reasoned political critique with quackery; religious piety with shameless egotism; practical charisma with utopian preposterousness. Browne may be viewed an almost Mark Twain like character; a figure who combined the qualities of the huckster and the visionary, the salesman and the prophet. His blending of the serious and the cartoonish seemed to almost make sense to those populist sympathizers who believed conventional politics could not express nor address the range of problems facing America’s working class.\(^\text{202}\)

Indeed Browne’s emphasis on millennial imagery that permeated the March comported with the Populist’s own religiosity. Political movements, whatever their stripe, typically allude to religion in order to broaden their appeal and justify their cause. Yet to an extraordinary degree the Populists often drew energy from the religious fervor of Protestant evangelicalism. For example, from the early days of the producer movement, Farmers Alliance spokesmen in their references to economic injustice frequently invoked Biblical passages that spoke to the community of man and the dignity of the poor. These evangelical references became an ingrained part of the Populist lexicon with its demands for economic justice for all. As an analysis of the rhetoric of the period suggests, “Populists understood what they were about in a religiously permeated language.” Apparently the failure of the established churches to effectively reach the Populist psyche

\(^{202}\) Osman C. Hooper, “The Coxey Movement in Ohio,” *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* IX, no. 1 (July 1900): 160; Browne, *When Coxey’s Army Marched* (sic), 6; While as is described in Chapter Five, the March received a warm welcome in the Pittsburgh area, according to an article “A Triumphant Entry Proclaimed” *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette*, 4 April 1894, “His [Browne’s] banners met with little favor….Indeed it was the weakest feature in the whole movement that it attempted to depict several ideas and the likeness of Jesus Christ in the most incongruous and rudest of allegories.”
resulted in a more evangelical religion being imported into the very halls where the Farmers Alliances met. The Alliance meeting places became in effect surrogate churches. Late nineteenth century populism in this sense took on the attributes of a religio-political movement, and Coxey’s March clearly captured this same religious spirit in both symbol and substance. The community of humble displaced producers in a spectacle known as “The Commonweal of Christ,” trudging towards their nation’s capital intentionally projected an aura and attitude of Christian humility.203

Coxey and Browne were less humble, however, in emphatically proclaiming the March to be the literal Second Coming of Christ. Browne’s idiosyncratic interpretation of theosophy firmly held that a person’s body after death conveys itself into one reservoir and then its soul migrates to another. A new born infant therefore represented a union of many other souls that float freely within the waters of an eternal reservoir. In Browne’s words, “Every person has a bit of the reincarnated soul of Christ.” Browne was explicit about his own millennial persona, and that of his new found soul mate, Jacob Coxey. “I believe that a part of the soul of Christ happened to come into my being by reincarnation. I believe also that another part of Christ’s soul is in Brother Coxey by the same process, and that is what has brought us together, closer than two brothers.” According to Browne, Coxey became the cerebrum and Browne the cerebellum of the reincarnated Christ. The Second Coming would be made possible

203 Rhys H. Williams and Susan M. Alexander, “Religious Rhetoric in American Populism: Civil Religion as Movement Ideology,” Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 33, no.1 (March, 1994): 1-15, includes an analysis of the religious language found in the writing and orations of “a variety of populist ideologists in the late nineteenth century,” finding it more than incidental, but fundamental to defining populism; Postel, The Populist Vision, 244-245; McMath, American Populism, 52-53. Perhaps the most graphic example cited as the epitome of the fusion of the Populist cause with religious imagery is the now infamous William Jennings Bryan “Cross of Gold” speech (1896 Democratic Convention) where the Democratic-Populist candidate invoked dramatic religious imagery throughout his speech.
because, Browne affirmed, the “remainder of the soul of Christ has been fully reincarnated,” in the thousands of people who were supporting Coxey’s March.\textsuperscript{204}

Browne’s religious views resulted from his conversion two years before to a growing new religion known as Theosophy. He began his religious odyssey in California after the death of his wife left him in deep mourning and seeking to reunite with her. Browne thus took to believing in reincarnation. In his nightly speeches Browne would unabashedly suggested he was in part the reincarnated Greek orator Callisthenes, as well as part Christ (Browne incorrectly cited Callisthenes, the historian. It appears likely Browne meant to compare himself with Demosthenes the famous speaker). Browne subsequently would convert Coxey to his peculiar theosophic interpretation of reincarnation. Thus Coxey, previously an orthodox Episcopalian, shed his conventional religious views and in complete conformance with Browne’s theosophic interpretation claimed to possess part of Andrew Jackson’s soul. After Coxey returned to Massillon from Chicago following the Bimetallic Convention, he spoke openly of his new beliefs. His sudden and apparently complete conversion quickly became the fast subject of gossip among his neighbors, raising doubts among those who had known him to have more conventional religious views.\textsuperscript{205}


While Browne’s peculiar interpretation of theosophic doctrine might have been on the fringe of this religion, Theosophy itself was not necessarily a marginal religious cult. Indeed, when Browne and Coxey first met in Chicago in 1893, Theosophy had become the center attraction at the Chicago Exposition’s World Religious Parliament. On successive nights Annie Besant, who made her reputation fighting for the “laboring classes” in England, and now served as the religion’s star attraction, drew over 3,000 people to hear her presentation. This heavily Asian influenced religion had attracted a burgeoning and sophisticated group of young professional followers. While no evidence exists that Browne, by then engaged in his own Lake Front activism and speechmaking, attended Besant’s lectures, he undoubtedly knew of her prominence in Theosophic circles. In her talks, Besant stressed the tolerant aspects of theosophy, so “that members of various beliefs will never again hate each other so much as they have in the past…” This emphasis on tolerance seemed at odds with Browne’s earlier anti-Asian campaign. Yet it certainly conformed to the way he and Coxey would embrace marchers of diverse religious and racial backgrounds.206

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206 “All Kinds of Theosophy,” *The Washington Post*, 10 September 1893, 10; “Mrs. Besant to Discuss Theosophy,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 September 1893, 9; Michael Barkun, “Coxey’s Army as a Millenial Movement,” *Religion* (October 1988): 18, no. 4: 377. See also Joselyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: The State University of New York, 1994), 227-228; 325-329; 277-307; Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 110; Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 58-60. “All Kinds of Theosophy,” *The Washington Post*, 10 September 1893. While it enjoyed a sudden notoriety in Chicago that summer, as a religion, Theosophy had long roots dating back at least to a self taught German shoemaker named Jakob Boehme. In the early seventeenth century he conceived his world view that the human soul contained within it the divine and that it was possible to gain mystical union with the supernatural. His writings lay at the foundation of the founding of the London Theosophical Society (1783) and, a century later, the founding in the U.S. of The Theosophical Society of New York (1875) in the Irving Place parlor of Russian émigré Helena Blavatsky. Blavatsky herself acknowledged, “Scarceley the most optimistic among the society’s organizers dreamt of such success as has rewarded their labors.” *The Washington Post* noted flourishing theosophy chapters throughout Europe and Asia, as well as 75 in the United States. Though Blavatsky died two years prior to this world religious gathering in Chicago, the Theosophical Society boasted branches throughout the world. This growth coupled with the religion’s Asian and transcendental flavor may be one reason organizers of the “Parliament” provided them two full days of exposure at the Exposition.
The tenets of Theosophy derived from an amalgam of often mystical beliefs found in eastern religions. Indeed, one of the religion’s founders, Helena Blavatsky, spent considerable time in Tibet and had an affinity for Buddhist teachings. Theosophy was not laden with a complicated catechism or liturgy. Rather, it affirmed three basic principles that included the universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color; the study of Aryan and Eastern literatures, religions, philosophies and sciences; and the investigation of the unexplained laws of nature and the psychic powers of man. Besant referred to the “seven fold” nature of man, with emphasis upon the seventh state where man is joined to the “eternal spark.” Browne extended this transcendental aspect of Theosophy with his own particular reincarnation theory. He was hardly limited to “Callisthenes” in deciding the range of possible reincarnated souls he might possess. He also spoke of parts of other great historical figures, including Christ himself, actually being present in part in his own soul. While more conventional Theosophists believed in reincarnation, they believed in it as the soul returning intact from heaven to earth and then trying to perfect itself through successive lives. Yet, in explaining his views to Robert Skinner of the Massillon Independent, Browne noted, “As all the chemical elements of a human being, as science proves, go back into their various reservoirs of nature at the death of a person, and thus are used over and over again in the birth of other persons, why not the soul matter be used over again.” Browne thus
convinced himself, and Coxey, that the March represented a true second coming, and that their ascent up the Capitol steps would mark the beginning of the new Millennium.\textsuperscript{207}

Thus though Coxey’s conversion might seem unconventional to his neighbors in Massillon, in the late nineteenth century the millenarian impulse attracted some of the nation’s most influential thinkers. Indeed so-called “Swedenborgianism,” another mystical religious sect, also borrowed freely from Asian antecedents. It attracted a highly respectable following, proving influential on such notable thinkers as William James and his cohorts in the Metaphysical Club. Swedenborgianism relied heavily on communication with the supernatural and the approximation of mental states that appealed to James appreciation for the extrasensory. This premonition that man’s terrestrial body might incorporate a part of the kingdom of heaven permeated nineteenth century millennialism.\textsuperscript{208}

Browne’s nightly lectures during the March were thus suffused with religious references both familiar and strange, including Browne’s favorite Biblical passage. He would regularly cite Revelations (13:1) comparing the beast with seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns, to the prevailing trusts. He also alluded to a favorite Populist monetary critique, Mrs. S.E.V. Emery’s \textit{Seven Financial Conspiracies which have Enslaved the American People}. With his own hand painted banners flying above his head with inscriptions such as, “The Kingdom of Heaven (on Earth) is at Hand,” Browne regaled his typically sympathetic audiences with descriptions of the “seven conspiracies against


\textsuperscript{208} Louis Menand, \textit{The Metaphysical Club} (New York: Farar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), 82-92;
the money and the people.” The sermon decried the “seven heads” of the biblical beast or seven great monopolies including “the Standard Oil Company, the railroads, the iron producers, the newspapers, the national banks, and the speculators in grain and the gold mining concerns.” Browne invoked eloquent ancient allusions noting for example that “Like Cyrus of old, we are fast tunneling under the boodler’s Euphrates and will be soon able to march under the walls of the second Babylon and its mysteries too. The infernal blood sucking bank system will be overthrown, for the handwriting is on the wall.”

Though Coxey spent his time each night describing the intricacies of his monetary philosophy and the need for Good Roads, Browne’s religious stem winders tinged with religio-populist diatribes, conveyed a sense of the coming day of millennial reckoning when God’s Kingdom on Earth would be realized. He fixed that day as May 1 when Coxey’s Commonweal would arrive on the Capitol steps.209

This recurring theme of millennial optimism permeated preparations for the March. Coxey and Browne deliberately chose Easter Sunday, the day Christians celebrate as a day of hope and resurrection, as the day they would depart. One of the bulletins they circulated optimistically invited all those who possessed a similar sense of the impending second coming. “The time of the fulfillment of prophecy is near at hand,” they proclaimed. As they busily prepared for the March’s departure, Coxey and Browne continued to find encouragement in the steady stream of supportive letters, small contributions, and volunteering of supplies. At their Massillon headquarters they also received constant reports of recruits making their way to eastern Ohio where three rail

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lines converged. On March 10, as part of a dress rehearsal for the ceremonial departure, they assembled five hundred “stand-in’s” at the Massillon city square. They used this occasion to inspire others to join their millennial odyssey. “All those who go in the procession to Washington,” according to Browne, “will be the humble instruments through which the second Babylon—the Money Power of Usury—is to fall and the Second Coming of Christ is now here.”

Buoyed by their religious optimism, and a sense of the energy of discontent still extant in the populist moment, Coxey and Browne believed welcoming communities would come forward with food, medicine, and clothing. Thus though the preparation for the March reflected an awareness of the practical challenges the marchers would face, it also suggested an almost blind faith in the inevitability of its success. Browne, in particular, seemed more interested in how the March represented itself than whether it was adequately supplied. Browne’s devotion to elaborate artwork and decoration, and his religious pronouncements seemed to take precedence over the more practical aspects of securing needed supplies. For example, Browne spent considerable time designing and painting the colorful Panorama Wagon. The rickety old farm wagon had a high platform and was draped with a huge red wheel. It was supplied with loads of special Good Roads petition paper which sympathizers along the March route could sign in support of Coxey’s cause. Browne employed his artistic skills, such as they were, to paint the banners with inscriptions, “The Kingdom of Heaven is at Hand,” “God is Not the God of the Dead, but of the Living,” “The Farmer Leads for he Feeds,” “Workingmen Want

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Work Not Charity,” and “Equal Rights to All Special Privileges to None.” These and other banners with favorite religious and Populist themes accompanied the March conveying these messages to thousands of onlookers all along the route.  

Browne used his artistic skills to retouch his intricate panorama depicting the nation’s financial system by painting a stunning mural called the “Commune.” This mural seemed to resemble crude versions of the meticulously detailed triptychs of the fifteenth century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. This eye straining montage of cartoon like images of religious and political figures was spiced with cryptic phrases scribbled beneath each scene. At one end a skull and crossbones image is labeled with the phrase “Gold Basis Money.” Beneath the phrase “Causes the Many to Suffer” is an almost childish scene of nude figures reaching helplessly to the heavens. This image was juxtaposed against a smiling caricature of Uncle Sam gleefully doling out ‘Legal Tender” (i.e. Greenbacks) to a group of grateful farmers and workers, and holding a sign saying “As you create value by great public improvements.”

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212 Depictions of Browne’s many murals and drawings that adorned the wagons and banners of the Commonwealers can be found in the Papers of Ray Stannard Baker at the Library of Congress. Browne’s practical and political artistry is explained in the artistic context Sarah Burns describes in, Inventing the Modern Artist (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986),19-46 Burns notes the number of artist clubs and their social networking grew exponentially in the late nineteenth century: “…by the 1890’s the competent, energetic, well-connected painter-teacher-club members very often took center stage as representative of the typical modern American artist, fully integrated with the social body.” According to Burns the Chicago Exposition itself became the “grandest example of late nineteenth century corporate activity uniting artists, architects, businessmen and civic leaders.”She quotes George Parsons Lathrop, editor of the Atlantic Monthly as declaring “a fruitful alliance between art and business was underway, betokening art’s progress toward complete social and economic integration.” Browne stood apart from the emerging genre of professional painters who became increasingly integrated with commercial society. One prominent observer proclaimed that “the late nineteenth century artistic world was moving toward complete social and economic integration. Browne could hardly be considered as a part of the growing network of national artists who “professionalized” their trade during the Gilded Age, and shed the mantle of the iconoclastic artist, to join clubs and professional societies. Browne itinerancy as an artist defied artist Benjamin Lander’s description of the new Gilded Age artist who “no longer expects to paint and picturesquely starve.”
Anticipation

The millenarian spirit that suffused preparations for the March also translated into other more practical aspects of the preparations. The practical necessity of needing money and supplies demanded Coxey and Browne maintain a sense of optimism, and their millennial spirit obliged. In over two thousand dollars worth of mailings to various sympathizers along the route, Browne constantly beseeched followers to recognize the sacrifices “Brother Coxey” made to sustain this enterprise and to contribute whatever they could. “Let every farmer and townsmen along our line of march, when they come to our meeting, bring with them something they can spare—bread, butter, bacon, ham, fruit, grain and hay for horses; etc. to put in our commissary wagons and they will not regret it.”

The assigned head of the commissary, Solon C. Thayer, who had lost on the Populist ticket in a race for Ohio Secretary of State the year before, suggested how supplies might reach the March. “People living west and elsewhere off our line of march can send to any railroad station freight, prepaid, near our line of march, or before we start from Massillon, about everything they choose.” Thayer sensed the populist network would come out in support of Coxey. He joyously observed, “What a sublime spectacle it will be if a band of brothers who cannot go, sending to another band of brothers who can go, to enter upon a siege that will bring benefit to all.” Coxey readily acknowledged that the Marchers could be expected to live off the good will of those sympathetic to their cause. He felt confident this network of fellow Greenbackers, Populists, labor

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sympathizers, and other reformers, would supply the Commonweal throughout its odyssey. Coxey had circulated a “cut out” petition in publications such as the Twentieth Century Farmer published in places as far away from Massillon as Los Angeles. The headline implored those so inclined to “Circulate this Petition at Once,” urging readers to cut it out of the magazine and circulate for signatures.²¹⁴

Though Browne assured all that this Second Coming would attract thousands of others in whom the soul of Christ was reincarnated, the actual size of the group that would leave Massillon became the subject of much conjecture. Coxey and Browne widely communicated their millennial vision for the March, but in reality they had no way to accurately estimate its ultimate size. Their predictions vacillated from initially optimistic projections to having to lower expectations as the number of days to their actual departure dwindled. Estimates swirled in the press that as many as three million men might join industrial armies nationwide. At one point during an interview, Coxey suggested that 500,000 men would march on the capital, though he assumed many would come by rail. “They will not all travel over the land,” he acknowledged. Others close to the March tempered such hyperbole. While one commissary loader realistically suggested only 600 would actually depart from Ohio, he quickly added that by the time they reached Washington, 50,000 more would have joined their ranks. Coxey’s own estimates changed rapidly in the weeks leading to departure. On the one hand he had

²¹⁴ Solon C. Thayer ran for Ohio Secretary of State on the Populist ticket in 1892 finishing fourth in a field of four; see William Alexander, Aubrey and Clarence Taylor, Ohio Statesman and Annals of Progress Vol.1 (Columbus OH: Press at the Westphalia Co. State Printers, 1899), 113; Thayer apparently continued his political activism and was cited in “Newsman,” Massillon Independent, 25 October 1895, as a prominent Populist, and later listed as an elector for the Socialist ticket in the 1912 Presidential election, see “Election Proclamation,” Lebanon Daily News, 25 October 1912; See Twentieth Century Farmer, 1, no. 2 (April, 1894): 3 in Coxey Papers in Massillon Museum, Massillon, OH.
reason for optimism. Letters continued to pour into the Commonweal’s headquarters and railroad men across the country reported their trains filled with men that said they were going toward Massillon. On Sunday March 11, two weeks before its departure, Coxey said the Commonweal would leave with about 5,000. But by Wednesday he had changed saying his desire was rather to leave with only a small body of men but increase in size along the way.215

Spiritually, Coxey and Browne exuded optimism that the March would attract thousands with its millenarian vision of a better future. Pragmatically, Coxey and Browne faced a practical challenge in accurately estimating the strength of this movement. They depended on evaluating the verity of commitments made in a steady volume of letters from individuals they had never met. The sheer volume of correspondence from those sympathetic to the March or those wishing to join it caused them to hire a secretary. Hundreds of letters arrived each week and it was difficult to gauge their authenticity and their sincerity. For example, on March 7, a letter from J.B. Aki of Washington, Pennsylvania noted simply, “I will meet you at Pittsburgh and will have what provisions I can secure at Finleyville when you arrive.” Another from Job Sealing from Belmont, New York on March 10 said “I am confident I can raise 100 farmers headed by a brass band to join you at Williamsport, PA, or nearest point.” On March 12, C.H. Carroll wrote

215 In an interview published March 18 Coxey made the prediction of 500,000 in Washington D.C. see “Half a Million Men,” The Washington Post, 18 March 1894; Yet at the same time others close to the March disputed these claims. An unidentified commissary loader suggested 50,000 recruits in “Coxey’s Conceit,” The Logansport Daily Journal, 13 March 1894; In an article “Crankery is Contagious” Chicago Daily News, 14 March 1894 the estimate of three million recruits appears. Coxey’s conflicting estimates issued only days apart appear in “Coxey Predicts a Large Army,” The Chicago Daily Tribune, 12 March 1894; and “Rumors Denied,” The Janesville Gazette (WI), 14 March 1894. An account of witness to new recruits by the rail men appears in “On Their Way to Join Coxey,” The Alton Daily Telegraph (IL), 15 March 1894. Carlos Schwantes refers to the hiring of a secretary in his Coxey’s Army, 41.
from Ludlow, Kentucky “I am organizing a company to meet you on the day appointed to depart for Washington. Send me badges and literature. I have at this writing forty-seven members enrolled.”

Most of the hundreds of encouraging letters received each day were equally short and to the point. Harry Naughton from Homestead Pennsylvania promised 100 men, while Messrs. Kinbell and Gough from Millville New Jersey said they would meet Coxey with 1500 men at Hagerstown Maryland. Charles Bonsell of Salem Ohio said he was busy securing barns for the Commonweal to sleep in on its way to Pittsburgh. J.A. Conrad of Poplar Bluffs Missouri wrote on behalf of a thousand of the unemployed said they would all pay their own way to Massillon. D.S. Armstrong of Terre Haute wrote to say he would bring a large group of unemployed brakeman and firemen from the railroad. Rufus Henry of Stout Ohio said his army of two hundred and seventeen would join Coxey at Pittsburgh. John Stoof of New Castle Pennsylvania said he intended to join the Commonweal with a force of several hundred. On and on, the letters arrived each day fueling the momentum and growing energy anticipating the March’s departure. Based on the flood of mail, the reports of other industrial armies forming to the west, and the not insubstantial contributions they received, Coxey and Browne reasonably thought the Commonweal could eventually reach 100,000 or more by the time they arrived in Washington.

In the days leading up to departure, Coxey typically walked into Massillon with a canvas sack filled with such letters that seemed to substantiate his most optimistic

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claims. Moreover, many of the letters came with monetary contributions or promissory notes. Though Coxey carefully kept such contributions a secret, some were reported to be as much as a thousand dollars. On the day before the March departed, Coxey exuberantly announced, “We have this morning received in cash, checks and promises over $1,400, and assurances that any financial aid we may require will be forthcoming.” He showed the Chicago Record’s Baker a letter containing a check for five thousand dollars, though he acknowledged some of the checks from apparently prominent people in New York and Chicago turned out to be hoaxes.218

While some of the bona fide contributions were for large amounts, other envelopes contained only a dollar. Some simply promised that volunteers would stage benefits for the March, including baseball games or concerts in order to raise cash. One writer offered up all the hay grown on the Kankakee Meadow. Many letters were from fellow businessmen promising both recruits and money. Indeed, Coxey had invited such contributions in his Good Roads Bulletin Number 4. In this circular he urged cash be sent as opposed to checks or drafts. Coxey’s sincerity, according to townspeople who knew him, reflected in his broad public appeals to support the March. He thus seemed truly disappointed when, for example, a particularly large check turned out to be a hoax. Coxey had a reputation as a shrewd businessman, but he could not police those who for whatever reasons wrote bogus checks.219

Coxey’s optimism about the prospects for the March was corroborated by an analysis of the letters by a reporter who presumptuously concluded that precisely 9,469 recruits were en route to Massillon. Despite this precise estimate, by Good Friday, just two days before departure, the press reported that Coxey’s assemblage consisted of only two recruits, who were apparently holed up in an abandoned freight car outside of Massillon. Increasingly, the some forty reporters who had come to the eastern Ohio town to report the story began to speculate amongst themselves that they might just have to round up some of their own recruits from a nearby circus just in order to keep their stories alive. Yet Coxey and Browne optimistically continued to create a sense of expectation that defied this reality. They continued to say as many as twenty thousand men would line up for departure on Easter Sunday. The rumors swirled around tiny Massillon as the countdown continued. Men were reported to be coming by rail and would arrive just hours before the March began. Nor did the lack of their physical presence deter the two leader’s preparations. Up until the very day of departure, promising letters and contributions continued to pour into Coxey’s Good Roads headquarters. Surrounded by a flock of young boys as he came down West Main Street Saturday morning, the very eve of the March, Coxey responded to questions about the size of the Commonweal. “Oh, they’ll be coming in to-morrow,” he said confidently over his gold rimmed spectacles, bedecked in a mud splashed Mackintosh.²²⁰

Industrial Army

While Coxey and Browne optimistically organized and presented the March as if it were the harbinger of a second coming, they simultaneously decided to present it as a dignified and organized procession of ordinary producers. The March therefore took on certain martial attributes, and the press began referring to it as an “industrial army,” rather than the leaders’ preferred *The Commonweal of Christ.* While the press used the term sneeringly, the industrial army terminology had its own lineage in utopian literature, which aligned well with the pervasive millenarianism that the March organizers sought to convey. Indeed, Browne made full use of utopian references and imagery in his artwork and musings about the purpose of the spectacle.

The industrial army designation may have roots back to Robespierre’s militarization of armament factories in the French Revolution. At least it can be traced to the French socialist philosopher Charles Fourier in the earlier part of the century. Fourier in envisioning his own utopian society, suggested the need for “industrial armies,” or phalanxes of peaceful workers dedicated to community purposes. Unlike the destructive armies of the past, these armies of the future would be devoted to construction of great public works. As Fourier himself said, “It is to the lack of industrial armies that civilization is unable to produce anything great and fails in all such undertakings of any extent.”

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221 In Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution: Arms and Enlightenment in France 1763-1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 265, Alder suggests that even during the French Revolution Robespierre, his Republican Army desperate for weapons, organized what amounted to industrial armies for the purpose of arming their beleaguered troops: “This cadre of military engineers directed both the armies in the field and the production of war materials.” Alder describes the latter as a “a whole bureaucracy of savant-technicians” engaged in a “kind of Manhatten project. For a discussion of Fourier see Keith Thompson, *The Political Ideas of the Utopian Socialists* (London: Fran Cass and
Indeed even those close to the March such as novelist Stanley Waterloo, who wrote the introduction to Henry Vincent’s chronicle of the *Commonweal*, referred to the men collectively as an “industrial army.” Vincent too could not avoid using the increasingly popular term. In late nineteenth century America, the distinctive reference to “industrial armies” tied the March directly to Edward Bellamy’s 1887 best selling fiction *Looking Backward*. In this utopian novel, the futuristic Dr. Leete introduces time traveler Julian West to the perfect industrial state where poverty no longer exists and workers amass in “industrial armies” in service to their country. Dr. Leete informs protagonist West that “The army of industry is an army not alone by virtue of its perfect organization but by reason also of the ardor of self-devotion which animates its members.” Bellamy’s optimistic utopian vision contrasted with other contemporary futuristic visions, such as Donnelly’s *Caesar’s Column*, that portrayed a more violent and apocalyptic future, where class warfare destroyed civilization and the ever present impersonal machine muted humanity’s sensibilities. ²²²

In this heyday of utopian literature, Bellamy’s vision of cooperation captured the nation’s attention as no other. Just as Browne would entwine his hopeful theosophic interpretation with a millennial vision, so Bellamy injected religion into his hopeful view of the future. Bellamy challenged the pervasive selfishness of the new corporate

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²²² Vincent, *Story of the Commonweal*, 12; Edward Bellamy, *Looking Backward 2000-1887*, (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888) 76; Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*, 38-52; Steven Trimble and Donald E. Winters, “Warnings from the Past,” *Minnesota History*, 49, no. 3 (Fall, 1984): 112; These authors discuss how an alternative dystopian view countered the notion of inevitable technological ascent toward a modern utopia, by projecting their own pessimistic vision of how the struggle between man and machine would end. *Caesar’s Column* concludes with the image of a mass grave that survives in a burning New York City. In this dramatic climax to the Donnelly’s best-selling *Caesar’s Column*, the ordinary citizens of the twentieth century find themselves captive to exploitive corporate oligarchs who control everything and have created a dysfunctional society marked by “its poverty, its misery, its sin, its injustice, its scramble for gold.
economy and offered an alternative where selflessness and cooperation became the norm. Bellamy’s highly popular utopian vision spawned Nationalist Clubs across the country to promote his utopian vision of a unified nation that addressed every man’s needs. By February 1891, 165 such clubs promoted Bellamy’s Nationalism across America.  

Though not formally a “Nationalist,” Browne nonetheless seemed drawn to Bellamy’s communitarian ethos. In Bellamy’s utopia, public trusts replaced private monopolies, state owned warehouses replaced merchant houses, and college education became free for all citizens. In *Bulletin Number 3*, Browne referred directly to the utopian author and two of Browne’s murals were meant to capture Bellamy’s harmonious industrial future. Browne advertised each of these copyrighted drawings for twenty five cents which he planned to sell as a way to ostensibly raise money for the March. Browne entitled his cartoons *The Prayer* and *The Prayer Answered* (see Figures 4 and 5), conflating his own millennialism with Bellamy’s utopian vision. The intricate cartoons were also replete with the common populist theme of prevailing economic injustice.

In his cartoon *The Prayer*, Browne depicts a city gleaming on a distant hill where as the caption reads, “Government furnishing money direct to the people on non-interest bearing state, county, or municipal bonds by the Coxey Plan would pave the way to General Cooperation.” The steps leading to this utopian city titled the “Waylands” are labeled with those industries that, in Coxey and Browne’s view, need to be nationalized

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(the railroads, telegraphs, and banks). The producers in the cartoon are pulling on a rope weighed down by the corrupt political bosses, as well as the Astor’s and Vanderbilt’s, and even Ohio Governor William McKinley. In Browne’s eyes these Gilded Age culprits have all fallen from grace. An elaborate scaffold emerges from a coach carrying all manner of corrupt politicians and business interests, with a dizzying array of images, from which also hang the busts of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. On the scaffold’s top platform is a king like figure with a bulbous nose, contentedly smiling and sporting a crown that reads “Gold Basis.” His buttoned gown is labeled “Rothschild’s,” and his reclining throne “Wall Street.” He is propped up from beneath by President Cleveland, who tacks up signs including one that reads “Four more years of no tariffs,” a reference to the ongoing debate in Congress over the repeal of the McKinley Tariff. 224

The companion cartoon, The Prayer Answered, suggested the attainment of the utopian vision set forth in The Prayer. The inscription over a grand archway that centers the mural reads “The Cooperative City”. Female figures stand atop this entrance into the industrial utopia that Bellamy described in Looking Backward. One woman, a Goddess of Peace, holds an American flag. Other feminine images hold banners reading “enough produced for all.” A fat banker, labeled as one “who will not work” enters the gate behind a man labeled “men who work” accompanied by a woman labeled “women will not have to work.” This amalgam of people of varying abilities now living harmoniously in a single nation is reminiscent of the classless utopia described by Dr.

224Postel, Populist Vision, 233; Open letter “To the Public,” Carl Browne, Bulletin Number 3 of the J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association of the U.S. at Massillon Public Library, Massillon OH. For copies of the two cartoons see Box 71 Reel 60 Ray Stannard Baker Papers, Library of Congress (also see Figures .
Leete, who envisioned each working according to their abilities and receiving according to their needs. Similarly, as Browne noted, “The principle on which our industrial army is organized is that a man’s natural endowment, mental and physical, determines what he can work on most profitably for the nation and most satisfactorily to himself.” This vision of cooperative society without the coercion of the powerful is best depicted in a scene beneath the arch. Here the image of Coxey is being propelled in a boat rowed by producers, with Coxey’s portrait bearing the logo “Coxey Non-Interest bearing bonds would bring this change quickly.” The scales of justice are balanced perfectly and in a statement of utopian harmony the iconic image of Coxey is accompanied by the slogan “Injury to one is the concern of all.”

Beyond Browne’s allegiance to Bellamyite imagery, the March exuded attributes that tied it to another socialist formation of the late nineteenth century. In its quasi-martial appearance the March drew from the less formal military characteristics of the French Commune. Indeed the legacy of the Parisian workers revolt in 1871 cast a long shadow over protest in late nineteenth century America. Beginning with the Great Strike of 1877, newspapers consistently referred to labor uprisings in terms of “The Commune.” Parallels were often drawn between laborers organizing in America and the potential for violence such as had occurred in Paris. Though American strikers

225 For Coxey’s views on women see “Rally Round Coxey,” Chicago Daily News, 19 March 1894; While Coxey achieved the symbolism of having a woman as his Goddess of Peace, his general views toward women seemed more in conformance with the Victorian views of the time. They also seemed out of step with his more progressive views on inclusion of people of color. Though the March occurred at the height of the “Jim Crow” era of racial terrorism, it claimed several African American recruits, including its standard bearer. But when asked if the March would include women, Coxey acknowledged though they would be hard to turn away he certainly would not encourage their participation. “We can accomplish our end without women…..” Coxey said, when interviewed in Massillon a week before the men departed. While women would later try and join the March, often disguised as men, Coxey and Browne clearly preferred to keep this an all male affair; Edward Bellamy, Looking Backward (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1888), 91.
themselves seldom mentioned the parallel, Coxey and Browne seemed content to appropriate the Commune’s nomenclature and its quasi-military connotations. Thus one available roster of individuals comprising the Commonweal of Christ reveals the men carefully arranged in respective “Chicago” and “Philadelphia” Communities, within which were separately organized communes comprised of five individuals each. As explained in Carl’s Camp Circular and in a February 8, 1894 letter in Browne’s tortured handwriting, the communes were originally designed to range in size from 30 to 105 men. The communes were in turn to be “federated” into larger communities, and then into “cantons.” Browne carefully delineated each unit to be led by a specified Commune Marshal who would report to separate Group Marshals. Yet, as precisely as Browne tried to describe the way the March would be organized, he openly invited recruits from labor unions and farmer alliances to join the March without having to reorganize themselves according to this “communal” structure.226

In developing the industrial army theme further, those who joined the March were to be designated as members of the Commonweal by wearing badges. Eight separate badges revealed different designs. Some were illustrated with greenbacks or with sheaves of wheat. Others were designed with hands clasped, or with battle axes and chains. In the initial planning, the officers, or marshals as they were to be called, were to

226 Philip M. Katz, From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4-25. Katz traces the connectivity of the American labor movement and the French Commune. Gustave Paul Clusert, the Minister of War in this French worker revolution in the spring of 1871, served as a Colonel in the Union Army during the American Civil War; Clusert represents one of several examples of cross fertilization of French revolutionary and martial culture. “Organization of ‘Army of Peace,’” Chicago Daily Tribune, 10 February 1894; The Jacob Sechler Coxey Papers at the Massillon Museum contain a roster of individuals under the banner Commonweal of Christ with J.S. Coxey listed as President, Car Browne as Chief Marshal, and aides to the Chief Marshal including Jesse A. Coxey, Coxey’s oldest son. The roster of participants is then carefully organized by Communes (A,B,C, D, etc.) housed within either the Chicago or Philadelphia Communities. In Library of Congress Papers of Ray Stannard Baker (Box 71 Reel 60) see February 8, 1894 letter by Carl Browne ‘Dear Sir and Brothers” on stationary of the Office of J.S. Coxey where he describes the organization of the March.
wear a badge on their hats bearing the number of their commune, the sign of their canton, and the name of their community. However, Browne went to great lengths to inform press reporters that officers of the March would refrain from titles usually associated with army rank. Order Number One issued on March 22 stated that because the March would be a civic demonstration, and because all marchers were equal in their citizenship, “the necessary authority should not cause any of us to feel big over our titles.”

At the outset of organizing for the March, a call went out for “100 old officers Union and Confederate to volunteer as marshals of divisions.” In this initial advertising, Coxey was careful to explicitly disinvite anarchists or criminals. He always emphasized the March’s peaceful mission seemingly in an effort to counteract the very martial organization he seemed to invite. “Every man will carry a milk white flag bearing the words ‘Peace on Earth, good will to men, but death to interest bearing bonds,’” he noted. Browne reinforced this by suggesting men leave their firearms behind and bring only their manhood. “We want patriots, not bums, the California activist affirmed.

227 “Coxey’s Army,” Boston Daily Advertiser, 19 March 1894; and “General Coxey’s Order,” The Atlanta Constitution, 23 March 1894; Hooper, “Coxey Movement in Ohio,” 162-63, quotes from the “Circular of Organization” issued by Carl Browne: “So the proposed procession will be composed of groups of men numbering five (5) in each, one of whom must be selected to act as marshal-Group Marshal-be numbered in order of the date of group formation. Groups may be federated into companies or communes, of not less than thirty men(30) no more than one hundred and five (105). Communes may be federated into regiments or communities of not less than two hundred and fifteen (215) nor more than one hundred and fifty five (1055). Communities may be federated into cantons (divisions) of two or more. All communes, cantons, and communities must select five marshals, to be numbered at first, second, and so on, the same as the Group Marshals shall be designated, thus: First Group Marshal, First Commune Marshal, First Canton Marshal, First Community Marshal. Badges of designation will be furnished by Brother Coxey bearing appropriate design made by myself (Browne) upon sending certification, or when any group or organization joins the procession.”

Beyond this quasi-military like organization, the March assumed other martial qualities, including the looming imprimatur cast by an early recruit, whom reporters deliberately designated as “The Great Unknown.” The press deliberately teased its readership by shrouding his real origin. Although he was rumored to be a former military commander, he turned out to be one Dr. Pizarro, a Chicago quack “medicine man.” Also known by the alias Louis Smith, the Unknown assumed a distinctly military aura. He rode with ease on “Onvaiser,” a magnificent Hambletonian stallion that Coxey provided. As the March proceeded, the Unknown would bark military orders. He seemed at all times careful to preserve his distinctly military bearing. Perched high on his stunning red saddle with a blue overcoat, white trousers and a yachting cap, all fitting well on his tall frame, he exuded a military bearing. According to one account the Unknown could “start and halt the column, direct them to right face, left and wheel, but cannot direct the execution of more intricate movements.” At the outset the marchers heeded the Unknown’s orders and tried, more or less, to adhere to the label of an “industrial army” by agreeing to muster in formation and practice parade movements.229

**Tramp Army**

Regardless of this pretense of military order and communal regimen, many reporters writing about the March used the term “industrial army” sarcastically. They saw

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229 Referring to “The Great Unknown” was a convenient press fiction to enhance the drama of the story of Coxey’s March. As discussed in Chapter Four, rumors swirled around his origins, though reporters, particularly those from Chicago knew him as alias Louis Smith, or in fact one Dr. Pizarro or Bazarro (both were used) who had sold medicines to Indians and tried at one point to take command of the Army; see Ray Stannard Baker, *American Chronicle* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1945), 13; W.T. Stead, “Coxeyism: A Character Sketch,” *Review of Reviews*, X (July-December, 1894): 53; “Not a Picnic,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 1894.
little if any military regimentation in a shuffling group of disheveled tramps. Despite its
martial nomenclature, and its regimented organization, at least on paper, many aspects of
the March resembled more a departing circus parade than a military procession.
Headlines during the March often referred to the “Coxey Circus.” Unwittingly playing
into this moniker, Coxey secured a four hundred foot, three pole circus tent as the
Commonweal’s sleeping quarters, and two smaller sixty foot tents for headquarters and
“office” space. Throughout the March Coxey fought the impression that the March
lacked serious purpose. In Hagerstown, Maryland, a circus manager asked if the Army
would like to make $400 dollars by consenting to join it. “This is an earnest body of men
and is not out for money making,” Coxey shot back. “Our exhibition is for the good of
the working people, not for any financial gain,” he continued, clearly disturbed by the
Circus Manager’s invitation.230

Coxey constantly reaffirmed his men were not idle tramps. Indeed he was
correct. These unemployed were not, as one Boston Globe reporter derisively called
them, “Huns and Slavs, and densely ignorant.” Nor could they be considered “tramps” in
the ordinary parlance. During the Civil War “tramping” referred simply to a long and
tiresome walk, much like the one Coxey’s men endured. While moving both by foot and
on empty rail cars, tramping became a common practice in the nineteenth century. Yet
tramps themselves assumed a societal status as lesser individuals unable to pull

230 “Down the Avenue,” The Sacramento Record Union, 2 May 1894; “Mr. Coxey’s Army Learning to Sing,”
New York Times, 20 March 1894; Preparations for singing during the March found in “Join Coxey’s Army,” Chicago
Daily News, 23 March 1894; “Ohio’s Don Quixote,” The Chicago Daily Tribune, 5 February 1894; “Coxey at His
Rubicon,” The Washington Post, 23 April 23 1894; “Peace Army Growing,” The Chicago Record, 16 March 18940 1;
“To Sing for the Army,” The Chicago Record, 21 March 1894; “Girls Meet the Army,” The Chicago Record, 19 April
1894.
themselves up to the ideal of the Horatio Alger hero. In the Social Darwinist narrative tramps became the anti-hero. The tramp was the weakest in a world that naturally selected the fittest to succeed. At Yale, at the same time as his cohort William Graham Sumner used a Darwinist rationale to defend laissez faire capitalism, the Dean of the Law School, Francis Wayland, derided the tramp. “There arises before us the spectacle of a lazy, shiftless, sauntering or swaggering, ill conditioned, irreclaimable, incorrigible, cowardly, utterly depraved savage,” Wayland lectured. To the unsympathetic observer Coxey’s unemployed could appear to fit this definition.231

Browne and Coxey repeatedly dismissed charges that their men were looking for a handout. Instead they insisted these unemployed simply yearned for a job and the opportunity to compete in this newly corporatized economic jungle. Newspaper stories characterizing the March prompted Coxey to become annoyed at the way the press typically appropriated the term “tramps.” Coxey refused to see his Commonweal in these terms, noting “We have nothing in common with the everyday tramp and we don’t want them in the Commonweal. By tramp, I mean the disorderly loafers whose ideas don’t rise above the bottom of a beer glass.” Coxey constantly reminded observers of the March that the men did not want charity, but simply a chance at a job in order that could pull themselves up by the bootstraps like “ragged Dick,” in the popular Horatio Alger success stories that praised the virtue of hard work.232

232 Robert Vlhakis, “Ragged Dick by Horatio Alger, Jr.” The English Journal, 68, no. 2 (February, 1979): 40. As described in the following, “Made Its Long March,” The Chicago Daily, 3 April 1894; “Like Gabriel’s Horn,” The Chicago Record, 3 April 1894; Vincent, Story of the Commonweal, 71-72; “Coxey Reaches Sewickley,” The Washington Post, 3 April 1894; Perhaps one strong indication of Coxey’s concern that the marchers were being characterized as tramps appears in his papers which contain a “Plea for a Proper Classification and Appropriate
So often did the term tramp associate with the March, and so cognizant were Coxey and Browne of how this charge interfered with the way the March was understood, that in their third Bulletin in February 1893 the two specifically addressed the “tramp issue.” In this circular they not only discouraged the sick from joining, but also those others of ill repute and the shiftless. The two emphasized that the March would be a test and that all who joined would face rough conditions. They would be expected “with true American grit, to grin and bear it.” Indeed, a contemporary survey seems to corroborate that Coxey succeeded in recruiting an assemblage that was far from a collection of the unskilled laborers, immigrants, or anarchists. Most, it turns out were either American or English born skilled workers representing some seventy different trades, and few represented any unions. Most of the men were married, and had some formal schooling. Their behavior, with only a few exceptions, defied the tramp stereotype. One report suggested “tramps” constituted less than half of those marching, while most were skilled tradesman who would depart the March for a job if one were offered.233

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233 Treatment of the Itinerant Vagrant,” by Ben L. Reitman, M.D. This document is not dated but likely appeared well after completion of Reitman’s medical studies in 1904. His Chicago medical practice was largely dedicated to attending to the destitute; see Box 3 Folder 10 Coxey’s Papers at the Massillon Museum in Massillon Ohio. See “Bulletin Number 3 of the J.S. Coxey Good Roads Association,” from Massillon Public Library, Coxey Collection. W.T. Stead, “Coxeyism: A Character Sketch,” Review of Reviews, Vol. X (July, 1894): 51 sites an analysis done by University of Chicago Professor Isaac a. Hourwich of General Randall’s Army that formed in Chicago: “Of 262 industrials, 181 were skilled mechanics representing 70 trades; 74 were unskilled, and 7 were tradesmen….They averaged seven years of school life; 26 had attended high schools, businesses and professional colleges, academies and universities. Of 115 questioned, only 2 were badly educated.” The term tramp dated to the Civil War and, as Kenneth L. Kusmer traces its evolution, became a popular term to describe wandering unemployed who often used America’s growing rail system to move from town to town; see also a Commonweal Roster of those marching by occupation and home in Coxey Papers Box 3, Massillon Museum; see also Kenneth L. Kusmer, Down and Out, On the Road (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 35-56; and “Tramps Are Ready,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 17 March1894; Michael S. Sweeney, ‘The Desire for the Sensational: Coxey’s Army and the Argus Eyed Demons of Hell,” Journalism History, Vol. 23, no. 3 (Autumn, 1997) 117; Russell B. Nye, “Jacob Coxey,” in A Baker’s Dozen (East Lansing MI: Michigan State University, 1956), 221; See “Commonweal of Christ,” in Carl’s Camp Courier of the Commonweal of Christ, found separately in Jacob Sechler Coxey Papers in the Massillon Museum; though not
Coxey contemporary Shirley Plumer Austen, in a highly critical account of
the Coxey movement in *The Chautauquan*, nonetheless provided detailed character
sketches of several of the marchers. Almost three quarters of those she surveyed she
determined, were skilled workmen who were simply put out of work by the Panic. For
example, John Schrum, a Populist from Iowa and an unemployed coal mine worker, left
his family to march because “starvation was staring me in the face.” Schrum seemed
drawn to Browne’s theosophy with its millenarian optimism. The established Schrum
confessed to Austen, that his religion and his experience had placed paradise off limits,
while Browne’s millennial theosophy had placed it “right here.”

Austen described an eclectic band of diverse marchers representing mostly out of
work industrialists. A.H. Blinn, described as a 30 year old married man, well dressed,
and intelligent looking, was an iron molder and a member of the National Federation of
Labor. He actually belonged to the Republican Party, seemed “disgusted” with
theosophy, and reportedly kept his distance from Coxey and Browne. Frank Ball, seemed
to Austen to be a man of some means. He had worked on Mississippi steamers, and
became attracted to Browne’s ideas when he heard him speak on the Chicago waterfront
the summer before. “I had been idle ten weeks before the Army started,” he said. Though
he voted Democratic, he believed a great political change was about to happen. “I am a

dated this listing of men in the March organized neatly and precisely into communes such as the “Chicago Community,
Group One,” or the “Connecticut and Rhode Island Community, Commune A,” likely, dates to the period following
the May Day debacle and was used to organize the camp site on First and L immediately after the march, or the later
two fifths of the force, while the remainder are mainly roving workingmen of different trades who state that they are
willing to desert at any time for good positions.”

Socialist and I want to see complete government ownership - that’s the only way of saying the people’s ownership.”

Another marcher, Edward A. Moore, like Browne, had an anti-Chinese pedigree, and, like Vincent, a history of violent Populist activism in Kansas. Moore was even identified by some as the master mind of the Coffeyville dynamite explosion that injured the family of a Pacific Express agent. Accusations that Moore as part of Vincent’s Populist group the Videttes (a term meaning sentinels, in this case against fusion) masterminded the plot were later dismissed by an investigating committee of the Kansas legislature. Now joining the March, Moore exhibited great confidence in Coxey’s peaceful approach noting “We will have the Plutocrats down on their knees before we are through with them.” Others included John Park, a paper hanger from Marion, Pennsylvania; William Donavan, a farmer from South Bend, Indiana; Joe King, a union rolling mill man from Akron, Ohio; and James Smart, a sickly looking woodworker from Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

The men’s reactions to the affair seemed as diverse as their backgrounds. Dan Thompson, a race track “swiper” professed to not knowing very much at all about Coxey’s proposals or Browne’s “religious stuff.” But he noted, “I am having a whale of a time with the outfit.” On the other hand, Charles Smith, a Pittsburgh wire drawer locked out since Christmas 1893, needed to support his wife and six children. He believed in Coxey’s ideas and that it would lead to full employment.

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235 Ibid, 449.
236 Ibid, 449-450; For description of Coffeyville incident see Footnote 160.
Though Austen generally vilified the men in her article as “devoid of character,” their speech “infected with the tramp dialogue,” and “given to strong drink,” the thousands of newspaper accounts of the March itself did little to corroborate her caricature of tramp behavior. Predictably as with any group movement, a few isolated incidents along the way seemed to invite the application of this stereotype. In Alliance Ohio, a bar room scuffle resulted in a stolen watch and charges against one of Coxey’s men. But the allegation proved untrue. In Beaver Falls Pennsylvania one of the Marchers allegedly robbed a home near the local College. But the person accused turned out not to be in the Commonweal. As the March continued, rumors swirled about small thefts and petty larceny. The suspicious Pittsburgh Police Superintendent reportedly sent undercover detectives to infiltrate and observe the March before it reached the city’s outskirts. Yet, like other wary mayors in advance of an approaching “army,” the Pittsburgh plain clothes men found none of these leads proved true. One of the detectives, apparently conducting his own crude criminology profile, concluded that only four of the men appeared to him to be crooks. A new recruit from Beaver Falls testified to the character of the marchers. “I’ve knocked around a whole lot and I’ve never run across a better class of men than these,” James Archer told a Chicago Daily reporter.\(^{238}\)

The actual demeanor and purposefulness of the men thus defied the tramp imagery some sought to assign it. By contrast, many thousands along the March route saw in this spectacle something else entirely. In farm country, families raced to the sides of the road to cheer the passing industrials. In towns

along the way, women waved bouquets of flowers from their balconies and brought baskets of food for the hungry marchers. At industrial sites, workers left their jobs to gain a glimpse of their unemployed colleagues. As Coxey’s Commonweal arrived in the Monongahela Valley and approached the Homestead steelworks they received their most tumultuous reception. With its uneven juxtaposition of martial, millenarian and utopian imagery, onlookers could identify with those aspects of the March each found most appealing. This array of tramping men presented various images that both played to certain stereotypes of the period, yet at the same time defied them, and therein seemed to lie the reasons for disdain or admiration.

**Color Line**

The spectacle also presented an image that directly challenged nineteenth century racial attitudes and stereotypes. As Coxey’s Commonweal advanced, post-reconstruction America continued its full scale retreat from implementing the equality amendments to the Constitution. Instead, Jim Crow laws and more overt forms of discrimination placed the nation on a trajectory toward the Supreme Court’s eventual 1896 affirmation of “separate but equal.” This deliberate retreat from racial equality under the guise of “accommodation” seemed inevitable from the moment President Hayes contested Presidential election resulted in the withdrawal of troops from the South as required by the Compromise of 1877. This retrenchment from the earlier commitments of Reconstruction led to a dark period throughout the South. In the period from 1891 to 1901, over 100 persons were
recorded as lynched each year, and the records were far from inclusive. In 1892, at
the peak of this lynching fury, 155 African Americans were hanged by unruly mobs
that treated the very act as a spectacle. Lynching became theater attendant with
advertising, speeches, souvenirs, and sadistic forms of audience participation. If
crowds flocked to the side of the roads to cheer the spectacle of Coxey’s March in
a way that reinforced their identity as producers, so in this same period did many
white Americans connect with the spectacle of lynching in a way that simply
reinforced their whiteness.239

The Populist Party, often unevenly, and some would suggest cynically,
presented at least the opportunity for political if not social equality. Given its
predominance in the South during this period, the pattern of Populist outreach to black
Americans seems remarkable, though it is not clear exactly what black leaders thought of
white entreaties toward them. At one level, this inviting rhetoric of political equality
coming from yet one more white dominated political source must have seemed hollow
and purely expedient. Yet in its historical context the efforts many white Populists made
to ally with their black brethren also seem quite genuine. As C. Van Woodward says in
his classic analysis of a Jim Crow south, “…the two races had surprised each other and
astonished their opponents by the harmony they achieved and the good will with which
they cooperated.” With over ninety percent of America’s black population still in
southern states, the effort to unite Black and White Farmer’s Alliances into a single

239 The “equality amendments” best describe the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution, including
the outlawing of slavery, equal citizenship, and the right to vote. H.W. Brands, The Reckless Decade (Chicago: The
in America 1890-1940, 19-30; Ronald C. White, Jr., Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel
(1877-1925, 10-21.)
entity, to coalesce within the people’s Party and to defeat the Democratic Party gained perhaps its most serious traction in Georgia. There Southern Alliance leader Tom Watson became the symbol for populist efforts to woo African American support. Watson believed that recognizing mutual self-interest could serve to unite the races. He even went so far as to save one of his ardent black supporters from a lynch mob. Yet in the south this pragmatic initiative to win majority support could not overcome the inertia of racial prejudice. “You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both,” Watson said in acknowledgement of the exigencies that pushed white populists toward black Democrats. In the Populist Party, pragmatism seemed always to triumph over principle when it came to race relations. Thus when Watson arrived in Washington as a Populist Congressman whom blacks helped elect in Georgia, he was joined by first term Senator Marion Butler of North Carolina, a Populist Senator whose fusion with white supremacist Republicans committed him to support black colonization.240

It is in keeping with the best angels of the Populist racial impulse, that Coxey’s March challenged the norm of discrimination. Moreover, it did do by design, not expedience. Browne said the March should be proud of its “cosmopolitan” hue. There was no practical reason to include blacks in the March. Only the presence and name of Coxey’s phaeton driver, “Snowball,” seemed to hint at the racial stereotyping typical of the period. “We want every nationality represented,” Browne said in a voice of Christian Commonweal tolerance, a far cry from his rhetoric during his sandlot days with Kearney.

True to his commitment, Browne recruited his friend Honore’ Jaxson, a Native American from Canada. Jaxson raised eyebrows throughout Massillon with his native Metis costume. Described in press accounts as a “half breed Chicago Indian,” who had spent time in an insane asylum, Jaxson actually fought during Canadian reformer Louis Reil’s Red River and North-West Rebellions. He was among Coxey’s favorite recruits with “his long hair, glib tongue, and buck skin half breed costume.” Jaxson told Willis Abbott of the Chicago Times about joining the March, but then quickly departed for Massillon before he could be assigned to it as a reporter. In a little reported episode during the March, Jaxson went out ahead of his fellow recruits as a self appointed advance man. Remarkably, he claimed to have made the trip from Massillon to Washington in eleven days by foot. On his arrival to the capital he said his feat proved the physical and mental superiority of the Native American.241

Further pushing the color line, as the rest of the March left Massillon it was accompanied by a seven piece brass band that possessed a remarkable accompanying singer referred to by the press as “the negro,” Professor C.B. Freeman. Promoted as “the loudest singer in the world,” he would often sing solo for hours or lead the men in a dozen or so songs that were set to the music of popular songs. In Massillon, Freeman’s spontaneous singing quickly attracted onlookers from blocks away. His voice struck one reporter as resembling the sounds of a calliope. As the preparation for the March ensued, and in keeping with prejudices of the day, some observers accused Freeman of spending

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more time singing songs than in gathering the supplies required for an almost five week journey.242

Freeman came to Massillon wearing a tattered brown derby hat, with his toes popping of his shoes, and with his banjo wrapped in dirty green billiard cloth. He brought with him another African American friend identified only as a “jew harp player,” and who indicated a willingness to shine the “General’s” (Coxey’s) boots. Freeman meanwhile reported that he had a wife and six children, but felt the calling to come and join the General. Nor, did Freeman represent the only African American, nor the only singer. The Commonweal glee club, consisted of four other African Americans. It often sang southern songs to the accompaniment of a guitar, violin, and coronet, directed by band leader J.J. Thayer.243

Coxey promoted and seemed to take pride in the diversity of the March. “The professor and his friend will furnish the African element,” he noted. However, Freeman did not figure as prominently, nor resonate with the public as much as the Commonweal’s African American flag bearer. Jasper Johnson Buchanan, a recruit from West Virginia, was described as possessing a droll face. His mascot dog, “Bunker Hill,” could usually be found tied at night to the same American flag he carried during the day. Buchanan was temporarily drummed out of the March when he decided to offer himself as a display for a dime store museum owner. Yet he proudly carried the flag heading the procession out of Massillon, and then again in the triumphant final leg down

Pennsylvania Avenue after being reunited with the March. More importantly in the context of their time, this black standard bearer and all the other African Americans Coxey recruited, not only marched by day, but they slept each night with their white counterparts. This overt and public demonstration of integration in the spring of 1894 challenged the prevailing racial mores’ of the day. 244

Word of the March’s integration and its black standard bearer spread rapidly through the grapevine of African American churches. By the time the March reached Washington, a predominantly black crowd estimated to be in the tens of thousands turned out to see the final leg of the March. Blacks anticipated the arrival of the March from the pulpit and the press, as well as by word of mouth. In contrast to established white churches that saw the March as exuding weakness, the leaders of black churches supported the March and advertised its arrival. In areas with concentrated black populations along the March route, large turnouts of African-Americans typically greeted the marchers. Baker noted in one dispatch the extent of the “negro” turnout around Frederick Maryland. He remarked that Coxey and Browne “make no distinction between them (‘the negroes’) and their white companions,” and for this reason Baker said the black turnout was always significant. “They always come and stand along the white washed fences and cheer lustily. There were a number of Negroes in the Commonweal

244 Ray Stannard Baker, unlike McMurry, Schwantes, or Vincent, refers to Jasper Johnson as Jasper Johnson Buchanan see “Army is in Trouble,” Chicago Record 27 March 1894; Vincent however, names him Jasper Johnson from Buchanan West Virginia see Henry Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal, 56.
and they all know that Coxey and Browne make no distinction between them and their white companions. This fact has made all the Negro population friends,” Brown wrote.\textsuperscript{245}

Not only did black churches tout the arrival of Coxey, but the African American \textit{Washington Bee}, published each Saturday, began trumpeting the arrival of the March. The \textit{Bee} editorially supported every phase of the March, and, in particular, decried harsh treatment of Buchanan after the arrival at the Capitol. In a harsh rebuke of the District’s white chief of police, the paper noted that he admitted to being more afraid of the “colored people than he was of Coxey’s Army.” The \textit{Bee} reported, “Finding the Negro the less offensive [than the rest of white marchers] they [the police] clubbed him.” The \textit{Bee}’s critique of police conduct at the Capitol concluded with the following rebuke: “The scene was disgraceful and the act cowardly on the part of some of those brutal and pusillanimous officers of the police force.” The entire event, the paper concluded, tested not only the endurance, but the motivation of this army. Tests it passed. As for the response of the officials in Washington, their reaction served to the \textit{Bee} writers as ample evidence of the harshness of the times.\textsuperscript{246}

\textbf{Women}

While the March challenged prevailing racial views, it assumed more conventional Victorian attitudes toward the role of women. Indeed women found a place in other Populist causes, in particular the Farmer Alliances, and for that matter in


\textsuperscript{246}“The Uncrowned King and His Subjects,” \textit{The Washington Bee}, 4 May 1894; “Coxey is Coming,” \textit{The Washington Bee}, 31 March 1894, 7 April 1894, and 21 April 1894.
industrial armies approaching from the west. However, Coxey and Browne remained steadfast in excluding women from the March. While Coxey acknowledged that it might be difficult to turn women away, he did nothing to encourage their participation in the physical march itself. He would welcome their aid and support at every stop. But with little exception, and for what they explained as largely practical reasons, Coxey and Browne simply did not want women accompanying the March. Just as in his dogged defense of the marcher’s work ethic, Coxey seemed concerned that having women in the March might lead to a similar battery of accusations of its moral laxity. Coxey noted that if the March were a part of a normal military campaign woman could be employed as nurses. Yet in emphasizing the peaceful intent of the Commonweal he thought women nurses would be a luxury. Thus while Coxey and Browne valued the role women played in support of the March, they could not bring themselves to integrate its ranks with members of the other gender. The appearance of woman and men sleeping in the same or adjacent quarters they thought would only exacerbate critic’s accusations. “We can accomplish our purposes without political parties or women,” Coxey declared. 247

Coxey’s views on women seemed not only practical but in step with the way Gilded Age men generally viewed women. For most women were viewed as subservient to men, and as “tender mothers, angels of mercy, and keepers of the morals.” Teaching, social work, and nursing seemed the limits of their capacities and appropriate given their sensibilities. As early as the Seneca Falls Convention (1848) women reformers such as Cady Stanton, Jane Hunt, and Lucretia Mott sought to address disparities in property

rights, marriage, education and employment. Yet the social trajectory for women remained fixed. Moreover, the backlash against women assuming equal social status encountered its own obstacles, particularly among male workers. In the depressed farm economy of the late nineteenth century many women who had found work on farms, now were the first casualties of the farm depression. They thus came to the cities looking for work. Some estimated at least a million women in factory work of some sort in the late nineteenth century. This heightened the antagonism of male workers already threatened by the increasing use of machines to replace them.  

While industrial workers generally resisted women’s participation in the work force and generally excluded them from union activities, the Farmer’s Alliances exhibited far more progressive attitudes towards women’s equal place in society. Women accounted for almost a fourth of the attendance at Alliance meetings and more women joined the ranks of the Farmers Alliance than they did the popular and predominantly female Women’s Christian Temperance Union. They did so in part to escape their social isolation, but also because the Alliance became a focal point for discussions around the “woman question.” These discussions among leading Populist reformers revolved less around women’s suffrage, and more on issues related to a woman’s economic status. The Alliance discussions devoted considerable time to the consequences of raising families in rural America as the price for food collapsed, liquor grew pervasive, and the challenges

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of educating children grew more daunting. Coxey cannot be said to have been immune to these concerns. Indeed in preparing for the March he reached out to many of the era’s leading women reformers. Yet he seemed to mirror the Victorian concerns of his counterparts that the mixing of sexes on a march would only fuel rumors and speculation about impropriety.249

The now widowed Browne seemed even more opportunistic in his attitude toward women, and indeed would become engaged later to Coxey’s teenage daughter. At one stop along the March route, seemingly smitten by the number of women that greeted the marchers, Browne went out of his way to praise the role women played in our history. He patronized the female crowd by speaking glowingly of the patriotism of the “average American woman.” Indeed, the aid and support role played by women auxiliaries at most stops along the March route seemed consistent with Coxey and Browne’s Victorian notions of the role women should play in their March. Typically, women were asked to gather in their communities in advance of the March and determine how best to support it with food, shelter, and medicine, much like the “women’s auxiliaries” that formed during the Civil War.250

Moreover, Coxey did make exception for female participation in the March near its conclusion by asking Annie Diggs, the famous Populist activist from Kansas, to be part of the final march to the capital. Diggs defended Coxey for protecting women from...
the travails of marching in mixed company and suggested that the men themselves were
marching to feed the mouths of their starving wives and children. As a force in her own
right in the Farmers Alliance movement, the diminutive Diggs seemed typical of other
female leaders within the populist movement. She was both educated and professional,
and actually spent more of her time in cities than on the farm. She actively promoted the
Coxey initiative with encouraging messages to the Governors of Kansas and Colorado, as
well as more broadly throughout her own populist network. She advanced Coxey for his
arrival in Washington with speeches that brought crowds to their feet. Coxey clearly
respected women such as Diggs and other activists such as Mary Jones, who helped to
organize a similar crusade in Kansas City. Jones herself led her own industrial army on
foot as far as St. Louis. Similar to Coxey, she raised money and gave speeches along the
way. For years afterward, Jones considered this experience as part of ‘Coxeyism’ the
launch point in her career as a labor activist. “Mother Jones,” as she would later
reverently be called, became a lifelong friend of Jacob Coxey, and when he
commemorated the March in 1914, he invited her full participation.  

In the one instance where Coxey did seek to involve women in the
March, namely his own daughter, he was rebuffed. Just days before the March departed
Massillon, Coxey found himself embroiled in a dispute with his first wife. While his
current wife Henrietta tended to their newly born infant son named Legal Tender, his ex-
wife, Mrs. Caroline Coxey, who still owned a second mortgage on one of Coxey’s
quarries, grew concerned. She learned that the parade plan included the presentation of a

Cordery, Mother Jones: Raising Cain and Consciousness (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), 45-
47. 

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Goddess of Peace, and that her former husband thought their seventeen year old daughter Mamie would be perfect for the part. Coxey pleaded with the first Mrs. Coxey noting that the March “will be the great event of the world,” and that by leading the procession Mamie would gain “worldwide renowned and fame.” But Carrie Coxey thought otherwise. While she had no doubt that her former husband with his “inflexible will” would make it all the way to Washington, she did not want their daughter accompanying the March. In the end Mamie was allowed to join the March as it left Massillon, and again as it entered Washington D.C. In the final presentation of the spectacle marching down Pennsylvania Avenue, she appeared as the “Goddess of Peace,” an appropriate space for a female to occupy in the Victorian era. Nor was she the only woman marching. At the rear of the March the Philadelphia contingent provided the Goddess of Liberty, “Miss Lavallette,” who wore a turban made of a small American flag (a role Browne envisioned himself playing; see Figure 10). And Coxey’s good friend and Populist sympathizer Annie Diggs also rode in her own carriage with her two daughters.252

Yet it was Mamie Coxey, dressed in red, white and blue and carrying a parasol, who drew repeated cheers as she rode down Pennsylvania Avenue. Emblematic of peace, she challenged the stereotypes of an army of industrials intent on violence. Moreover, her youthful presence which drew repeated applause, seemed to exude the very confidence Coxey and Browne had in the future. As one newspaper account

252 Vincent discusses Legal Tender’s naming in The Commonweal, 50. According to Vincent, Coxey claimed the purpose of the unusual name “is that in the years after as he grows up, people will naturally inquire ‘What is the meaning of that name?’ and questions of like import. It will ever be a pertinent reminder of the sovereign right of government to use its own full legal tender as money, and that nothing else is money.” “Coxey’s ‘Goddess of Peace,’ The Washington Post, 22 March 1894; “Join Coxey’s Army,” Chicago Daily News, 23 March 1894; “General Coxey’s Waterloo,” Boston Daily Globe, 2 May 1894.
presented the image: “A wealth of blonde hair, which the sun’s rays kissed into gold, flowed from beneath a white liberty cap, on the front of which was a single blue star and the word ‘Peace.’” Thus, despite her mother’s protestations, the March both at the beginning and the end, included Mamie representing the all important Goddess of Peace, the very emblem of its purpose.

Indeed if Coxey and Browne set out to create an event that would draw attention, they succeeded in ways they themselves could not fully grasp. As indicated in this chapter, this moving spectacle with its many disparate dimensions seemed to capture the energies of an eclectic group of reformers and their allies who, in their loose association, characterized the populist moment. In its use of religious symbolism and utopian imagery the Commonweal of Christ embodied the very evangelical heterodoxy of the populist movement. In its prominent display of racial diversity it captured the populist’s often, though not always, tolerant streak. And, in its mimetic display of unemployed men, it reflected reality back to a core producer constituency that came to the roadsides to cheer on this moving spectacle of supplication. Here seemed the moving embodiment of the plight of the common laborer, whose industrial orders often sought common ground with the predominant Farmer’s Alliances in their struggle against the economic concentration of the monopolists.²⁵³

Yet, as we shall now see, the March also multiplied its appeal by no design of its own. A rapidly changing newspaper landscape provided it a national voice that amplified

²⁵³ Postel, 17-22 does an exceptional job of describing the inherent eclecticism of populism and its various proponents. For example, though often thought of as the anti-populist for his role in confronting Populist icon Bryan during the Scope’s trial, Postel notes “That it was Darrow, not Bryan, who had been a stump speaker for the People’s Party provides a warning against the facile identification of Populism with a traditional Christianity.
the spectacular at the expense of substance. Perhaps ultimately the most famous of reporters that covered the March, the Chicago Record’s Baker noted that Coxey’s Army was more “concretely sensational” than other previous populist expressions. Whether this judgment is accurate, the Coxey spectacle indeed challenged the growing tactical machinations of those Populist political operatives. Coxey’s March thus, in its own brief moment, seemed to restore the restless spirit that characterized the small “p” populist moment of the previous two decades. As Baker noted, Coxey’s Army in all of its incongruent appearances and remarkable diversity at its core represented “a flaming example of unrest.”

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254 “General Coxey’s Waterloo,” Boston Dailey Globe, 2 May 1894; “Climax of Folly,” The Washington Post, 2 May 1894; McMurry, Coxey’s Army, 115; Baker, American Chronicle, 184.
CHAPTER 4: THE DEMONS

“I can go nowhere now but that I am followed by forty argus-eyed demons of hell, eager to catch any sentence that will condemn us.”

Carl Browne

Up until Saturday March 24, the very eve of the planned departure, the idea of the March remained just that, an idea without much reality. *The Chicago Record’s* Baker wrote “there was no army, at least no privates.” Charles Seymour of the *Chicago Herald* asked “What are we going to do if this army blows up and doesn’t start?” Twenty four hours before the scheduled departure, Coxey and Browne could claim only a few recruits. Doctor Cyclone Kirkland appeared. The astrologer, who claimed to be able to predict hurricanes, would stay with the March until recruited by a dime museum in Pittsburgh. The professed world’s loudest singer Charles Freeman also arrived, as did “the Unknown.” But those thousands of industrials rumored to be on their way were nowhere in sight.

Since Browne arrived in Massillon on October 9, 1893, he and Coxey prepared for the departure in relative obscurity. Yet by March the following year, the stories about their preparations written by local *Massillon Evening Independent* reporter Robert

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Skinner began to arouse interest beyond the small Ohio town. Larger dailies received Skinner’s stories over the telephone lines of a revitalized Associated Press. Skinner’s articles began to create a sense of anticipation of a growing movement. For example, after visiting Pittsburgh, Skinner reported that Homestead strike organizer Elmer Bales was generating interest in Coxey’s cause among his fellow steelworkers. Bales professed absolute belief in the wisdom of Coxey’s Good Roads plan with its promise to provide work to unemployed steelworkers still idled from the Homestead strike two years before.

By the time the marchers assembled for their Easter departure Skinner could proudly remark on the very phenomenon he helped create:

> Today it arrests the attention of the whole United States. From Massillon on Sunday night [March 25], seventeen operators sent 39,000 words of press matter contributed by dozens of special writers from all of the best papers in the country. Rarely except at national political conventions have so many newspaper men from the really leading papers assembled to cover a single event.

As these stories of the March’s preparations were telegraphed from Massillon and the sense of the anticipation grew, newspaper editors in search of colorful human interest stories began to see in Skinner’s accounts and his presentation of the Coxey spectacle, the potential for a larger story. They soon began to dispatch their own reporters to Massillon.257

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257 “The Cohort Gathering,” The Evening Independent (Massillon OH), 16 March 1894; “Coxey’s Army,” St. Paul Daily News 27 January 1894; Coxey issued the optimistic estimate of 100,000 in January see “Don’t Want Much,” The Hamilton Daily Democrat, 24 January 1894; as late as March 3 Coxey held to this prediction, “Coxey’s Great Army,” The Davenport Leader, 4 March 1894; W.T. Stead, “Coxeyism: A Character Sketch,” Review of Reviews (July, 1894) X: 48, This piece was written by W.T. Stead, a British journalist who came to America in October 1893 to cover the effects of the Panic and remained in the U.S. until March 1894. Stead is particularly remembered not simply for his character sketch of Coxey, but his piece “If Christ Came to Chicago,” in which he excoriated the lack of relief efforts existent for the unemployed and destitute. Stead was also recognized as the emblematic “last man on the Titanic.” While biographer Grace Eckley notes a multiplying number of conflicting accounts about Stead on the sinking ship, including that he was found in the reading room playing cards, most likely she concludes, he was on deck at the time the iceberg struck and then retired to his room, only to reemerge and help load the last survivors into life boats.
In their planning, it is likely neither Coxey nor Browne imagined the March was about to receive such intense daily front page newspaper coverage and thus reach so many millions of Americans. From Easter Sunday when the March left Massillon until May Day, when it arrived on the Capitol steps, thousands of articles appeared on the pages of American newspapers devoted to Coxey’s March as well as those of the other industrial armies moving eastward. According to the analysis of one journalistic historian, no other single event since the Civil War, with the possible exception of the election of 1876, garnered as much news coverage. From the time the March left Massillon, March 25 until the accounts of its final May Day parade to the Capitol, in six of the nation’s largest metropolitan newspapers, over 1,000 separate articles were devoted to Coxey’s March alone, and approximately one third of those were on the front page. Thousands of similar stories on the Coxey phenomenon ran in smaller dailies across the country. By contrast, President Cleveland’s name appeared in only 263 articles in these same six large newspapers during this same time period, and of those articles a dozen actually focused on Coxey more than the President.  

Biographer Frederic Whyte corroborates that he was apparently on deck near the end betraying a remarkable composure, and fittingly, given his career traversing the ocean to cover stories in America, is buried half way in between. See Grace Eckley, *Maiden Tribute* (Philadelphia: XLibris Corporation, 2007), 380-381; Frederic Whyte, *The Life of W.T. Stead*, Vol. II (New York: Garland Publishing, 1971), 314-315; “It was a Joyous Occasion,” *The Evening Independent* (Massillon OH), 19 January 1894; “Moving from Massillon,” *The Evening Independent* (Massillon OH), 26 March 1894; Sweeney, “Desire for the Sensational,” 114; The search engine Pro Quest Historical Newspapers as of 2010 reveals 1,032 separate articles between the time Coxey departed Massillon (March 25) until he reached the Capitol steps (stories from May 2 that reported the final episode are included in this count). The newspapers included are the *Boston Daily Globe*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *The Atlanta Constitution*, and *The Washington Post*. A separate search for the year 1894 in the search engine Newspaper Archive results in 7,989 articles where the term Coxey is mentioned during the entire year 1894, 7,595 articles where the term “industrial army” is mentioned, and 1,054 articles where Carl Browne is mentioned.
Indeed in the very first week of the March, Coxey went from being an obscure Midwestern businessman to a national figure. As he left the March by train to auction some of his horses in Chicago in order to raise money, Coxey must have recognized how the press portrayal of the March had created his celebrity. Almost instantaneously he had become a recognized figure. As crowds followed him down the same Chicago streets where he and Browne began forming their ideas in virtual anonymity the previous year, loud cheers greeted him. Soon people gathered and began to chant for him to speak. Throughout the day as Coxey moved about town he greeted the admiring and the curious pressing him to comment on his plans. Even when he went to the auditorium for a luncheon, onlookers anxiously questioned him about the March and his plan for Good Roads. Coxey seemed to embrace his newfound acclaim and decided to visit the newspaper club that afternoon. Later, when he decided to toast a few with the press gang, it caused him to miss the evening train back to Ohio. Nonetheless, Coxey seemed to revel in the attention and stayed at the club until well past midnight.  

This chapter will focus on how the enormously rich and detailed press coverage shaped the March’s image in its own time and its eventual legacy. On the one hand, the press popularized the March to an extent unimaginable by either Coxey or Browne. By extending the March’s reach to millions of readers, the press allowed millions to connect with the March even if they were removed by geography or political sympathy. Though Coxey and Browne clearly sought to draw attention to

the spectacle they created, they could not have foreseen the way in which a dozen reporters who remained embedded in the March would serve collectively as its oracle. Whether a Populist reading the Advocate on Main Street in Topeka Kansas, or a Gold Bug Republican reading the Times on Wall Street in New York, readers depended on the twelve reporters embedded in the March to tell the story. As British journalist W.T. Stead sent to America to cover the Panic of 1893 concluded “…the art of convincing the Press into a sounding board is one of the most indispensable for all those who would air their grievances and Coxey by instinct seems to have divined how to do it.” Stead had already gained his own notoriety for a presentation in November 1893, “If Christ Came to Chicago,” where he detailed the misery of those unemployed and destitute because of the Panic. 260

On the other hand, while the unprecedented press coverage magnified the reach of Coxey’s Commonweal, it also diminished the seriousness of its purpose. If later, historians could not quite fit Coxey into the framework of the populist moment, then much of the blame might be laid at the doorstep of the contemporary press coverage. As this chapter explains, as products of a “new journalism,” the dozen reporters, who made the March, wrote stories that differed little in content or style. While Stead’s musings recall the P.T. Barnum phrase “there’s no such thing as bad publicity,” the accompanying press focused more on the colorful features of this spectacle at the expense of its substance. While Coxey would speak nightly at each camp ground on the virtues of a national system of good roads financed with

government financed legal tender, the press coverage for the most part gave only passing reference to Coxey’s Good Roads Plan. Despite the scant mention of his speeches during the course of the March it appears he continued to speak to the particulars of his plan at every stop. Nonetheless, as exemplary of the matter of fact way the speeches were reported *The Chicago Tribune* noted on April 2 that “Coxey then spoke on the subject of Good Roads.” Similarly, *The Washington Post* gave a one sentence mention to Coxey’s speech on Good Roads at McKeesport. Such was the norm as the daily accounts typically eschewed reporting any more detail of these speeches other than to say they were about Coxey’s plan. Nor did the reporters dwell on Browne’s messianic orations or the utopian vision the March offered. If the daily reportage cited these at all, it was in the context of how much money they raised for the cash strapped affair. In this new journalistic era where editors sought to build circulation with colorful human interest stories, the March obliged with its diverse ensemble of colorful characters, encounters, and travails that unfolded each day as a serial drama. As the *Los Angeles Times* insightfully concluded, simply by reporting the colorful and entertaining, the press enlarged what it also belittled.  

As this chapter depicts, a steady stream of insulting headlines, which often belied the more straightforward reportage, coupled with severe editorial coverage, compounded by the March’s own failed ending, served to marginalize Coxey in his

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261“The J.S. Coxey Crusade,” *The Evening Independent* (Massillon OH), 20 March 1894, describes the “immense mail” that Coxey and Browne received and sent out to fellow populists and good roads advocates; Vincent, *Story of the Commonweal*, 50; “Coxey’s Army Grows,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 April 1894; “Over the Muddy Hills,” *The Washington Post*, 7 April 1894; No Title, *The Los Angeles Times*, 28 March 1894, 4 noted “The invasion of Washington by Coxey’s Army appears to be as much of a howling farce, to which the press of the country has paid altogether too much attention. Such men as Browne __ and Coxey is presumably one of the same kind __ trade upon the notoriety which they get in the newspapers….The best way to treat such people is to ignore them entirely.”
own time, and created a legacy of ineptitude and failure. Coxey’s March was seldom seen in the larger context of populism, but more typically as an aberrant form of industrial protest led by an opportunistic crank and a mystic agitator. The reportage largely presented the March simply as theater populated by eccentric characters and filled with humorous incidents. When combined with editorial coverage that scoffed at its purpose and promoted its idiosyncrasies, the resulting legacy relegated the term “Coxey’s Army” to slang usage.

In its time, and depending on your perspective, whether Gold Bug or Greenbacker, monopolist, or populist, you might find simply by reading the daily newspaper accounts a pretense for justification of your views. Yet in both cases the sympathies aroused by these stories resulted from the presentation of the characters and their travails, not the causes they championed. For those sympathetic to the variety of Populist causes, who were concerned that the sinews of a more democratic capitalism were eroding at the hands of the monopolists, the familiarizing anecdotes about the March’s eccentric characters could well endear them to this engaging entourage. They seemed as presented in their ordinariness symbolic of the people’s plight. In the minds of these Populist sympathizers wedded to a more republican economy, the daily travails and human experiences of this spectacle of supplication, punctuated by the courage of those sleeping in the snow and marching without shoes, only served to magnify the ridiculous excesses of the Upper Ten. On the other hand, readers who welcomed and benefited from the late nineteenth century transition to a more corporatized economy, could take delight in the portrayal of those colorful but “down and out tramps” that
comprised Coxey’s rag tag army. For these beneficiaries of the new corporate economy, the March became a sort of “opera bouffe” that in its mere depiction satirized the foibles of those unable to compete in the new economy. The headlines and editorial coverage alternatively caricatured Coxey’s ensemble as a tramp army, a circus parade, or a sham. Thus in either case, whether sympathizer or detractor, the barrage of derisive headlines, editorials, and magazine critiques, as well as the newspaper accounts that dwelled on the characters and day to day events, rather than the reforms, created a legacy that separated the March from its populist moorings.²⁶²

**New Journalism**

Coxey represented the ultimate human interest story, and human interest had become the hallmark of news coverage even before the techniques of yellow journalism transformed news presentation later in the decade. The spectacle that Coxey and Browne created came at a time when technological advancements, including notably the availability of large quantities of low cost, chemically treated, wood based white paper for newsprint (as opposed to rags), coupled with new mass printing technologies allowed newspapers to expand from a maximum of four pages daily to scores of pages and multiple editions. As America’s population became increasingly more urbanized and readership of newspapers grew, the larger dailies could capture news not only from their own newly deployed city beat reporters, but from their fellow travelers scattered

throughout the country. This growing cadre of reporters could file stories on telegraph wires that stretched across the country and the world.\(^{263}\)

While the reporters accompanying Coxey and Browne faced the same day to day physical hardships of the March, every evening they had to meet the challenge of filing their day’s dispatch. They had to make sure their stories reached a growing readership.

Ironically, for a populist enterprise, the March depended on the monopoly of the telegraph to speed transmission of its stories to its readers. At the outset, even prior to leaving Ohio, this proved relatively straightforward. The lobby of the Massillon Park Hotel became a telegraphic nerve center dispatching some 80,000 words a day across fifteen switchboards. But as the March proceeded to more remote regions, the challenges increased. At almost every stop along the way, the remaining dozen or so reporters would make their way to a make shift office set up by the Western union operators and send their accounts to news desks around the nation instantaneously. E.P. Bishop of Western Union oversaw the telegraph operations. He made arrangements at each stop for a telegraph lineman who could make sure each dispatch could be sent. As Baker reminisced:

> Imagine an old shed lighted by several feeble lamps or lanterns, with four telegraph instruments on goods boxes and the operators sitting on other goods boxes, ticking off with experienced fingers thousands of words and page after page to the four quarters of the country, while a dozen newspaper men’s pencils are dashing over the paper in the gloom, the demons sitting on barrels or on the floor, and writing on anything and everything attainable.

\(^{263}\) Sweeney, “Desire for the Sensational,” 114-125. Sweeney explores the theme of the press coverage and how in its desire for the colorful story its coverage overwhelmed Coxey’s more substantive message. Sweeney notes that in the reportage of Ray Stannard Baker of the Chicago Record, of the 75,000 words he wrote during the five weeks of the March, only about 1,600 were devoted to the ideas Coxey tried to convey. See Carl Browne’s illustrations in Ray Stannard Baker papers at Library of Congress, Box 71 Reel 60.
Neither inclement weather nor remote geographies deterred thousands of words from being transmitted from virtually every stop over the four hundred mile journey.264

Once the stories arrived, utilizing the array of new technologies, they were printed instantaneously, catapulted onto the street, “hawked” by the omnipresent newspaper boys, and grabbed up by readers anxious for the next Coxey episode. On the cusp of yellow journalism and offering greater variety and more pages, newspapers searched for those colorful and entertaining events that would ensnare reader’s interest, growing their circulation and attracting new advertisers. Newspaper advertising revenues doubled in the decade from 1879 to 1889. Editors, trying to grow their circulations to stay ahead of the competition, thus increasingly demanded exciting and colorful stories. This gave rise to this so-called “new journalism,” and Coxey’s March aligned perfectly with its demands and mores’.265

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265 Baker, “Marching with Coxey”; Baker, American Chronicle, 21. Though easily pigeonholed as the decade which spawned “yellow journalism,” press turmoil in the 1890’s is typically oversimplified and conflated with the “sensationalism” associated with William Randolph Hearst. W. Joseph Campbell writes that the term “yellow journalism” actually emerged from disdain over the term new journalism. However, it would be 1897 before the term “yellow journalism” actually first appeared. Yellow journalism itself represented anything but a settled genre. In the broadest sense, it might best be characterized by its own claims of self importance and by the many ways it sought to draw attention to itself (e.g., Hearst and Pulitzer). But at its roots, as Campbell writes, it was “a highly idiosyncratic genre,” and marked by extreme variety in the many ways different yellow papers subscribing to its precepts sought to best their competition. Campbell provides alternative theories as to who first coined the term yellow journalism. His analysis suggests that New York Press editor Ervin Wardman first adopted the term “yellow-kid journalism,” a phrase that alluded to a jug eared cartoon caricature of a tenement youth. The term first appeared in January 1897 and began to be commonly used by those critical of Hearst’s journalistic approach, which he first adopted at the San Francisco Examiner and later at the New York Journal. Yet Hearst’s papers, typically cited as the prototypical examples of yellow journalism, did not represent the only approach to the presentation of news in the 1890’s. At the end of the decade the lines were clearly drawn. Competing against Hearst in New York, yet not practicing “yellow” techniques, Adolph Ochs’ New York Times would adopt a more austere, factual and conservative style contrasting itself with the slogan “All the news that’s fit to print.” Meanwhile the New York Commercial Advertiser, edited by Lincoln Steffens would take a far more literary approach to its presentation; See W. Joseph Campbell, Yellow Journalism (Westport CT: Praeger Publishing 2001), 5-8;25-31; Joseph J. Kwiat, “The Newspaper Experience: Crane, Norris and Dreiser,” Nineteenth Century Fiction, 8, no. 2 (Sep, 1953):101-102; and W. Joseph Campbell, The Year that Defined American Journalism (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5-9. Not only did America’s population grow, but it became increasingly urban. According to Sidney Kobrey, The Yellow Press and Gilded Age Journalism (Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1964), 2-3, the number of daily newspapers increased from 387 to 2,326, one fifth of the nation’s
Not only did this period in journalistic history mark a transition technologically, but importantly it saw a fundamental shift away from newspapers as overt political instruments. In the *ante bellum* period, indeed since the Colonial period, the American press was decidedly political. Most newspapers of the so-called “penny press” genre overtly announced their political allegiances and readers knew exactly what to expect. For example, *The New York Press* proudly stated on its masthead that it was “New York’s Largest Republican Paper.” *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greely’s name became synonymous with the Republican Party and such a prominent political figure that when he died in 1872 he himself became the subject of over 2,000 editorials.266

Yet the political trajectory of the penny press ended abruptly with the Civil War. The role the press itself played in dividing America seemed to sour the public on the political orientation that dominated newspaper reportage. Once the war ended, the reality of its violence, coupled with the convergence of new technologies and an emerging journalistic corporatism, relegated partisanship to a distant second place in what emerged

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266 Gerald Baldasty, *The Commercialization of the News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3. Baldasty notes that as early as the 1830’s a new so-called “penny press” emerged to challenge a long dominant mercantile press, that had been devoted more to commercial announcements and transactions than to news. During the colonial era, the press assumed a decidedly political cast. See Footnote 14 of Chapter XIV Franklin Luther Mott, *American Journalism* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 272; Robertson, 58.
as the “new journalism.” New publications such as *The Chicago Daily News* (1876) noted it had “No axes to grind, no friends to reward, and no enemies to punish.” The new journalism led journalists to assume greater and greater political independence. An independent paper could still have a political bias, but its priority was to convey entertaining human interest stories to attract readers and grow circulation. The new breed of businessman publishers were transforming the newspaper business, and depending on advertising for their revenue. A healthy circulation rather than a partisan bite became the new business imperative. Political bias often was often masked subtly in the way a story was reported.

The “new journalism” first achieved prominence in the Midwest. During the 1870’s, a cadre of younger publishers gained control of established and well known newspapers in cities such as Chicago, Detroit, and St. Louis. These new owners seeking to distance themselves from the earlier rancorous partisanship of their predecessors, adopted a decidedly business rather than political model as they launched their journalistic enterprises. Their newspapers took out after corruption in government, published shining literary stories, and ran entertaining, often comic pieces.

Of all those associated with this new approach to journalism, Joseph Pulitzer’s *St. Louis Post* and later *New York World* perhaps most typified this new genre. Pulitzer’s

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267 Thomas Leonard, *The Power of the Press: The Birth of American Political Reporting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 90 notes the ante bellum partisan press reported political debates with an unapologetic slant. In this context of journalistic partisanship and ideological division, where compromise could be seen as weakness, the perception grew that the press played too large a role in dividing north and south. One journalistic historian observed: “…it is hard to imagine an ideological conflict so broadly based and sacrifices made for so long without the awareness of the political positions that the spread of reporting helped to bring.” Kobrey, *The Yellow Press*, 191; Baldasty, *The Commercialization of the News*, 416.

brand of new journalism, was characterized by a generous dose of self promotion, plenty of advertising, and human interest stories typically tinged with drama and excitement in order to reach the widest possible audience. Thus somewhat predictably, in reporting on Coxey’s arraignment before a District of Columbia Judge on May 2, the day after the March ended on the Capitol steps, the World led its story with rumors of intrigue. Its May 3, 1894 story began with the insinuation that Lucy Parsons, an anarchist whose husband was convicted and executed for his role in the 1886 Chicago Haymarket riots, had taken a hotel room in Washington. To build intrigue, but also implying its own political bias, and thus likely those of its editors, the story alleged she was conspiring with other “anarchists” also allegedly gathered in the capital city. “Men who have been prominently identified with the bomb throwing group at Chicago have been recognized on the streets within the last two days,” the paper exclaimed before it turned to Coxey and the trial that awaited him. Pulitzer, setting the standard for other papers in this new journalistic mode said it was his goal to publish every day “at least one article so intriguing, so unusual, so provocative that it would cause people to talk about it at the dinner table.”

Pulitzer’s World pushed the envelope of the new journalism, becoming well known for creating its own stunts and crusades and then reporting them as if they were news. Pulitzer was well aware of the enormous appetite newspaper readers had for

269 See a discussion of Pulitzer’s acquisition of the New York World and his approach “To draw readers from both sides of the line that separated white and blue collar work”; see David Nasaw, The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 52-55; Smythe discusses Pulitzer’s ascendancy and approach to journalism in Smythe, Gilded Journalism, 84-88

unfolding detective stories, scandals and adventures; characteristics that would later typify Coxey’s odyssey without having to be fabricated. In fierce competition for advertising to build their revenues, the World, and other rival newspapers of the Gilded Age that followed in its footsteps, notably William Randolph Hearst’s New York Journal, seemed conflicted by their need to entertain on the one hand, while increasingly demanding their reporters be factually accurate. This often led them to stage their own “news events.”

For example, in the late fall of 1889, the New York World’s famous “lady reporter,” Nellie Bly, sought to beat the 80 day around the world record of Jules Verne. Throughout what all recognized as a publicity stunt, Bly “was greeted everywhere by waving flags, the blare of brass bands, songs, shouts and fireworks.” Bly’s escapade was clearly staged by the press and for the press. Yet in the coverage it received, it foreshadowed how the press would a few years later fawn over Coxey’s spectacle. Like Bly’s unfolding day to day episode, Coxey’s marchers drew enthusiastic readers who awaited each new episode. The day to day suspense of a march that seemed always on the edge of extinction, would come to grip the nation in much the same way as did Bly’s uncertain quest to break Verne’s record. As the reporters on the Coxey journey discovered, the actual real-life events themselves needed little embellishment, even though Bly apparently thought they did. Her own self serving account of the final day of Coxey’s March, curiously datelined several days after the event, headlined that it was she (Bly) that actually led “Coxey’s March up Pennsylvania Avenue.” She even claimed to
have tipped policeman leading to Coxey’s arrest. Her account, even her presence, is corroborated by no other newspaper or account and leads to doubts about its veracity.  

On the eve of what came to be described as ‘yellow journalism,” newspapers struggled to define themselves between the extremes of coldly objective informant or the tawdry salacious entertainer. The new journalism tended to be more literary than sensational. Indeed this emerging journalistic motif seemed to enjoy symmetry with the predominant literary genre of the day, the so-called “new naturalism.” Associated with the works of one of the period’s preeminent literary giants, William Dean Howells, the fiction of the period often appeared more journalistic than artful. Howells himself repeatedly expressed misgivings about over sensationalizing reality, even in works of fiction. Sheer reality such as Coxey’s March provided its own rich narrative. It embodied

270 Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: A History of Newspapers in the 250 Years from 1690 to 1940 (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1941, 437. See also Nellie Bly, “Nellie Bly and Coxey’s Army,” The World (New York City, NY) 6 May 1894; The Evening Independent (Massillon OH), 1 May 1894; and “March Ends in Riot,” The Chicago Record, 2 May 1894. Though the World had already run stories about Coxey’s March, including the trial, in their Sunday May 6 edition, they published a curious piece by Bly who not only claimed to have infiltrated Coxey’s March, but also to have led the final parade to the Capitol. “She Led the Half Starved Commonwealers on Their March Into Washington Last Tuesday,” trumpeted the headline. Bly’s bylined account rendered a less than sympathetic, though self serving account. It even begins with a lead “I went to Washington last week and headed the Commonwealers on their march from Brightwood Driving Park to the gates of the Capitol.” This rendition of events is corroborated by no other account of the March. In fact no other account even mentions Bly as being part of the March, and indeed given the date of the appearance of her article (five days after the march), it is possible she could have written it without ever having set foot in Washington. As the article unfolds, Bly describes what “taking the lead” meant. Since she was not riding a horse and confined to a buggy (taxi) and what she called “her stupid cab driver,” she resigned herself to being embedded in the procession and thus lacking perspective. “But as usual I was in luck,” she wrote, then describing how another man offered to escort her in his buggy and to take the lead if she wished. When this person who she identified as Oklahoma Sam introduced her to Coxey, the General then offered that she could be part of the procession. Bly said she then informed Coxey she was going to take the lead. Her critical May 6 piece scoffs at both Coxey and Browne, “as the workingman’s pretended benefactors,” who took advantage of the marchers for their own notoriety. “A more woe-begone (sic) and hapless-looking lot of men I have never seen,” she observed. Yet her account takes its most self-serving twist when Bly claimed it was her tip that led to the arrest of Coxey. Arriving at the Capitol she approaches an officer and inquired as to which steps Coxey would be speaking. When the officer emphatically indicated there would be no speech Bly claimed it was her tip that led to the arrest of Coxey. Arriving at the Capitol she approaches an officer and inquired as to which steps Coxey would be speaking. When the officer emphatically indicated there would be no speech Bly then remarked to him, “‘Then you better go that way,’ I [Bly] said pointing to the direction where the men meant to enter.” Bly, after asserting she led the march, thus casts herself as central to the story of Coxey’s arrest. Unlike the other firsthand accounts which speak to the violence that ensued, Bly referred almost matter of factly to the “…gentleness the policeman handled the men and felt some regret that the New York policeman had not charge of the job.” Contrast her rendition with Skinner’s firsthand account on May 1 where he reports a stampede and exclaims in a telegram back to Massillon: “…the police are using clubs.” Or Baker’s lead on May 1, “Coxey’s eventful march from Massillon to the marble steps of the capitol closed today in riot and bloodshed.”
the sensational without having to embellish, as Bly apparently felt compelled to do. Howells’ works, the epitome of the new naturalism, were not about out of the ordinary disasters, accidents or wars, but rather focused on the subtle chance meetings of acquaintances or the coincidental events that connected people. Coxey’s March provided such material at virtually each turn in the road without the need for contrivance. 271

In the one exceptional instance where the core Coxey reporters obviously played with the truth, they did so not by making up the facts or exaggerating them, but by simply withholding them from their readership. They colluded to mask from their readership the real identity of “the Great Unknown.” Before his true identity was revealed as Dr. Pizzaro, he was also referred to by the press as alias “Louis Smith.” As readers would later learn, the mystery figure had actually befriended Browne in Chicago the summer before the March. Pizzaro went so far as to enlist the California migrant as a salesman for his quack cures. The press seemed to revel in shrouding “the Unknown’s” real identity from the national readership. This deliberate mystery was created by the ‘demons’ who apparently saw it in their collective self-interest to build suspense among their new found national readership. 272

272 The Great Unknown was a convenient press fiction used by the press corps to enhance the drama of the story of Coxey’s March. Rumors swirled around his origins, though reporters, particularly those from Chicago, knew him as alias Louis Smith, or in fact one Dr. Pizarro or Bazarro (Baker notes in American Chronicle (13) both were used) who had sold medicines to Indians and tried at one point to take command of the Army. Wayne Klatt, Chicago Journalism (London: McFarland and Co., Inc., 2009), 55 notes The Chicago press had ample precedent for developing intrigue in pseudo characters or pseudo events. One of Sparks predecessors at the Daily Tribune, John E. Wilkie, gained notoriety when, in 1890, he reported the story of a boy who could climb a rope tossed into mid air. Four months later Wilkie would go on to head the secret service, where he enthusiastically pursued counterfeiters, often being accused of press exploitation during his controversial administration.
The Unknown was caricatured by the reporters as a “big, handsome, well-dressed man,” who seemed “a strict disciplinarian, and appeared to be a born leader.” The Coxey journalistic troupe reported he appeared very well to do and some felt he might be helping Coxey with the finances of the March. Upon his arrival, he promptly decided to give a speech to those assembled. But his remarks were so ‘incendiary’ they immediately sparked speculation that this charismatic presence was perhaps Samuel Fielden, the recently pardoned Haymarket anarchist from Chicago. In addition to speculation about his being an anarchist, it was also rumored he might be a Swedish national named Jensen employed by the Pinkertons, or perhaps a circus ring man or German military officer. To confirm his actual identity, Chicago Daily Tribune reporters went to 77 Peoria street where the Unknown’s photograph was positively identified by his wife. She confirmed for the Tribune reporters that her husband was the “President of National Patriotic Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Humanity,” and the manufacturer of a blood medicine.

Before reveling the Unknown’s actual identity, the reporters further enhanced the mystery surrounding him by introducing a separate mysterious woman they quickly suggested to be his wife. This surrogate “Goddess of Peace,” reportedly the real “Mrs.

273 “She May Be Mrs. Great Unknown,” Chicago Daily Tribune 27 March 1894; Baker, American Chronicle, 13; McMurry, Coxey’s Army, 99; “Says Smith is Jensen,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 11 April 1894; “All Followthe Grub Wagon,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 16 April 1894; “Colonel Browne Bobs Up,” The Washington Post, 16 April 1894; “Not Wholly a Myth,” The Washington Post, 25 March 1894; and “What Coxey Wants,” The Milwaukee Journal, 24 March 1894. “Coxey on the March,” The Wisconsin State Register, 30 March 1894; In “Unknown the Prince of Fakers,” Chicago Tribune 17 April 1894 the reputed wife of Bozzaro (though the so-called “Veiled Lady” is also with the March at this point was identified by the press as “reportedly” Bozzarro’s wife (which throws into question exactly the identity of the “Veiled Lady”). In the article, Bozzarro’s two daughters positively identify a photo and discuss the business relationship that Bozzarro had with Browne selling Kickapoo Indian remedies in Chicago the summer before. They also discuss how they intended to join Coxey in his March.
Unknown,” joined the March in Alliance Ohio on the 2 PM train from Chicago on March 26. She reportedly registered at the Keplinger Hotel as one “Mrs. Smith.” She wore a heavy black veil to conceal a black eye. A hotel maid sympathetically told reporters the injury must have resulted from a blow from a small child. Those who watched her enter the hotel lobby reported she appeared very well educated and well dressed. This fueled the speculation that she might indeed be “Mrs. Unknown,” since by all accounts the Unknown himself was not only well spoken, but seemed by appearance, with his white pants and yachting cap, to be quite well to do; in fact he had been rumored to have helped with financing the March. To build suspense, the reporters also labeled the elegant Mrs. Unknown as the “Veiled Lady.” The Unknown himself would later put these press monikers in placards he used to draw crowds at shows he staged following his days with Coxey (See Figure 11). While reporters thus deliberately kept the identities of “The Unknown” and the “Veiled Lady” very much a mystery with their readers, Browne made it quite clear that Mrs. Unknown had to march ahead of the procession and keep her distance. Regardless of her association with ‘Smith,” she would be treated no differently than any other aspiring female member of the Commonweal; i.e., like Coxey’s own daughter she would not be allowed to join.274

While the Unknown and his mysterious accomplice became a central figure in the Coxey narrative, this remained the only prominent example of

274 “She May Be Mrs. Great Unknown,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 27 March 1894; Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 51-2; See Figure 6 in Appendices which is a flyer appearing in the papers of Ray Stannard Baker advertising the appearance of the Veiled Lady; The placard reads: “To-Night The Great Unknown, The Original Louis Smith, Jesse Coxey and the Veiled Lady of the Commonweal Movement will appear at Miller’s Hall; The “Unknown” will be speaker of the evening and give an exciting account of his wonderful trip across the mountains while in charge of Coxey’s Army. Admission,-- 25cts. Lecture at 8 o’clock sharp.” See Ray Stannard Baker Papers Box 71 Reel 60.
sensational fancy taken by the reporters over the course of the March. Indeed, they did not need to resort to this sort of gimmickry to build reader suspense. The reality of the March itself provided more than sufficient human interest stories. The simple chance encounters that occurred at every turn along Coxey’s winding road toward Washington, and the seemingly endless parade of colorful characters, generated sufficient copy to satiate curious reader’s appetites. In short, the reality of Coxey’s March did not have to be concocted. Among a new, this more professional cadre of journalists accompanying Coxey’s men, the lines between literature and journalism faded. Moreover, the reporters embedded in the March represented the new hands on approach to the discipline of gathering news, one that required a different kind of reporter with a nose for facts and as much attracted to the adventure of reporting as with the art of writing stories.

**Reporters**

The “new journalism” demanded a new breed of educated professionals skilled in the art of writing. Soon-to-be-famous writers Theodore Dreiser, Frank Norris, Stephen Crane, and Ambrose Bierce wrote stories molded to the conventions of this “new journalism.” Their journalistic accounts were not dissimilar from those they would write as fiction. The new journalism typically placed reporters in the thick of the city with its scoundrels, scandals, and salacious affairs. The author-journalist Jack London, among the luminaries of the naturalist literary genre, actually wrote an account of his own experience marching with Kelly’s Army. His passage “The March of Kelly’s Army,” (see Appendix 4) which became a portion of London’s *My Life in the Underworld*,

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depicts with stark accuracy mobs forming in Council Bluff Iowa, raids on the Union Pacific rail yards, and the capture of an engine as rail officials sought to tear up the tracks to stop the protest from moving east. London’s life and death account of this California based band of Coxeyites trying to outwit officials and at times their own leadership seems the stuff of later London fiction. But in this case London did not have to make it up.

London’s journalistic style represents the essence of this new genre of writers who toggled back and forth between journalism and literature with very little need to change their approach or style.275

The dozen or so reporters that stayed with Coxey’s March from Massillon to Washington typified this new kind of reporter. They were typically young, paid by the word, and obviously in it as much for the adventure as for their remuneration. Their everyday accounts included reporting such mundane events as what the men ate, how they shaved, or the lyrics to the songs they sang, but not the content of Coxey’s Good Roads Plan. And because a reporter’s pay was customarily commensurate with the number of words published from their daily dispatches, they naturally gravitated to the colorful anecdote or chance encounters that were in abundance over the March’s thirty five days. The space writing system of pay under which they operated put a premium on lengthy description and narrative, and the Coxey story obliged this need. They were there to report on life not on policy. The field thus attracted both the intellectually curious and

those thirsting for adventure. As Frank Norris, wrote: “It’s the Life that we want, the vigorous real thing, not the curious weaving of words and the polish of literary finish.”

In the new journalistic milieu, publishers such as Charles Dana of the New York Sun identified the need for this new breed of reporter and recognized that their newspapers needed to become incubators for aspiring authors. Lincoln Steffens would later reflect in his own Autobiography how at his New York Commercial “…reporters were sought out of the graduating classes of the best universities Harvard, Yale, Princeton and Columbia, where we let it be known ---that writers were wanted--not newspaper men, but writers." Newspapers rewarded these good young writers less with pay, than by allowing their bylines to appear. Tenacious young reporters attracted to this notoriety appeared on the scene fresh from schools such as the University of Missouri and Cornell that had begun to offer “Certificates of Journalism,” suggesting the field of newspaper writing was soon to take on the lineaments of a profession.

The Chicago Record’s editor Charles Dennis seemed immediately, almost intuitively to sense how Baker fit the mould of this new breed of reporter. Baker had grown up in what was considered the wilderness near St. Croix Falls Wisconsin, along the Mississippi River not far from Portage where historian Frederick Jackson Turner had come of age. He shared Turner’s view of the shaping force of the frontier, noting years later, “As I look back, it seems the virtue of the frontier was hope….” Bored with his

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study of the law at the University of Michigan, he decided to sign up for one of Newton Scott’s literature courses for the term beginning in February 1892. Enthralled by Scott’s dynamic approach which combined adventure, imagination, and science, he soon enrolled in what the University subsequently claimed as the first course offered by an American university in the techniques of newspaper writing. As an undergraduate, Baker also immersed himself in the scientific curriculum. Associating himself with the methods of renowned naturalist Louis Agassiz, Baker later would observe how his science courses taught him to look at something before drawing any conclusions about it. He would soon find the challenge of digging out the facts and presenting them as they are, an essential skill in newspaper reporting. Many college educated young reporters, like Baker, became enamored with the scientific method as a way to hone their investigative skills. When Baker left Ann Arbor to begin an apprenticeship with the Chicago Record, he was thus emblematic of this new breed of young, college educated men trying to become newspaper reporters, trying to report the facts as presented, even if they often appeared to resemble fiction.

278 Ray Stannard Baker, Native American (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1941), 149; John E. Semonche, Ray Stannard Baker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 52-62; The “New Realism” is a term most associated with the icon of the new literary genre of realism, William Dean Howells. His method is described by Susan Goodman and Carl Dawson, William Dean Howells: A Writer’s Life (Berkley: University of California Press, 2005 on page 119 where the authors discuss one of his early works, Venetian Life: “Here, as in later books, he plays with the boundaries between fact and fiction, the ways by which fiction can grow from observed life, however distasteful, into a new reality that corresponds to an actual world.” Kwiat, “The Newspaper Experience,” 99-117 similarly discusses how thin the lines between journalism and literary realism. For Baker’s early fascination with science see Robert C. Bannister, Ray Stannard Baker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 31-35; Regarding the influence of science in young reporters, Theodore Dreiser read Spencer as well as Darwin, Tyndall and Huxley. See Michael Schudson, Origins of the Ideal of Objectivity in the Professions: Studies in the History of American Journalism and American Law, 1830-1940 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 168-69. Schudson notes “many of the journalists of the 1890’s were either trained in a scientific discipline or shared in the popular admiration for the scientific emphasis on the empirical Ray Stannard Baker took special interest in his science courses at Michigan Agricultural College; Lincoln Steffens did graduate work in Wilhelm Wundt’s world-famous psychological laboratory. Indeed, the appeal of Herbert Spencer was strong among reporters as among other educated Americans.”
Dennis saw “poetry” in Baker’s early work. The “poetry” grew from the young reporter’s keen recognition of social distances in the streets of Chicago, and from those seemingly futile efforts to overcome them. Assigned to cover the human impacts of the Panic of 1893 on America’s fastest growing city, Baker wrote compelling accounts about the everyday human tragedies. “Every day during that bitter winter the crowds of ragged, shivering, hopeless human beings in Chicago seemed to increase,” decried Baker. Like his British accomplice Stead, who he came to know well, Baker wrote about what he saw as an appalling lack of a social safety net for Chicago’s poorest. In March 1894, however, Dennis interrupted Baker’s reporting of these stories about those most impacted by the Panic “There is a queer chap down there in Massillon named Coxey. Go down there and see what it all amounts to,” Dennis instructed his young cub reporter. Skinner’s stories had apparently captured Dennis’s interest and he dispatched his young reporter to investigate what the Coxey story was about. Dennis’ instincts proved correct. Baker could hardly suppress his elation on the assignment his editor had handed him, noting his head was “swimming with excitement.”

Baker would later write that Dennis once said to him, “It is not superficial or noisy action that really makes the best news; it is the meaning that underlies the suffering or the happiness of everyday life.” Yet, as Baker arrived in Massillon he had difficulty admired Spencer’s views on having an economic literary style as taught in writing classes by Fred Newton Scott at Michigan Agricultural College; See Smythe, The Gilded Age Press, 208-09 and Michael Schudson, Origins of the Ideal of Objectivity in the Professions: Studies in the History of American Journalism and American Law 1830-1940 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 168-169; 279 Baker, American Chronicle, 1-6; Bannister, Ray Stannard Baker, 61; Russell B.Nye, “Jacob Coxey,” in A Baker’s Dozen (East Lansing MI: Michigan State University, 1956), 221; Sweeney, “The Desire for the Sensational,” 117; Telegrams from C.H. Dennis to Ray S. Baker, March 20 and 28, 1894 in Ray Stannard Baker papers at Library of Congress, Box 23 Reel 23.
finding the deeper meaning of the March. In his first meeting with Coxey, Baker remarked “He did not impress me as a great leader of a revolutionary movement.” Yet over the course of the next five weeks his attitude changed. He subsequently acknowledged that to present the marchers as “bums, tramps and vagabonds was a complete misrepresentation.” As the March unfolded, and at Dennis’s urging, Baker made a concerted effort to engage the marchers in conversation. He recognized that conducting formal interviews with them would prove futile. So instead, he engaged the recruits in casual conversation as they marched from one town to the next. Baker would strike up familiar conversations asking the marchers about their homes, families, and their inability to rent land or find a job. From these discussions, Baker gained a visceral sense of why, at almost every point along the March route, the men received such a warm welcome. He wrote later that “…the public would not be cheering the army and feeding it voluntarily without recognition, however vague, that the conditions in the country warranted some such explosion.”

Some forty reporters actually walked out of Massillon with the Commonweal of Christ. Yet Baker noted that because the thousands of recruits predicted did not arrive, many editors recalled their reporters. These newspapers thus relied upon the press association dispatches that came from the dozen or so remaining journalists like Baker that stuck with the March for its duration. For the most part, this corps of remaining inveterate reporters developed the same kind of personal relationships with the marchers as Baker described. These reporters routinely doled out liquor, cigarettes, and small

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280 Baker, *Native American*, 149, 301; Various accounts estimate the number of reporters leaving Massillon from 37, see Browne, *When Coxey’s Army Marched*, regarding Baker’s account (“Marching with Coxe”) that they numbered about 40; see also Baker, *American Chronicle*, 7, 18-19.
change to their less fortunate unemployed companions. As Vincent noted, the reporters generally served as “a stimulus” to the March itself. As he observed, “In fact, oft times the crowd [marchers] would not have endured many hardships, but for the little delicacies and attentions received from the press contingent.” Vincent noted how the press would often serve to advance the arrival of the marchers, seeking out places for them to camp, securing halls for Browne and Coxey’s nightly speeches, and trying to encourage the local citizenry to welcome the strange contingent about to enter their city gates.  

Yet inevitably over this extended period, relationships between press and marchers could grow tense. Browne in particular often seemed irritated by the presence of reporters. Just past noon on the fifth day of the March, as the men paused to rest at Leetonia Ohio, Browne decided to mete out his own justice. Coxey had departed by train the evening before to attend a horse auction in Chicago in order to raise more money for the cash strapped March. Thus Browne took charge. Jolted by  

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281 The actual count of those reporters that survived the entirety is not clear either. Baker even suggests later in American Chronicle ten to twelve (see page 21) Stead in “Coxeyism” Review of Reviews article suggests “sixteen went every foot of the road.” Finally McMurry cites some twenty in footnote 1 on page 76 of his Coxey’s Army. In Baker’s, “Marching with Coxey,” he actually lists twelve reporters who made the trek (though he also suggests states that Babcock had to drop out because of a sore foot), and in a separate photo of the reporters in Box 71 Reel 60 in Ray Stannard Baker papers in the Library of Congress where he refers to mostly last names of at least 8 reporters though at least three of those are not mentioned in his Baltimore American article. They are W.J. Christy of the Pittsburgh Press, J.A. MacKay of the Associated Press, and S.P. Austen of the Pittsburgh Post; Another listing is also available in part in Wilbur Miller’s Scrapbook, Microfilm Roll 162, Ohio State Historical Society Archives. He notes in addition to the above listed in the text who had gone a week into the march as including Walter Robinson of the Baltimore American account, and a picture where Baker labeled some eight of the men by their last name only (he also uses only last names in the article), we know this group included in addition to Baker, Wilbur Miller of the Cincinnati Enquirer, Clifton Sparks of the Chicago Tribune, Charles Seymour of the Chicago Herald, W.H. McClean of the Pittsburg Leader (or St. Louis Chronicle), Austin Beech of the Pittsburgh Times, R.P. Skinner of the Massillon Evening Independent and also for the New York Recorder, Caldwell (no first name identified) of the New York Herald, W.P. Babcock of the New York World, Hugh O’Donnell of the New York Press, Harold Calvert of the United Press, and Hamilton (no first name identified) of the Pittsburgh Press. This “press gang” of a dozen journalists who remained over the duration had their own segregated identity and seemed proud of the camaraderie they developed. Regarding Vincent’s take on the value of the press see Henry Vincent, The Story of the Commonweal, 120-121.
the endless stretches of bad roads and in a mood as foul as the chilly weather, he decided to give one of his stem winding speeches to what seemed like the entire population of this tiny Ohio town. In this speech, he did not speak about the virtues of theosophy, but rather about the evils of the press and the scourge of the accompanying reporters. Browne unleashed a scathing diatribe against the accompanying journalists. In it he nicknamed the press corps “the Argus Eyed Demons of Hell.” They are ever so “eager to catch a sentence that will condemn us,” he inveighed. During the March, Baker observed Browne “was always howling about ‘the ‘subsidized press’ and the reports as being ‘organs of the Gold Bugs’….’” Yet Browne was hardly alone, nor necessarily misguided in these sentiments.282

Over the course of the five weeks, the marchers similarly came to reflect their disillusionment with the press. As one of the marchers, A.M. Nicholl, noted in his diary, “The boys are not very friendly to the majority of them on account of their not reporting the truth about the army.” As the odyssey progressed, the marchers would often exchange stinging barbs with the reporters. Sometimes this tension could be deflected, but on one occasion at least the tension spilled over into fisticuffs. After the brash sixteen year old Jesse Coxey made an insulting remark to W.H. McClain of the Pittsburgh Press, this particularly “pugnacious” reporter knocked the young Coxey down. Falling over a wagon tongue the young Coxey writhed in pain on the grass before recovering his bearing.283

282 Baker, “Marching with Coxey.”
283 Ibid.
Following Browne’s Leetonia speech, the reporters took to calling themselves “Demons” and began wearing badges printed with the initials A.E.D.H. (i.e., Argus Eyed Demons from Hell). They also had their own Demon’s song with lyrics by *New York World* reporter W.P. Babcock that they cheerfully sang acknowledging their new found power to project the March to an entire nation:

Forty demons marching on  
Every demon has a horn  
Drunk at night, and drunk at morn,  
Now we’re here, and now we’re gone

In fact, they seemed entirely comfortable with their separate identity. Thus when Coxey and Browne decided to briefly barge the marchers down the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, the demons would take comfort on their own separate boat. Even their dress was distinctive. They typically were adorned in dapper caps, sweaters, corduroy trousers, and flannel shirts. Moreover, it did not go without notice, that after a day on the road and spattered with mud from the ill kept roads, they appeared scarcely distinguishable from the marchers in their drab frock coats and bowler hats. Indeed their common identity was so strong that in the ensuing years these same reporters would continue to communicate with one another, even planning reunion dinners.\(^{284}\)

Browne’s Leetonia speech was not entirely indicative of his attitude toward the reporters he came to know as the March proceeded. True to his official capacity as

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\(^{284}\) Vincent, *The Story of the Commonweal*, 120-121. McMurry, *Coxey’s Army*, 76; Baker, “Marching with Coxey.” In Wilbur Miller’s Scrapbook at the Ohio Historical Society appears correspondence of April 24, 1930 from Shirley Austen to Miller referring to a forthcoming reunion dinner, and that the reporters who followed Coxey’s March have met previously: “All of the fellows agree that if we have any possible excuse for getting together, we should certainly do it as it will probably be the last and only chance we will have.” See Coxey’s Army Collection 1894-1931, Ohio Historical Archives, Columbus Ohio, MIC72. The scrapbook also contains telegrams from Austin to Miller indicating a reunion dinner planned for April postponed until May.
Chief Marshall of the Commonweal, Browne seemed to be always “howling about the ‘subsidized press,’ and their being “organs of the Goldbugs.” Yet, on the other hand, he developed a close relationship with some of reporters. In part, this schizophrenic relationship seemed to result because Browne considered himself to be a bona fide journalist. Indeed, long before he arrived in Chicago and met Coxey, Browne had gained a tawdry journalistic reputation in the west, where he was presented as part of an earlier election tampering and blackmail scheme. He claimed he had been sent to Chicago in the summer of 1893 by the San Francisco City Argus and in the months after the March he would publish his own Carl’s Campaign Cactus describing himself as “poet, painter, puncturer of pride and political purpose wherever and whenever he chose.” The Cactus was distributed to the remaining industrials who continued to camp in Washington through the summer of 1894.285

Like his mentor Kearney, Browne railed against the press as an arm of the plutocrats. Yet, he also understood very well the power the demons possessed in drawing the attention of the nation to the March. In this, he seemed to draw parallels between what his mentor Kearney had created with his own self-promotional labor newspapers that widely advertised his sandlot protests. Perhaps it is not surprising, therefore, that Browne struck up more than a cordial relationship with those reporters that

285 See Carl’s Campaign Cactus in Coxey’s Army Scrapbook by Wilbur Miller at Ohio State Historical Society Microfilm MIC72; The Los Angeles Times reprinted an associated press account from the Oakland Times. See “Migratory Miscreants,” The Los Angeles Times, 12 March 1894. The newspaper reports on Browne’s libel trial and though circulation was confined to the west coast, attempted to sound the alarm loud enough for those in the east to hear. The Oakland Times, familiar with the itinerant painter’s checkered past, warned not to take these “very cheap and nasty rascals” as credible. In the harshest of terms one account reflected not only a pervasive disdain for Browne’s “roguery,” but his recruitment of tramps for the March “as a disdainful victimization of a “gathering of dead beats and loafers.” To western papers in the Bay and in Los Angeles, Browne’s escapades did not even rise to a level where they could be demonized as socialists or anarchists. The western press portrayed Browne as “sub human and hardly worth the ink itself.”
accompanied the March. Browne grew particularly close in subsequent years to Baker, calling on him in the ensuing years. “He wrote me many letters,” Baker acknowledged, “signed with a flourish and the motto, ‘The Pen is mightier than the Sword.’” Indeed Baker visited Browne in his jail cell after his arrest. With blood still matted into his long hair from the Capitol fracas, Baker returned some amber beads stripped from Browne during the chaos on the Capitol grounds. Baker reported Browne saying to him, “You’re the only friend I’ve got left in the world.” Later, Baker would acknowledge in his memoirs that for years afterward Browne would regularly visit him in Chicago.286

**Baker and Sparks**

The reporters who actually marched with Coxey, particularly when contrasted with the editorial coverage, and even the headlines that announced their stories, seemed almost beneficent in their treatment of the episode. Their marginalization of Coxey was more subtle. Characteristically, the demon’s daily dispatches typically contained a combination of the humorous incidents of the day, the personal profiles of often eccentric characters, and anecdotal accounts of what the marchers encountered with what seemed each turn in the road. By default trivializing the March’s political agenda, editors placed these colorful dispatches of each daily episode on their front pages. Each day produced

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286Baker, “Marching with Coxey,” *Baltimore American*; Browne’s letter to Baker appears in Wilbur Miller’s *Coxey’s Army Scrapbook* by Wilbur Miller at Ohio State Historical Society Microfilm MIC72. Similarly Coxey struck up relationships with the reporters. As early as July 6, 1894, he wrote to Wilbur Miller of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, addressing him as “Friend,” saying in an affectionate note, “‘A friend in need is a friend indeed,’ and you will ever be in my memory as a true friend.” In later years Coxey wrote to Miller, noting how pleased he was to discover Miller’s whereabouts in Syracuse since he (Coxey) tried to keep tabs on the location of all the reporters who began with the march. Coxey’s April 3, 1930 letter to Miller, then living in Syracuse. Coxey notes: “I have been wondering for a long time where you were, as there are only a few left out of the 35 correspondents that started on the March 36 years ago, certainly surprised as well as being much pleased.” See also Carl’s Campaign Cactus in *Coxey’s Army Scrapbook* by Wilbur Miller at Ohio State Historical Society Microfilm MIC72; See also Baker, *American Chronicle*, 25.
stories that introduced new characters unfolding against the backdrop of interesting new places.

The actual reportage of *The Commonweal* by the demons was remarkably consistent in both its content and style. For the most part, it portrayed Coxey’s troupe as almost innocently disconnected from any larger purpose. Therefore, comparing Baker’s accounts in the *Chicago Record* with those of cross town rival Clifton Sparks at *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, reveals the surprising similarity in not only the subject of what each separately reported, but also the way they reported it. For beneath the often more sensational and distracting headlines, the actual reportage revealed a penchant for the routine, detailing the Commonweal’s every movement, the specific daily challenges of weather and terrain, and the various though remarkably similar receptions it received at each stop along the way. Many of the accounts actually read like a travelogue. The concerted effort to satiate the reader’s appetite for these more superficial details led reporters to describe the picturesque roadside scenery, the horrific road conditions, the names designated for each night’s camp, the kind of food supplied by local townspeople, and the occasional humorous incident about a stubborn toll keeper or a stray marcher. On their usual city beats these same reporters might feel the era’s pressures to be imaginative, to embellish, and even to make up the facts. But in the case of Coxey’s Commonweal, the inherently colorful characters, constantly changing scenery, and daily unfolding plot line left them with little need to exaggerate.287

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287 Not all Headlines were inflammatory or ridiculing. Noteworthy in the case of the *Chicago Record* was that virtually all of Baker’s some 75,000 words on the march are prefaced with rather benign headlines such as “Coxey’s Great Army,” “Peace Army Growing,” “To Sing for the Army,” and ‘Entered in Triumph.”
For example, neither Baker’s nor Sparks’ March 29 dispatches from Leetonia, where Browne made his derisive speech about the press, pay significant attention to Browne’s “Argus Eyed” diatribe. Sparks characterized Browne’s Leetonia speech as a “wearisome, uninteresting discourse on the evils of capitalism and the sins of capitalists,” noting almost incidentally that Browne also included references to newspaper reporters as “Argus eyed demons.” Baker did not refer to Browne’s speech at all, noting only that both Browne and Coxey spoke later in the evening at Camp Trenton in Columbiana raising some $7.29 for the March. Rather, Baker began his dispatch that day with the account of a nearby farmer named Steven Halloway who came to cheer the March as it entered town. As the American flag came into view of the awaiting townspeople, the 70 year old farmer called out “God Speed,” then turned to walk into a nearby store and collapsed dead. Sparks also refers to this incident, but unlike Baker does not make it his lead.288

Rather, Sparks’ lead for his March 29 story, addressed the day’s marching conditions and praised the men’s perseverance: “If persistent endurance amounts for anything, Coxey’s “Army of the Commonweal” will get to Washington alright,” Sparks began. Instead of dwelling on Browne’s speech, Sparks described Leetonia noting it to be “a hospitable town,” and that the townspeople contributed enough to allow each of the men to have two “big ham sandwiches and a pint of coffee while they warmed themselves in a vacant nail factory by the warmth of four “enormous chimney stoves.” Baker, as was more his tendency, personalizes this warm hospitality by introducing his

288 Have Lots of Pluck,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 30 March 1894; “Dead in the Street,” Chicago Record, 30 March 1894.
readers to Robert McCready, a sympathetic local iron worker who led the marchers to the abandoned nail shop. Baker dwelled on a humorous incident involving flag bearer Buchanan who gave haircuts to the men before they left Salem. Baker noted Buchanan would not finish cutting a marcher’s hair until he received his requisite compensation in the form of beer, since as Baker humorously describes, Buchanan had “an inordinate thirst for beer.” (See Figure 12.)

Similarly, while Sparks does not mention the haircutting episode, he does tell his own human interest story involving a row between the young Jesse Coxey and Browne as they left Salem. With the elder Coxey departed, Browne had disputed the hotel bill for the younger Coxey and then made a defiant statement that a tent should be good enough for any officer of the March. Sparks noted Browne spoke in a tone loud enough for all to hear in the lobby of the hotel. When Jesse Coxey entered just in time to hear the remarks, Sparks reported Coxey scolded Browne saying “I guess I’ll stay wherever I like,” reminding him it was Coxey money that was funding the venture, and incidentally Browne’s own hotel accommodations.

While their March 29 accounts show some difference in the anecdotes each reporter chose, more often than not Sparks and Baker agreed on the incident which would lead their daily dispatches. For example, on April 9 the incident they both chose as their lead was the confrontation that day with a stubborn toll keeper outside of Brownsville. Baker, more prone to the colorfully descriptive narrative, painted a vivid picture. He described how the marchers approached “a little white washed house” with colors

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289 Ibid.
290 Ibid.
fluttering. “Little Bobby, the Scotchman, played merrily on his bagpipes all the way up and down the mountain street of Brownsville, and out to the nearest toll gate thousands of enthusiastic persons cheered the army and Coxey’s hat worked up and down like a patent waffle iron.” By contrast, Sparks’ article reads more like the transcript of the dialogue between Annie Clabaugh, the toll keeper, and Browne, the representative of the Commonweal. Sparks provided the blow by blow account of how this wily toll keeper sent Browne to an ignominious defeat. As might be expected there are some discrepancies in detail between the two accounts. For example, Baker stated the toll eventually paid was $1.95. However, Sparks claimed Mrs. Clabaugh asked for $1.87 which Coxey paid in nickels and pennies, an incidental fact Baker did not choose to report.291

Baker spends more of his dispatch for this same day talking about the improved weather conditions, lovely Pennsylvania scenery, and the warm reception the marchers encountered en route to Uniontown. “One would have thought it was the Fourth of July,” Baker reported, noting the welcoming bicyclists, carriage loads of provisions brought by nearby farmers, and continuous cheering as the Commonweal passed. By contrast, Sparks description of the day’s journey is more muted. “Several delegations met Coxey at small villages along the road and got him to deliver speeches. A big delegation and a band met the army a mile out of town and escorted it to the limits.” Yet, again the differences appear more stylistic than substantive with Baker more prone to writing colorfully descriptive prose and Sparks’ content to simply use fewer adjectives in

conveying the same interesting stories. Regardless, their common emphasis remained on the routine and ordinary which as depicted provided plenty of human interest.  

Editing

As Baker noted, the core of reporters joined to the March “were as bright, as full of life, energy, good humor, wit and good fellowship as any twice forty ordinary men.” The editors deserve substantial credit for this since they were more than willing to provide this new genre of young reporters with sufficient latitude both in style and substance, allowing them to seek out stories and make their own reputations. Dennis gave Baker a long leash and encouraged him to “get the picturesque side” of the event. Though he was bothered by Baker’s interest in Browne as a leading figure (“Don’t put Browne too much in evidence, as the hero of the plot is Coxey, though he seems to be rather a puppet in Browne’s hands), he encouraged the young reporter to take photos of every scene. Most importantly he urged Baker to “keep me informed of your needs,” displaying his attentiveness to the travails of the March and the fragility of the young reporter. What Dennis and the other obliging editors received in return were stories that familiarized readers with the March in its intricate though often trivial day to day details. As Dennis wrote Baker on April 11, 1894, “The anabasis of Mr. Coxey seems to grow in interest and your reports are very satisfactory.”

Yet the editors played another role with their constant critical and satirizing editorial commentary that surrounded their reporter’s stories. Vincent suggested the

292 “Coxey Puts Up Toll,” Chicago Daily Tribune (April 10, 1894) 2; Forced to Pay Toll, Chicago Record (April 10, 1894).
typical way in which the marchers were characterized in editorial coverage from the very moment they began to organize:

The first announcement of the movement was received with derision and sneers all over the land. The proclamation of J. Sechler Coxey demanding the expansion of the volume of currency, and the improvement of the highways over all the country, as well his expressed purpose to gather together, from east and west, and north and south, great masses of unemployed proletariat only served to evoke sarcasm and unrestrained laughter.

Vincent’s account concluded by suggesting that newspapers in general treated the marchers as “low comedy.” Consistent with the way the press would affix sneering nicknames to prominent Populist politicians, they seemed to take delight in referring to the characters in the March other than by their actual names. Thus Coxey participants “Oklahoma Sam” or “Tooting Charley,” substituted for real names in the accounts, just as reporters would nickname Populist Kansas Congressman Jerry Simpson as “Sockless,” or Populist orator James Davis as “Cyclone.” In this none too subtle way, they trivialized and satirized the prominent and not so prominent players in the populist moment.²⁹⁴

Thus as historians revisited the Coxey story, they would have to overcome both its interpretation by the demons who comfortably dwelled on its superficial and idiosyncratic features, as well as the more acerbic opinions of editorial writers. These later pundits incessantly portrayed the March, with its tramp like features and carnivalesque appearance, as a subject for both ridicule and disparagement. The blurred lines between editorializing and news coverage in this late nineteenth century period of journalistic transition only served to reinforce the marginalization of the March as

anything more than a historical side show. While reporting the news became more professionalized in the late nineteenth century, editorial opinion often intruded itself into the presentation of “the facts.” Perhaps there was no coincidence that the reporters ignored the substantive and let their editors further impugn the motives for the March. As reporter Lincoln Steffens noted shortly after joining the *New York Post* in 1892, the editors point of view could not help but influence the way reporters went about their business. Working for the famous E.L. Godkin, the Irishman turned American reformer and later an icon of the progressive movement, Steffens remarked “Godkin was mind to me all those years and I was legs to him.” In the reportage of Coxey’s March not only did the lines between literature and journalism often blur, but so too did the boundaries between editorializing and reporting. 295

The editorials about Coxey often appeared on the front pages in the guise of news. Three days before the March departed Massillon, but days after another industrial army had left Los Angeles, *The Los Angeles Times* published a two column story that appeared to be news, but instead consisted of sheer editorial opinion. It compared the “bands of men wandering over the country” to a phenomenon in the Middle Ages when “great bands of destitute men roamed for a number of years throughout Europe, sometimes begging, and at other times marauding and continually terrorizing the inhabitants….” *The Times* story, more editorial than news, accused Browne and Coxey of acting on behalf of the devil and leading their innocent vagabond followers astray. 296

296 What Shall We Do With Them,” *The Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1894.

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Relentless editorial coverage over the March’s five week duration spared no aspect from ridicule. The Boston’s Daily Globe said the March represented “the wildest flight of a visionary theorist,” and “it did not believe there are enough fools in the country to constitute a very considerable army for the fun to be had in an overland march.…” The Toledo Blade suggested Coxey rob a bank to pay for the excursion. The Pittsburgh Press and the St. Paul Globe portrayed Coxey as a marginal nuisance, and his tramp followers as lazy, prone to crime and a threat to innocent people. The Atlanta Constitution saw the March as a mob invasion with an all too eerie resemblance to the French Revolution. The Nashville Constitution and The Milwaukee Journal were certain this little army of occupation would find its way to jail or quickly out of town with little if any attention being paid. The Chicago Daily Tribune suggested that “In the ‘On to Washington Farce’ now playing to small audiences in Eastern Ohio, Mr. J. S. Coxey is the leading comedian and Mr. Carl Browne is unquestionably the heavy villain.” Later it would editorialize “The tramp army under the lead of Coxey is nothing better than the worst kind of wild goose chase.” The Louisville Commercial analogized the March to a sickness (“the grip”) which was also treated like a joke but had far more serious consequences. The Cedar Rapids Republican also referred to Coxeyism as a “sickly sentiment.” Other editorials warned of dire consequences as the armies neared Washington. The Indianapolis Journal suggested “There is plenty of law for the preservation of peace and order at the National Capitol and plenty of power to enforce it.…” The Burlington Hawkeye pleaded that the gathering threat necessitated federal intervention. “The time has come when the President ought to issue a proclamation
warning the various ‘armies’ not to invade the District of Columbia and to see to it that order is obeyed.”

Not only was the editorial coverage almost unanimously negative, but the front pages often contained brief trailers that were meant to add to this sarcastic commentary or reinforce a critical editorial point of view. Coxey’s March became a ripe target for such clever and suggestive epigrams that characterized newspapers in this period. For example the Boston Globe suggested that should Coxey run for President in 1896 he could count on the votes of those marching with him, assuming of course any were still alive. The Los Angeles Times invoked an often used analogy noting the departure of the March resembled that of a departing circus parade. The Chicago Tribune suggested that while indeed Coxey might live in history, history would dismiss Browne, “that apostle of humbug and reincarnation.”

Meanwhile derisive or alarming headlines further served to brand the March as simultaneously freakish, dangerous, or ridiculous. “Dreams He Sees an Army: Then Coxey Awakens and Sees Fifty Tramps,” proclaimed the New York Times on the eve of the March’s departure. Headlines such as “Taken as a Joke,” “The Crazy Coxey Crusade,” or “Pranky Boys at Play” suggested to readers a less than serious endeavor. Other headlines questioned Coxey’s sanity, shouting “Candidate for an Asylum.” While others such as “Carl Browne, the Clown,” questioned Browne’s credibility. As the

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March progressed headlines became more anxious and prompted officials to react. “Troops are Called Out,” “Guarding the Treasury,” “Officials on the Alert,” and “Blood Flows from Coxeyism,” were the sort of headlines that simply added to the suspense being generated as the armies approached Washington and severed the March from its peaceful purpose.299

Coxey’s March fared little better in many of the established magazines of the day. The conservative *Harper’s Weekly*, enjoying a healthy circulation and touting itself as “the journal of civilization,” initially compared Coxey to Don Quixote and Browne to his Sancho. With its traditional Republican orientation (though some thought its iconic cartoonist Thomas Nast contributed to Democrat Grover Cleveland’s first victory for President in 1884), *Harpers* saw the movement as potentially dangerous, but in the end likely to do no harm:

> These worthies have no doubt at all that when they surround the Capitol and blow their blast the walls will straight way topple, as they did in Jericho years ago, and that the proud and arrogant legislators will fall all over themselves in their haste to do the bidding of the common people. “And if they don't,” says Mr. Coxey, with eyes uplifted, “God help us!”

A few weeks later in its May 5 editorial, *Harpers* scoffed at Coxey and cast doubt on the character of those who had marched. Without presenting any hard evidence, it asserted that there was “a liberal sprinkling of adventurers and criminals” in the March.

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Expanding on this speculation it then suggested, while the criminal element appears a minority, it erodes the moral fabric of the rest, allowing the “lawless and fanatical elements to take command.” Acknowledging that the “original programme of Coxey has fallen largely out of sight,” the Harpers editorialists suggested the March seemed to be about denouncing corporations and capitalists with some vague mention of property redistribution. “We believe that the sham crusade has already culminated, and that from this time, ridiculous aspects of it will rapidly come into prominence, while its alarming features will disappear.” 300

When later in May Harpers featured a story on the arrival of the March, it referred to the parade down Pennsylvania Avenue as one of the strangest scenes ever witnessed in a city known for its strange scenes. It concluded, “An hour after Coxey had been discouraged and Browne arrested the plaza was clear, and the crowds that had gathered from all parts of the city to enjoy a dramatic scene were returning in swarms to their homes, most of them having seen nothing whatever.” Harpers thus gloated in the seeming vindication of its prediction that the March was irrelevant, completely devoid of any serious purpose, and clearly without any historical significance. 301

Other journals that might seem to have provided a more sympathetic context for Coxey’s endeavor proved equally critical. For example, the more Democratic Leslie’s Weekly described the March as “Coxey’s Folly,” and predicted the March would end a “ridiculous failure.” Even Pomeroy’s Advance Thought, a monthly magazine started by journalist and Greenback advocate Marcus Pomeroy could not refrain from being critical

of the Coxey endeavor, though it chose more substantive grounds criticizing the issuance of bonds that draw no interest. “To give such bonds out to men who would work at road making would be to give out such paper as was given out by the Continental Congress and the Southern Confederacy — paper that was not legal tender and therefore not money….”

Even the populist-oriented Chautauqua Society took a highly critical stance. In Coxey’s time, Chautauqua had become a forum for those in rural America to connect with urban culture and stay abreast of intellectual developments through attendance at events featuring famous authors, artists, and musicians. Even the eventual Democrat-Populist candidate for President in 1896 William Jennings Bryan became one of its star attractions. Yet as predisposed as they might be towards Coxey’s populist views, The Chautauquan’s May editorial viewed the Coxey episode as a predictable “exhibition of social crankism.” While it acknowledged both Coxey and Browne to be Populists, the editor’s concern focused on the potential of the March to precipitate revolution or anarchy. “Their whole tendency is in the direction of social disorder,” they warned. The editorial clearly stripped the March of any populist affiliation and associated it instead with an urban radicalism that produced the Haymarket disturbance and the October 1893 assassination of Chicago Mayor Harrison.

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303 The Chautauqua Society as writers as much separated in time and perspective as Richard Hofstadter and Michael Kazin both note was a largely rural phenomenon which sought to bring cultural and intellectual features and speakers to largely rural audiences. See Footnote 4 “The Vanishing Hayseed,” in Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* 128;
Other contemporaries who actually did see Coxey in the context of the broader populist moment could not resist criticizing his plan. *The Social Economist* indeed did place the episode in the context of the populist ferment of the previous two decades. On the money question the magazine noted that Coxey was addressing this fundamental question, and “that he (Coxey) and the whole rank and file of the Populist army have thought, and in their way read, talked, discussed and agitated the subject. That is just what the Framers’ Alliance and Populist Clubs have been doing.” Moreover, the magazine tied Coxey’s idea of loaning money at two per cent interest to the revered Greenback icon Kellogg. Yet, while taking Coxey’s ideas more seriously than most critics, the magazine then proceeded to defend the banks and the Gold bugs, and finally joined the cacophony of Coxey critics, noting simply the Good Roads scheme to be without merit and suggesting it would lead to the nationalization of banks. “General Coxey might as well hope to make meat cheap by closing all butcher shops, as to make rates of interest low by closing all banks,” the editorial concluded in defense of banks lending money at whatever interest rate they choose.304

*The Nation*, which also viewed Coxey as part of the Populist phenomenon, spared no amount of vitriol for the movement, noting “The Coxeyites are Populists of the lowest grade….” *The Nation* tortuously attempted to link the March to Republican trade protectionist policies. Indeed as Coxey approached Washington, the 53rd Congress engaged in a fierce debate over repeal of the protectionist McKinley tariff. *The Nation* disdained the existing tariff because it served to insulate large industrial interests from

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304 “Coxeyism and the Interest Question,” *The Social Economist* 6, no. 6 (June, 1894): 345.

foreign competition and had depressed wages. In defining what it called “The Coxey Problem,” *The Nation* suggested that the “millionaires and the ironmasters’ were those receiving the benefits of tariff money, even though it was meant for the workers. *The Nation* conceded Coxey had called their bluff. Yet in the *Nation’s* view, Coxey’s Plan would no more reward hard working industrial laborers than would the repeal of the McKinley Tariff:

This is what Populism means and what Coxeyism means. Both are a widespread turning to Washington for relief on the part of that portion of the population which does not manufacture or mine, and cannot be protected by high duties on imports, namely the farmers and farm-laborers, and in fact everybody that is poor and in debt or distress.

In short, *The Nation* seemed frustrated by the tepid tariff repeal effort moving through Congress, and diminished it further by tying it to the Coxey phenomenon which it viewed as the most despicable form of Populist expression.305

Indeed, Coxey and Browne’s “crankish” behavior and ideas invited just this sort of incessant editorializing and satirical commentary. “Crank” was a commonly used moniker in the late nineteenth century to describe those who loudly and demonstrably challenged conventional thought and practice. Coxey and Browne thus played into the hands of those anti-crankish custodians of Gilded Age probity. For example, one such prominent social critic Eliza Lynn Linton thought Browne’s theosophy and belief in the millennium bordered on insanity. “How those [millenarians] who believe in this blissful state of universal peace and joy and deathlessness,” she wrote in *North American Review* in 1895, cannot accept “the facts of life as we know them?”

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She further derided the bicyclists loyal to Coxey’s Good Roads Plan as “exhibiting a crazy flight of transportation that required far too much concentration on keeping one’s balance.” Putting her views in an economic context, she unabashedly pronounced that “for those who can afford horses and carriages and Pullman cars and all the rest of it, a wheeled treadmill seems a queer kind of vehicle, and its popularity counts among the things which no fellow can understand.” Indeed Coxey himself acknowledged the crankism charge noting people accused him of having “wheels in his head.”

Yet in the spring of 1894, the Coxey story, for better or worse, dominated America’s front pages. It was a story made for the “new journalism.” The young “demons” who accompanied the March wrote their accounts as if writing a serial novel. As their story unfolded, they seemed to collectively realize the impact they were having. Baker, who would soon become one of the most famous of the muckrakers and eventually an advisor to President Woodrow Wilson, realized his stories appearing daily.

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306 Eliza Lynn Linton, “Cranks and Crazes,” North American Review 161, no. 469 (December, 1895):667-673;; R.J. Huggett, “Cranks, Conventionalists, and Geomorphology,” Area 34, No. 2 (June, 2002): 184; While addressing crankism in the context of the natural sciences, Huggett draws several conclusions that have distinct parallels to our understanding of nineteenth century cranks. He notes that the quantum leaps in understanding the Earth’s surface for example come from those “who are brave enough to suggest hypotheses that are far enough removed from conventional ideas to be deemed outrageous, but are not so far removed as to be dismissed as foolish.” (see page 184); Christian Boufisin, “Of Home Birth and Breeding: Eliza Lynn Linton and the Girl of the Period,” in The Girls Own: Cultural Histories of the Anglo American Girl 1830-1915, ed. Claudia Nelson and Lynne Vallone (Athens: University of Georgia Press)1994, 98-99. “Peace Army Growing,” The Chicago Record, 17 March 1894; Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 36; Schwantes also notes (48) that “a crank in its most literal manifestation is a handle to activate a piece of machinery. Who could tell whether one of the eccentrics whom society labeled cranks in the 1890’s might succeed in activating the social machinery that would resolve the contradiction between progress and poverty?” Indeed as time passed and Roosevelt met Coxey at Warm Springs prior to offering his New Deal (1932), Eisenhower signed the Interstate Highway System (1956), King marched on Washington (1963), and Nixon ended the gold standard (1971), Coxey and Browne’s once crankish world view seemed the stuff of vision rather than lunacy. Coxey visited President Elect Roosevelt in December 5, 1932 and presented him with a modified plan for public works, see “Roosevelt Confers with Governor Woording,” The Washington Post, 6 December 1932. Writing to Roosevelt seven years later on March 28, 1939, Coxey said to the President ‘I hope the Poem, “Rags make paper, paper makes money, money makes banks, banks make loans, loans make poverty, poverty makes rags,” that I presented to you at Warm Springs GA Dec 1932 has been analyzed by you as to how closely it describes our economic system, as it has produced an abundance of rags to make all the paper required to coin (print) all the legal tender money needed to bring recovery and restore prosperity.”
had directly resulted in attracting fresh recruits for Dr. J.H. Randall’s Industrial Army organizing in Chicago. Baker mused how he gradually came to understand the power of the press. “Here was I all unconsciously, a part of it. What was I doing with my share of that power” Baker asked himself rhetorically? His realization seemed to be shared by other reporters who made the journey. When the March reached Hagerstown Maryland in its last week, the Mayor held a dinner in honor of the dozen reporters who had remained with it since Massillon. As one reporter insightfully remarked that evening, “We are the cause of the very thing we follow.” Another reflected on what he and the other reporters were doing to convey a story and a cause they did not believe. In his diary of the March A.M. Nicoll readily acknowledged that even though the marchers were seldom friendly to the accompanying reporters, they did recognize that when the press was absent, their story could not be conveyed. As Stead concluded, not only was the coverage of Coxey’s March unprecedented, but the sheer cost of paying for the space of this “free advertising” would have ruined the wealthiest of millionaires.307

For almost five weeks, the press familiarized Coxey and his “Army,” connecting the event to millions of eager readers across America. On the one hand, their words that dwelled on the ordinary and routine, marginalized the seriousness of purpose of the March. On the other hand, their stories reflected an authentic and spontaneous energy of a determined core of followers that captured reader’s attention nationwide. What emerges over a century later in reading the totality of the press accounts is a story of remarkable persistence and commitment by a determined band of unemployed men engaged in the


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most direct form of democratic expression. Marching in foul conditions exacerbated by a cold spring, and having to overcome obstacles presented by rough terrain punctuated by unpaved roads, they would reach their final destination. Though small in numbers, the sheer physical feat of marching by foot from Massillon Ohio to Washington DC suggested a deeper commitment to Coxey’s Plan for jobs for the unemployed. Their collective feat allows us now to reclaim Coxey’s small “p” populist credentials even if these journalistic accounts in Coxey’s own time served to separate him from the populist moment.
CHAPTER 5: THE MARCH

“They are peaceful and earnest, and there is an eloquence in the patient dreariness of their plodding.”

―Stanley Waterloo

Born on an Easter Sunday in 1854, now some forty years later on an Easter Sunday in 1894, Coxey prepared to lead a hopeful Commonweal of the unemployed out of Massillon Ohio toward Washington to present his petition for Good Roads to the Congress. On the March 25th departure date the assembled press continued their speculation about the identity of “The Great Unknown.” However, the real unknown for these reporters and their faithful national readership concerned the March’s ultimate fate. Few observers seemed to think this disappointingly sparse assembly in its inherent disorder could actually reach the steps of the nation’s Capitol. Yet reflecting on the March in Vital Questions of the Day, Dr. James Boyd suggested that Coxey and Browne created an event that developed its own momentum. As Boyd insightfully observed, the March “…would prove attractive to all elements of discontent, and would grow by daily accretions, till finally [it] became an irresistible energy, compelling respectful sentiment and accomplishing its objective in spite of legislative obstacles.”

308 Vincent, Story of the Commonweal, 15; Baker, American Chronicle, 19;
Ironically, none of the states, or even the counties through which Coxey’s troupe marched seemed to evidence particular sympathy for the newly formed People’s Party (See Figure 13). However, that did not seem to translate into a lack of sympathy for Coxey’s cause. Ohio hosted one of the first formative conventions of the Farmers Alliance in 1891, where the People’s Party was actually birthed. However, the Ohio Alliance movement itself remained small and politically impotent. In a state where farmers remained prosperous, the two major parties each found ways to successfully attract the votes of those disgruntled farmers who might likely sympathize with the Populist’s message. The appeals of the established parties thus proved successful in limiting farmer support for official Populist candidates. In Ohio the People’s Party took on more recruits from the nascent union movement. Coxey himself would draw the most votes of any Populist candidate on the Ohio ballot later in 1894 when he ran for Congress. His alliance with labor leaders meant that the Ohio People’s Party banner would evidence a decided labor cast.\textsuperscript{310}

Similarly, in Pennsylvania, by 1894 the increasing dominance of the silver cause within the People’s Party seemed to alienate farmers who might otherwise be sympathetic. Moreover, at least in the eastern part of the state, farmers had largely escaped the two decade old depression that was at the root of the National Farmers Alliance movement. The few counties in Pennsylvania where the Populist Party fared reasonably well were those caught in a transition from a dying lumber industry to barely surviving farms. But these few counties were far removed from the Coxey route.

\textsuperscript{310} Michael Pierce, “Farmers and the Failure of Populism in Ohio, 1890-1891, Agricultural History 74, No. 1 (Winter, 2000) 58-85. Hicks, Populist Revolt, 209-211.
Nonetheless Coxey himself clearly drew support from those populist sympathizers along the March route, including small farmers, miners, and laborers. In preparation for the March Coxey reached out to the various networks of likely sympathizers. Yet as in Ohio, populism’s appeal in Pennsylvania had long seemed more pronounced among disgruntled industrial workers than farmers. There were 53 strikes in Pennsylvania in 1893, and when the March reached Homestead, the site of the largest and bloodiest strike in U.S. history in 1892, the Commonweal received its most triumphant welcome.311

Similarly in Maryland, while the Farmers Alliance formed some enclaves, the cooperative movement gained most strength in industrial settings. One contemporary scholar judged Texas and Maryland as having the strongest cooperative movements nationwide. In Maryland there were notable examples of worker cooperatives including furniture and textile workers in Baltimore. Yet this translated into a mere 796 votes for General Weaver in 1892, a fifth of what even the Prohibitionist candidate received. As with Ohio and Pennsylvania, the warm reception Coxey generally received spoke to something other than any formal allegiance to the Populist Party.312

311 Philip Klein and Ari Hoagenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973), 372; William E. Lyons, “Populism in Pennsylvania 1892-1901,” *Pennsylvania History* 32, No. 1 (January, 1965) 49-65; The Populist Party fared exceptionally poorly in Pennsylvania garnering less than 1% of the vote in the 1892 Presidential race though some local Populist candidates fared better including in Indiana County adjacent to where Coxey marched. Like Ohio (see Michael Pierce, “Farmers and the Failure of Populism in Ohio, 1890-91, *Agricultural History* 74, No. 1 (Winter, 2000) 58-85) where conditions should have allowed for Populist gains, the People’s Party never took hold. In Pennsylvania this is attributed largely to aversion to the silver cause, and in Ohio because the two established parties seemed particularly effective at winning the allegiance of small farmers (though this latter analysis is likely adaptable to Pennsylvania as well). Lyons noted that the Populist Convention which met in Harrisburg on May 1, 1894 sent a telegram in sympathy of Coxey’s March. Indeed the Pennsylvania People’s Party emerged from the earlier Greenback Labor Party that had nominated Coxey for state senate in 1885.

Indeed in each these states as well as nationally, the strength of “small p” populist sentiment did not necessarily correlate with the strength of the now formalized Populist Party. In the days leading up to departure Coxey tapped into the networks of authentic populist energy including local Populist Clubs, Coxey Clubs, Greenbackers, and Good Roads advocates. In his news reports from Massillon, Skinner detailed the extensive scope of Coxey’s outreach and the response it engendered. “We are being fortified through the petitions we have been sending out. Every Farmers Alliance in Pennsylvania has a petition and we feel considering all our influences, that the good farmers of the Keystone state will not permit our people to want,” Coxey declared on January 27, almost two months before the departure. The letters and telegrams that flowed into Massillon, and that Skinner detailed in his daily accounts, foreshadowed the reception the March would receive at virtually every stop. Many reported how they personally would help with money and supplies, and others how they had enlisted the support of their clubs or organizations.313

Within these social and economic networks of like-minded individuals, populism resonated and so too did Coxey. In the spring of 1894, as these energetic citizens convnened in their lodges and meeting halls along the March route, along came this travelling band of unemployed producers traipsing toward their nation’s capital. The very populist energy that these local joiners sought to express through their own various

313 “A Magnificent Faith,” Massillon Evening Independent, 27 January 1894; Typical of the letters detailed in Skinner’s accounts in the days leading up to the March is one (see “The Coxey Movement,” Massillon Evening Independent, 15 March 1894).from a “representative of organized labor” in Beaver Falls PA, “We have here a coming nation colony club. I told them it was their duty to make an organized move towards rendering your army substantial assistance.” Moreover, the reach of Coxey’s mailings was nationwide. On March 19, for example, D.H. Talbot of Sioux City Iowa sent regrets about not joining the March because his farm was about to be foreclosed. J.J, Palmer of Back Lick PA said he intended to supply two printing presses free and would gather up other supplies. “The J.S. Coxey Crusade,” Massillon Evening Independent, 20 March 1894.
affiliations seemed to be reflecting back to them as they witnessed this Petition of Boots before their eyes. More than any staunch allegiance to the ideas embraced by the formal Populist Party, the most plausible explanation of the consistently warm receptions the March received seems to be lie with the sympathy it aroused among those aligned with the producer’s cause. Though we must rely on newspaper accounts from which to judge the temperature of each local reception, the vast majority of those cheering and waving at the March seemed largely to be responding in some way to the multiple images it cast. Here, unedited, was this unassuming troupe of unemployed with its millennial and religious imagery, quietly marching to the nation’s capital in exercise of their right of free speech, seeking to enlist the government on behalf of the tillers and the toilers.

At the same time, when J. Brown of Pittsburgh wrote Coxey that “three fourths of the population of the city is with the movement,” he implied that another cohort clearly had reservations. Arguably not all along the March route shared in the enthusiasm. Undoubtedly many, having heard the rumors of an approaching “Army” or having read accounts of the March’s exploits were simply drawn to the roadside out of curiosity. For this cohort of inquisitive onlookers, Coxey’s Spectacle was clearly entertaining, if not perhaps amusing. Some of the more opportunistic observers even tried to recruit the March’s most colorful characters to perform in dime store museums. And beyond the cohort of the curious, were those concerned violence might ensue. Local officials charged with the safety of their towns reacted reflexively to the approaching horde of industrials. Their anxiety often resulted in armed preparations and the assemblage of local posses to intercept the arriving horde. Yet, as the account of the March below
suggests, these latter two categories, the curious and the anxious, seemed overwhelmed by those who genuinely welcomed the March and saw in it some hope for a better future.  

Relying principally on the scores of daily newspaper accounts detailing the March’s progress, this chapter thus seeks to present a composite narrative of the March spiced with quotes from the accounts of those dozen reporters who remained with the March over the 35 days from Massillon to Washington. At one level it thus represents a rendering of what Americans might well have read as they picked up their daily newspapers in the spring of 1894. While recognizing the press focused on the routine as well as the colorful, the accounts from which this composite is drawn provide insight into the way the March represented itself and thus insight into the public reaction it elicited. With few though notable exceptions, the March found itself warmly received during the course of its some four hundred mile journey.

**Departure**

On March 25, 1894, as church goers in Massillon made their way to Easter services, the marchers slowly began to assemble. By the end of an eventful Saturday, as the hotels filled and the town became abuzz, some two hundred men had made their way to a forming ground along the Tuscarawus River. Browne assigned each recruit to a commune, and then proceeded to present his first written order of the March instructing

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314 Skinner’s summation of several letters arriving at Coxey headquarters on March 22 includes one from J. Brown of Pittsburgh who declares that three fourths of the population of Pittsburgh is with the movement. “Lead your men like a new Joshua, and go ahead, as if God is with you, who shall dare to be against you?” “coming by the Thousand,” Massillon Evening Independent, 23 March 1894.
the men on the sequence of events for this Easter Sunday. An hour before their scheduled noon departure, the seven piece “Commonweal of Christ Brass Band” began its jangly tunes. Already some recruits had deserted. A freight train bound for Chicago came through Massillon the night before and apparently carted away at least fifty men who suddenly seemed possessed with second thoughts about this grand adventure. As the remaining men shuffled from their tents, Windy Oliver, the bugler, tried to rally them with his version of “Boots and Saddles.” But having drunk merrily with the newspaper correspondents the night before, his pathetic attempt was reported to be more wind than sound. Instead, at the ringing of the church bells to begin Easter services, either the Great Unknown or Browne gave the command to march.

Coxey looked pleased, bedecked in his usual Edwardian celluloid collar, he rode in one carriage driven by his black coachman “Snowball.” In another carriage, were his second wife, sister and infant son, Legal Tender. Coxey’s oldest son Jesse, mounted on a blooded stallion, wore a blue and gray ensemble to signify the union of opposing forces in the Civil War (see Figure 20). Symbolically, two years after the historic strike at Homestead, one of its central leaders, Hugh O’Donnell, was also prominently at the lead. Browne touched off his usual cowboy outfit with a white lace tie for this special occasion and sat proudly upon a white Percheron stallion named “Currier.” Behind Browne came astrologer Kirkland who had predicted the next month “to be a hummer in a cyclonic way.” The spontaneously assembled brass band, with J. Thayer animatedly conducting, was accompanied by Kirtland’s Glee Club” or the “hobo-brigade,” and a lead soloist music hall singer, Frank Fenton.
Adding to the colorful send off, some thirty colorful banners, prepared by Browne over the course of several weeks, now flapped in the breeze. The murals and banners were a montage of illustrations and cartoons, images and sayings, including the Commonweal’s trademark “Peace on Earth Good Will to toward men, but death to interest bearing bonds.” The Unknown, perched on his own majestic brown stallion darted back and forth shouting orders to the rank and file that followed the carriages and wagons. The march Quartermaster, “Weary” Bill Iler, drove the colorful Panorama Wagon, but remained despondent he could not ride separately at the head of the parade. In all the procession consisted of four covered wagons containing “camping outfits, baled straw, and several quarters of beef.”

Flag bearer Buchanan grasped the American flag at the head of 122 other marchers who had assembled in the public square this Easter Sunday morning. Cold and gray weather greeted the departure. Even its sympathetic chronicler, Vincent described the sight as a “grotesque, if not to say pitiable assemblage.” Later snow flurries appeared as they made their lunch stop. Without overcoats this chilly early spring, the harsh Midwestern weather tested the marcher’s resolve. Yet there appeared to be no desertions, and by the time they reached Canton later that day an estimated twenty thousand people had already greeted the March from the roadsides. Over the next five weeks thousands more would flock to the roadsides, wave from their factory windows, or gather near the edge of their farm fields to greet the March as a symbol of something amiss in a new corporate economy reeling from a depression with no end in sight.
Leaving Massillon, the procession itself, some marching two abreast, others single file, were followed by a crowd of some 2,000 on foot, riding in carriages and on horseback. As Vincent remarked, “old and young, ragged and well clothed, hungry and well fed, the clean and the dirty were all there, but all seemed cheerful and determined of purpose.” That determination would now carry them almost four hundred miles to the steps of the Capitol where Coxey hoped to deliver his plan for Good Roads and jobs directly to the people’s Congress.315

Ohio

The pleasant weather that greeted the 122 marchers as they set out from Massillon on Easter Sunday March 25, 1894, quickly turned to a snow storm accompanied by a “piercing wind.” With only a dozen of the hard looking men having overcoats, and already chilled to the bone, they were warmed at Reedurban by the presence of some 3,000 onlookers and a small lunch of bread, meat and canned salmon. Here Mrs. Coxey

315 The assessment of the range of the size of the Army over the five week period is based on extensive review of hundreds of newspaper accounts, but is still subject to debate. Interestingly contemporary observer W.T. Stead, within the confines of an article published in 1894 at one point suggests “he [Coxey] never had more than 500 men, and sometimes he had only 100,” and later notes “the 100 vagabonds who had started from Massillon had now grown to 600;” see W.T. Stead, “‘Coxeyism:’ A Character Sketch,” The Review of Reviews (July, 1894) 49, No. (none given): 52. This composite description of the March’s departure is compiled from several newspaper sources including, “Moving from Massillon,” The Evening Independent (Massillon OH), 26 March 1894; “Not Wholly a Myth,” The Washington Post, 25 March 1894; “What Coxey Wants,” The Milwaukee Journal, 24 March 1894; Vincent, 56. “To Sing for the Army,” The Chicago Record, 21 March 1894; “On the March,” Boston Daily Globe, 26 March 1894; “In Camp at Canton,” Chicago Daily News, 26 March 1894; “Stewart’s Advice,” Rocky Mountain News, 26 March 1894; “Off for Washington,” The Milwaukee Journal, 26 March 1894. Other firsthand accounts include Browne, When Coxey's Army March (sic) 8-9; Baker, American Chronicle 13-15. Also corroborating this synthesis are McMurry, Coxey’s Army 46-48; Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 42-48; and George A. Gipe, “Rebel in a Wing Collar,” American Heritage 18, no.1, (December, 1966):25. As with any historical accounts there are significant conflicts in various versions of the exact time of the March’s departure and the number of men who were a part of the March. For example in “Mr. Coxey's March,” The Bismarck Daily Tribune, 26 March 1894, the time given for departure is 12:30, which was the published time in original schedules; but both Browne and Baker who were there say the March departed at 11 a.m. There also within these accounts discrepancies in the numbers of men. Vincent, Story of the Commonweal, 56, puts the number at 122 and Schwantes Coxey’s Army agrees (other news accounts range from 75 to 200).McMurry in his earlier version of Coxey's Army refers to the “hundred industrials.”
bade farewell to her husband and Jesse. The March then proceeded on toward Canton, which lay down the windswept road another two hours. According to Vincent some 20,000 people gathered in the streets of Canton to welcome the marchers, though most accounts suggest it was closer to 10,000. Nonetheless, it was an impressive turnout for a city of 26,000 by the 1890 census. And, regardless of the number, the earlier threats of force receded and even the local “police force joined in applauding the March.”

During their first night on the road at their newly pitched Camp Lexington, the men tried to endure the cold in the big circus tent. Some slept next to the horses for warmth. But for some the cold was too hard to endure and sent them to the warmer stone floor in the police station seeking warmth. Others simply scattered. As those remaining awoke the next morning they found an inch of fresh snow on the ground. They also discovered Coxey and Browne had repaired to a local hotel for the night. This revelation naturally caused some dissension. So too did the incessant orders issued by the Great Unknown, whose “arrogant spirit” proved to be an irritant for many. Matters could have grown much worse. Less than twenty four hours on the road, already the commissary wagon’s supplies dwindled dramatically. Yet in Canton, as would happen often in the days ahead, the local towns people came forward donating food, in this case two hundred boiled hams, two hundred loaves of bread, five bushels of potatoes, baked beans and an abundance of other edibles.

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Meanwhile, reports that some 3,000 new recruits would be joining the Commonweal at the Pennsylvania border boosted Coxey’s spirits. Every day the press carried stories of new recruits on their way from cities across the country. With the astrologer Cyclone Kirtland confidently predicting the March to be “the grandest movement the world has ever known,” Coxey now estimated he would be followed by some fifteen thousand men into Washington. Yet on the morning of March 26, following this very first cold night on the road, a mere seventy five soldiers marched out of Canton. Among the missing was red nosed bugler Windy Oliver, who reportedly left behind his bugle and an empty flask of whiskey.318

By eleven o’clock the March continued along the “Washington Trail,” paralleling the Pennsylvania Railroad. Only a few years before, this now poor excuse for a road had served as a route for the Underground Railroad. With their own black standard bearer, Buchanan, still in the lead, the marchers trudged wearily along in the twenty degree chill, already dirty and ill clothed for the cold weather. Unfortunately this would remain their condition throughout the March. As they grew colder, they occasionally lapsed into a double time march in an attempt to warm. At last arriving in Louisville, Ohio some thirteen cold and dreary miles down the road from Canton, the marchers discovered the tiny town’s Mayor guarding the its precious brewery with a shotgun. However, seeing the marchers were unarmed and bearing religious banners, he allowed them to enter peaceably. They established a camp near the town woodpile which was quickly dubbed Camp Peffer for the Populist Kansas Senator who introduced

Coxey’s Good Roads Plan as legislation and proposed a welcoming resolution. Despite the Mayor’s initial hostile bearing, it did not take long for him to warm to the marchers. Seeing the men’s frozen condition, he invited them to sleep on the floor in a cramped room in the town hall. Thus with three cheers, the marchers quickly abandoned their Camp Peffer and headed to their new indoor quarters and the “warmth” of a cold floor. 319

As Coxey and Browne addressed local residents at the downtown theater with speeches on Good Roads and the Second Coming, other Commonwealers found their way to a Louisville saloon where a local resident decided to threaten them with a gun. The Mayor quickly quelled the late evening disturbance, but it became more complicated when the gun wielding local discovered he lost his watch. Returning from their speeches, Coxey and Browne met with the Mayor in a hastily convened mock court under the flaps of the Commonweal headquarters tent. After hearing the passionate stories of those on both sides of the robbery, the allegations against Coxey’s men were dismissed. But, as Baker noted, with the watch still missing, suspicions reflexively turned to the African-American standard bearer Buchanan. Browne quickly intervened yelling at Buchanan for all to hear, “Don’t you open your gab.” Browne’s admonition seemed to recall his contemptuous attacks on Chinese Americans earlier in his career. Despite this instance of reflexive prejudice, during the March Browne seemed quite comfortable with

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319 Schwantes, Coxey’s March, 53; Browne and McDevitt, When Coxey’s ‘Army’ Marched, 9; “March of the Tramps,” The North American 27 March 1894, 1. Unbeknownst to the marchers, Senator Peffer on this very day issued his own criticism of the March found in “Lacks But Two Hundred,” New York Times 28 March 1894; and Coxey’s alleged financial predicament (i.e., in arrears on his mortgage) see “Coxey Out of Cash,” Chicago Daily News, 27 March 1894; Also “What the Heavenly Twins Want,” The Washington Post 27 March 1894 says: “Most of his property is heavily mortgaged, and there is, in particular a valuable stud horse to which he is romantically attached, but upon which he still owes an unpaid balance of $24,000. “Too Cold for Coxey,” The Atlanta Constitution, 27 March 1894. Coxey’s letter in response to criticism about the March from Nevada Senator Stewart appear in several papers see “Coxey’s Men are Tired,” The Washington Post, 27 March 1894.
the diversity of the March and, in particular, the prominence it provided African Americans.  

With this incident behind them, the next morning, March 27, after a breakfast of boiled potatoes and cold ham, the men took to the road about nine o’clock, but not without giving three rousing cheers for the “won over” Louisville Mayor. The Commonweal, sporting some fifty new recruits, had grown to 143 as it made its way toward Alliance. The ground still had several inches of snow and the weather turned even colder. An hour outside Louisville it began to snow again. Yet, in spite of the elements and though suffering a cold, The Great Unknown barked his orders for the marchers to quickstep repeatedly during their fourteen mile journey. And quickstep they did, arriving in Alliance about one o’clock, a mere four hours after leaving Louisville. The soldiers were understandably footsore after only two days on the road. Greeted by some 3,000 onlookers, the men immediately reached out to the community for replacements for their worn shoes and frozen coats. The Alliance citizenry obliged and also provided a commissary stocked with plenty of food, though by dinner it seemed to have disappeared and a sparse meal caused much grumbling among these already weary travelers.

As they pitched Camp Bunker Hill outside of Alliance, as many as one hundred new recruits arrived to shore up the numbers that had dwindled in the first forty eight hours since leaving Massillon. Supplies also continued to make their

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320 ‘Army is in Trouble,” The Chicago Record, 26 March 1894.
way to the camp. A local watchmaker had abandoned his business for a day and apparently went door to door in Alliance raising supplies for the frost bitten soldiers. Perhaps sensing that the men needed encouragement to stay with the fledgling venture, Coxey sat on an upended box in the main tent that evening eating the same bread and cheese the men ate, while sipping on unsweetened coffee. He also came bearing two skillets for the African American cook Tom Murphy who was said to have been a chef on a Mississippi steamer. Yet Coxey’s chumming with the men was short lived. Later that evening he departed by train for Chicago. As the earlier warm dinner wore off, the men could be seen frostily emerging from the large sleeping tent heading for the town lockup and a warmer place to sleep.322

Since the departure from Massillon, the press had speculated about Coxey’s finances and his aggressive creditors. So when Coxey left the March for Chicago to sell some of his prize trotters at an auction, it remained unclear whether he would use his remaining funds to both pay his debts and finance the March. Browne suggested to reporters that Coxey now had hardly had enough money to buy his own train ticket and speculation turned to whether the March might dissolve sooner than later simply because Coxey could no longer finance it. Yet for the men left behind in Alliance on March 27 the immediate concern was simply to stay warm through another cold early spring evening.323

323 “Rumor that Coxey will Desert,” The Chicago Record, 25 March 1894. When Coxey landed at the Chicago stock yards he discovered that the very horses he wanted to sell had commanded only $450, well short of the $1,000 he sought. He had reportedly engaged in discussions about the sale of Acolyte, his prize winning, $40,000 dollar stallion. See “Coxey Visits Chicago for a Day,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 29 March 1894; and “Have Lots of
At day break on the fourth day of the March, a new bugler known only as “Tooting Charley” rallied the men with “Boots and Saddles,” and the Unknown happily distributed extra clothing donated by the locals. With the bevy of new recruits, almost two hundred men set out toward Salem, though not all of them seemed to be marching and only 79 would arrive there by foot. The others reportedly hopped on trains and rode rather than marched to this next encampment. This so-called “train cheating” had, since the Civil War, become an accepted hobo practice, and far different from what occurred with the more violent commandeering of trains in the west by other industrial armies. Indeed for Coxey’s March this became the routine for a few days until Browne called a halt to it. Those who actually did endure the fourteen miles to Salem, did not arrive until four in the afternoon, taking only a short break for lunch at Beloit. Along the route, they had to brave yet more inclement weather, being summoned again and again to pull the heavy wagons out of the muck, including Browne’s prized panorama wagon. Along the way Professor Freeman, the infamous loud singer, tried to lift the men’s spirits singing in his mellifluous voice what seemed hour long songs with the rest of the men occasionally serving as an imperfect chorus.  

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As they trudged toward Salem, they walked into the teeth of a driving, wet snow storm. Despite these harsh conditions, the townspeople lined the streets and called from the windows. A local populist organizer from the Buckeye Engine Works had rallied this small Quaker town days before. This evening Browne, in Coxey’s absence, held forth at the town’s Opera House to an enthusiastic and packed crowd of some twelve hundred people. Though Mayor John Northrop had earlier in the week cautioned his fellow citizens about “some erratic human specimens” who were “not so desirable,” on this evening he provided the men with two sleeping halls, including the local armory. In addition, the welcoming townspeople provided plenty of food including ten yards of bologna and seventy nine fresh eggs. This warm welcome of Salem townspeople encouraged the men as they pitched Camp Diggs, in honor of the prominent Kansas Populist, Annie Diggs, who would later join the March as its first woman when it reached the outskirts of Washington.  

As morning broke at Camp Diggs, Buchanan administered haircuts to the troops. As he prepared to put the finishing touches on the now well coiffed marchers, some of the Salem locals came through the camp providing much needed new coats and pairs of shoes. Coxey’s ad hoc logistical plan premised upon a millenarian optimism of being able to live off the good will of those in these many towns and hamlets encountered along the March route, indeed seemed to be working. Buoyed by their generosity, the men now seemed every bit ready to inch their way closer to the Pennsylvania border. 

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326 “Dead in the Street,” The Chicago Record, 30 March 1894.
With the weather turning a bit milder, the route from Salem to Columbiana took the Commonweal through mining towns including Washingtonville, where Vincent observed striking miners quietly watching the procession, seemingly envious, he thought, that their unemployed brethren had taken to the road to protest their condition. Yet unlike Pittsburgh later, these laborers did not join the March, even if for a few miles. Indeed in this catholic region it was reported that Browne’s religious symbolism was particularly offensive. In fact, as they moved toward the little town of Leetonia, Browne was asked by local officials not to unfurl his religious banners. Perhaps feeling the chillier reception in this region, it was here that Browne turned on the press, labeling them the “Argus Eyed Demons from Hell.” Yet, as in the other towns along the route, as the hours progressed, relationships grew warmer. The Mayor of the town later would lead the men to a well heated nail shop where they were plentifully fed before moving on to Columbiana for the evening. Indeed at this destination the marchers encountered what Browne described as “the warmest greeting of the entire trip,” if not in number in spirit, as 300 townspeople lined the road to greet the approaching March. This town was home to the father of one of the more colorful marcher’s who went by the nickname “Oklahoma Sam,” a rugged cowboy who worked on Coxey’s horse farm outside Massillon. As in the towns before, the locals responded to the entreaties of town local John Harold’s Populist Club and the fifty three member “Coxey Club,” by filling two store rooms with food, including some one thousand loaves of bread. These provisions were particularly welcomed by seventy five weary soldiers who had tramped this day along snowy roads, with the other half again hopping a train. The Commonweal struck Camp Trenton this night at an old
foundry. The fires warmed the men, who rested comfortably on the earthen floor. The local Populist Club, run by one John Harold, outdid itself by collecting rations. Improving matters even more, Coxey arrived back in Columbiana from Chicago on the late train. The men gave him a warm return greeting. So too, did those attending his speech that night. In fact, one local raced up to embrace Coxey causing the understated Coxey flush with embarrassment. 327

The men awoke on a sunny Friday morning, to find that the earthen floors at Camp Trenton had turned to soft clay. They found themselves caked with grime. But at nine o’clock, and with three rousing cheers for Oklahoma Sam and his hospitable hometown, the March resumed toward East Palestine Ohio, some ten miles down the road. It was soon met by sympathizers carrying a bouquet, and a sixty member brass band from Mount Hope College. Students carrying banners reading “Long Live Coxey,” and “On to Washington” accompanied the marchers into a town fully decorated to welcome them.

However, not every town was as welcoming. In East Palestine later that afternoon, the town placed fifteen additional constables on duty and forbade the saloon keepers to serve liquor. Though a pottery and mining town filled with hard workers thought to be sympathetic to the March, these citizens seemed more cold and curious than welcoming. The Commonweal had to clear Camp Gompers, named in honor of the President of the American Federation of Labor. For the first time during this first week of

the March the men were ordered to sleep in their tents. Unlike most towns where a cohort of sympathizers rallied support, East Palestine proved an exception. Purportedly, with the leading Coxey ally in town bed ridden with the mumps, and with Mayor strongly opposed to the whole affair, the Commonweal decided best to keep to its own business. At their camp on the local fair grounds the men sat around camp fires and sang songs far into the night.328

Homestead

The next day (March 31), the Army entered Pennsylvania at Darlington. Rumors swirled that the young Democratic Governor of Pennsylvania, Robert E. Pattison, still haunted by the untenable political quandary he had found himself in during the 1892 Homestead strike, would summon the state’s National Guard in order to block the entry of the March into the Commonwealth. But the nation’s youngest, and one of its most promising governors, allowed the March to cross the border without even the hint of militia. For the moment, he felt the Pittsburgh police sufficient to the task. Oklahoma Sam had already ridden ahead the night before to scout for possible armed resistance. As the Commonweal crossed the state line Browne anxiously rode ahead to see if anything unusual might mark the boundary between the two states. But he saw nothing. The Commonweal entered a town fittingly called New Galilee that sat appropriately on the banks of the Jordan River, only to find townspeople sleeping the day away.

As it turned out, New Galilee proved little more hospitable than their previous encampment, save for a local constable. Thomas McGowan seemed the only one interested in making sure the men were fed and cared for at their new camp, named Marion Butler in honor of the President of the National Farmer’s Alliance. However, the camp did attract few onlookers in this sparsely populated area. Encouraged by these visitors, Browne chose to call a Sunday service on this Saturday evening and spoke passionately about the virtues of theosophy. His sermon attracted a couple hundred of the curious, who were seated on hastily and awkwardly made wood benches constructed from lumber lying outside of a vacant foundry. Browne held forth under the stars, and despite a chilly wind the crowd seemed to appreciate his message.329

The March had now stayed its course for a week. As they entered the Beaver Valley of Pennsylvania, the Commonweal now started to encounter much larger welcoming crowds and took on a revived momentum. People began streaming out of their homes and to the roadside to cheer the March as it passed. It seemed as if somehow all 30,000 people in the Beaver Valley wanted to push the marchers toward Washington. One woman even asked a reticent Coxey to kiss her baby. By two o’clock, Buchanan, still proudly bearing the flag, led the marchers in columns of two into Beaver Falls with colorfully dressed bicycle men escorting the parade into town. The nation’s bicycle

329 For discussion of Governor Pattison’s conflicted role in the Homestead Strike of 1892 see Les Standiford, Meet You in Hell (New York: Three River Press, 2005), 187-88;190-2; On his affirmation of the adequacy of the Pittsburgh police see “Coxey’s Army Starts,” The Washington Post, 26 March 1894; Browne, When Coxey’s Army Marcht (sic), 10; “Army Meets a Frost,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 31 March 1894; “Two Hundred in Line,” The Washington Post, 1 April 1894; “Coxey’s Army at Camp Marion Butler,” Raleigh News Observer-Chronicle, 4 April 1894; see also Vincent, Commonweal, 68. “Kissed Little Peter,” The Chicago Record, 2 April 1894; See James L. Hunt, Marion Butler (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2003. Marion Butler was head of the North Carolina Farmers Alliance and later became a Populist Senator from the state, after advocating fusion with the Republicans. Generally an advocate of free silver, he took reformist views toward the nation’s monetary system that would have allied him with Coxey.
enthusiasts who wholeheartedly supported Coxey’s Good Roads campaign became a fanciful part of the large crowd that also included electric cars filled with passengers waving and shouting encouragement. Women came from their homes in new spring bonnets and men wore their finest Sunday clothes. A festive mood permeated this industrial valley and local residents had collected over five tons of food and other stores for the Marchers. Coxey welcomed the outpouring of supplies. The March would soon reach the Blue Ridge Mountains where he worried food might be scarce.

America’s blossoming trade union movement was strong in this region of Pennsylvania, and new recruits now arrived to swell the Commonweal’s ranks. The *Pittsburgh Press* explained, “There is existing between workingmen an affinity that on such occasions as this makes them all of a kin.” The March now numbered some two hundred and seventy men and would soon swell to about twice that size as it moved through this industrial valley. They struck Camp Valley Forge on a scenic parcel of land perched on College Hill on the Beaver River right beneath Geneva College. When the College Chancellor told his students not to leave their rooms, a near mutiny ensued. The students wanted to be part of an estimated 12,000 that made their way to the camp that night to cheer on the grateful marchers.

Amidst the bustle and excitement of this day, 150 or so new recruits joined the Commonweal necessitating the formation of another new Commune that they named after the Astrologer “Cyclone” Kirtland. Throughout the night the townspeople flocked to the camp, as did 18 new recruits. One newspaper summarized it “A Great Day for

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Coxey.” The Bellamyites, “Coming Nation Club,” and the Producerist’s “Economic Literary Society” all spread the word of its arrival and turned out sympathetic well wishers in greater numbers and with more enthusiasm than any town before. When the March broke camp the next morning for its longest journey yet, 18 miles to Sewickly, the Commonwealers gave three rousing cheers for the hospitable citizens of Beaver Falls.331

Though the reception along the route warmed, the weather remained cool and crisp as the March, now larger than ever, headed out of Beaver Falls on April 2. A phalanx of bicyclists and a hundred or so college men who had designed their own colorful banners accompanied the marchers to the city limits. They raised spirited yells bringing smiles to the usually sullen faces of the marching tramps. Throughout the day the outpouring continued as the Commonweal marched through the picturesque Pennsylvania countryside. Every little town and hamlet—Kenwood, New Brighton, Rochester, Baden and Economy—seemed to find their own ways to show their allegiance to the men and their cause. Workingmen from Aliquippa joined the March in Conway and marched for a few miles in support. Factory girls in Rochester ran to the roadside to cheer the men along. In Economy the engaging Mayor welcomed the marchers serving a lunch on a bank surrounded by budding apple trees that had begun to turn green in the early spring. The citizens of Economy outdid themselves supplying some hundred pounds of delicious ham, twenty bushel baskets of freshly baked bread, and two soap boxes full of boiled eggs. Throughout the long day, this outpouring of

enthusiasm spurred the Marchers along. One observer described it as “a continuous ovation” from its beginning to its end.332

Continuing through the Ohio River Valley after lunch, more cheering crowds greeted the Marchers in Fair Oaks, Leetsdale, Shields, Edgeworth, and Quaker Valley. In Rochester some two thousand employees from a local factory were so ebullient in their greeting that Coxey broke the brim of his hat waving back to them. Though they predictably encountered a frosty reception in the wealthy, upper class suburb of Sewickley just outside Pittsburgh, this was a brief interlude to what would now be a triumphant March as they proceeded down through the Monongahela Valley toward Pittsburgh. The echoes of the Homestead Strike still reverberated two years later as they approached the famous Carnegie Works. Here, the very sight of Coxey and his band of the unemployed evoked memories of the strikers. As the Boston Globe reported, “No man whose sympathies are with the working class could say a word against Coxey.” This was the industrial heartland and the residents warmed to those who honored the contribution of the humble producer. As the Commonweal now made its way from Sewickley toward Allegheny, the crowds grew even larger than the two days before. Shops and schools closed for the approaching parade.333

At the last minute the police tried to change the March’s route to avoid areas they thought most sympathetic to Coxey. But the plan was foiled. The crowds found their way to witness the tiny March. The road along the Monongahela River’s side soon became packed with onlookers wearing red, white and blue Coxey badges.

332 “Like Gabriel’s Horn,” The Chicago Record, 3 April 1894; McMurry, Coxey’s Army, 77
Streaming forward to see the March as it went by, they delivered what seemed a continuing ovation. At points along the way the crowd was estimated to be lined up some forty deep. The March that had steadily replenished itself and now consisted of about three hundred men was escorted into Allegheny by some eight hundred more sympathizers, including the ever present bicyclists and a brass band. They were greeted with banners and songs and everywhere cheers. Even local bakers had the word “Coxey” emblematically in the frosting on their cakes in window displays.

Up the New Brighton Road near Allegheny the marchers proceeded on toward the Homestead Works. Police wearing helmets tried to hold back the surging crowds. But to no avail. By noon the traffic came to a virtual standstill even though the route taken detoured the original one planned. Union men including the iron molders, boilermakers, bakers and pattern-makers all joined the procession for the final mile. Young men and boys hung from the telegraph poles that would soon burn hot with this story of “Coxey’s Big Day.”

Years later Baker wrote of the moment, “I shall never forget as long as I live the sight of that utterly fantastic, indescribably grotesque procession swinging down that little hill through the city of Allegheny singing with a roar of exultation a song in honor of Coxey’s men set to the tune of ‘Marching through Georgia.’” As Baker wrote in his lead that day:

Pittsburgh, Pa. April 3__The newsboys on the street corners have been calling ‘Coxey! Coxey! Coxey!’ all day long. The crowds packed forty deep on the dusty pavements stood for hours and shouted ‘Coxey! Coxey!’ until they were horse.

334 “Was Coxey’s Big Day,” The Chicago Record, 4 April 1894; “Welcomed by Thousands,” Boston Daily Globe, 4 April 1894; see also Vincent, Story of the Commonweal 73-76; McMurry, Coxey’s Army 79-91; Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 54-57. “Engulfed in a Crowd,” Chicago Daily News, 4 April 1894.
Shop girls whispered ‘Coxey,’ to one another in the half deserted stores. The children in the public schools were dismissed because Coxey was coming to town, and they danced merrily away with eyes as round as saucers to catch a glimpse of Coxey and hear him speak.335

From virtually every window people were yelling “Coxey!” and women would rush into the way of the procession and up to the inconspicuous man the press dubbed the “General” and fervently whisper “God Bless You.” As the March moved steadily closer to city center, the crowds simply overwhelmed the police force, and the dust clouds from the mob at times became blinding. It was all that one Captain Murphy could do when the marchers reached the Allegheny baseball field to close the gates against the oncoming crush of humanity. Even then, many admirers made it into the next encampment named Camp Kirtland for the March’s eccentric and beloved astrologer.336

Coxey’s men would now have to wait in Allegheny the entire day of April 4 before making their final triumphant march through the streets of Pittsburgh. On Wednesday April 4 the marchers found themselves effectively incarcerated behind the fences of their encampment at the local ball field. The crowds having dissipated, the police could now assert their authority. Perhaps motivated by the ongoing labor violence in the coke districts south of Pittsburgh, the police actually arrested forty two of Coxey’s men for vagrancy the night before and sentenced them for up to thirty days. Police also stopped those Commonwealers who wanted to attend Coxey’s nightly speech. They surrounded the encampment with force despite Browne’s loud protestations. Even when

335 “Was Coxey’s Big Day,” The Chicago Record, 4 April 1894.
the men tried to sneak away to gather up materials to repair their torn circus tent, they were arrested by the local gendarmes.\textsuperscript{337}

Despite the police harassment, Coxey proceeded to give his customary speech on Good Roads to a packed audience. At the Monongahela River wharf Coxey spoke to an estimated eight thousand people, where the sheer crush of the crowd caused one of his carriage tires to break. Later that evening he spoke to a similarly packed house at the Palace Theater in Allegheny. In fact there were so many waiting to hear Coxey, that the over flow crowd followed Browne back to the river wharf where the “Calistoga Cowboy” held forth on theosophy and how the \textit{Commonweal} represented the second coming.\textsuperscript{338}

To overcome the stubborn Allegheny police, Coxey enlisted the negotiating skills of \textit{Chicago Tribune} reporter Clifton Sparks, whom Coxey increasingly found useful in such predicaments. Sparks pleas to the local chief resulted in the release of the March from its confinement at Exposition Park. Sparks also skillfully persuaded authorities to dispense with the thirty day sentences of those Marchers still in a local lock up as well as those who had served time in Allegheny’s jail quarters. With this beneficent grant of clemency, Browne’s attempt to lead the marchers in “three groans” for the Chief and Superintendent of the Allegheny police, instead resulted in three cheers. Now at last the Commonweal departed this city on their way toward Homestead. After what might be charitably described as a day of fitful rest, it proceeded to march through the streets of


\textsuperscript{338} “Coxey’s Men In Jail,” \textit{The Chicago Record}, 5 April 5, 1894; “Recruits in the Workhouse,” \textit{The North American}, 5 April 1894.
Pittsburgh donning the new vests and socks and three hundred pairs of new shoes provided them by “Kaufman’s Great Store.”

Fresh from this twenty four hour interlude, the ever expanding March of almost five hundred now traipsed down the winding, uneven Brownsville road toward historic Homestead. The Commonweal had taken on about one hundred new recruits described generally as “Bohemians and Slavs.” Browne assigned them to a special commune fittingly called “Pittsburgh,” realizing they might not be long for the March. In this center of industry with its sympathetic workingmen and families, the men were greeted by an estimated 100,000 cheering people. Local union organizers, populist sympathizers, and Coxey Club members, had all turned out and recruited their fellow citizens in a massive show of labor support. The Keystone Drum Corps now accompanied the March. The usual procession included its flag bearer, Buchanan at the lead, with Oklahoma Sam, Browne, and Jesse Coxey all on horseback, followed by Coxey in his phaeton with the demons and a new gaggle of local reporters trailing the procession. The Great Unknown rode furtively back and forth barking his orders. As they moved along the crowded streets in the industrial neighborhoods where the working men at the Jones and Laughlin Steelworks lived, hundreds of men fell in line behind Coxey’s soldiers of peace. At one point on this festive day an estimated two thousand men joined the marching ranks. This now truly industrial army in the shadows of the legendary Homestead Steelworks now encountered a driving rainstorm. In an irony not

lost on this day of triumphant entry into the historic steel town, the nephew of Henry Clay Frick or Andrew Carnegie, depending on your version of the story, joined Coxey’s ranks in a symbolic act of defiance against management’s efforts to break the union two years before. Having endured a driving rain storm, the March finally made its quarters this night in an old and cramped ice house. It found itself having to turn away new recruits as Coxey grew increasingly concerned that his Commonweal had grown too large. Coxey also appointed a new recruit Alexander “Cheeky” Childs to take over the dwindling commissary.  

From the start of the fourteen mile journey on April 6, crowds again cheered mightily as the marchers passed the famous Carnegie Steelworks. The crowds lining the route out of Homestead again swelled into the thousands. By the time the March reached Duquesne, a large group of iron workers accompanied it, all now marching across the bridge to McKeesport. As they entered the city a brass band and town officials turned out to greet them. When they reached McKeesport workers at the local Tube Works met the marchers and escorted them through a toll gate to the outskirts of town. There they struck camp in a circus ground in an open field near Reynoldston on the edge of town.

Now the fully loaded commissary wagon and the other wagons carrying needed supplies broke down in the mud and did not reach camp until well into the

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340 "Afraid of His Army," *Chicago Daily Tribune,* 7 April 1894. “Coxey Wins Recruits,” *Chicago Daily,* 6 April 1894; “Marched Through Pittsburgh,” *The Atlanta Constitution,* 6 April 1894; “Coxey at Homestead,” *The Washington Post,* 6 April 1894; “Coxey is Victorious,” *The Chicago Record,* 6 April 1894; See also McMurry, *Coxey’s Army,* 89-91; The *New York Times* for example reported Childs to be nephew of Frick, as did other papers see “Coxey Has a New Commissary,” *New York Times,* 6 April 1894; However, Baker’s account suggests he was a nephew of Andrew Carnegie see “To March with Coxey,” *The Chicago Record,* 6 April 1894.
evening. The wagons seemed to be in need of constant repair and the costs for these began to mount up. Coxey grew increasingly concerned. Usually they would raise from twenty to fifty dollars between these appearances and allowing visitors to the camp. However, the money that came from charging for public entrance to the camps, or from the nightly speeches on Good Roads and Theosophy hardly covered the cost of these constant repairs, including a new, though undersized tent Coxey had purchased to replace the torn circus tent. This night as Coxey and Browne spoke to a gathering of over two thousand people at the Altmeyer Theater. 341

The next day’s long eighteen mile march from McKeesport to Monongahela City kept the Commonweal squarely in the heart of Pennsylvania’s thriving industrial belt with steel mills, oil derricks and coal mines all in plain view. This, the March’s longest single day’s trek, happened to put them squarely in the teeth of yet another violent spring storm. The March quickly lost many of its newest recruits as these local sympathizers, swept up in the euphoria of the last several days, returned home.

Meanwhile, the core of Coxey’s Commonweal again faced the physical realities of the March. Even after a hearty and well received lunch arranged by the local Populist Club at Elizabethtown, the skies opened near Panghorn Hollow and a torrential spring downpour sent the marchers scurrying for caves, barns and any shelter they could find. In spite of the weather, the lack of sleeping quarters, and spotty meals, the remaining marchers seemed all the more determined to move forward. As Vincent describes, “They

slipped, they stumbled and fell, yet they marched onward in the awful slush and mire, until the cheering lights of the Monongahela could be seen in the distance.” (See Figure 14)

As the marchers approached McKeesport by twilight, the warm welcome they had received throughout the valley continued, complete with the ever present brass bands and a torchlight parade that took the marchers to a barn where they were to stay for the night. As the men set up camp, the indefatigable Coxey and Browne went to the Bayers Hotel and spoke from the verandah to some 5,000 people who had waited patiently through the evening to hear them. Back at the camp the men’s mood had grown somber. They had marched farther this day than on any day previously, and through unsettled spring weather. They were tired and still chilled. As they tried to settle into their quarters usually meant for farm animals, the jolly atmosphere created by the earlier reception in working class Pennsylvania seemed to evaporate in the chilly air of early spring.342

**Blue Ridge**

Nor did the next day’s leg provide any respite for the weary marchers still wet from the day before. Many now sported colds and others had become seriously sick. As the March wore on, the press would warn that the men were “disease couriers.” A chief public health official warned that the gathering armies in various parts of the country could cause a smallpox epidemic. Yet as they limped forward they continued to find occasional relief in the smiles and warm remarks of well wishers gathered by the sides of

the roads. They seemed to be constantly cheering them on. This day they were headed to Camp Chicago near Brownsville (See Figure 15), though as was becoming the custom, local sympathizers had secured two halls to house the men for the night. They were at the base of the mountains, and their eventual journey to Uniontown would take them to the summit of the steep Blue Ridge Mountains. It would require all of their energy. Adding to this formidable challenge, the route would also be through regions experiencing labor unrest. Thousands of strikers had left their coal and coke operations and were moving about the region to protest conditions and wages, much as they had done when Coxey was growing up. Coxey grew increasingly concerned for the marcher’s safety. He also recognized their flagging stamina and fragile morale. As Baker wrote: “Lack of provisions, police interference, impatient creditors, mountain ranges, internal dissension, and a hundred and one less painful obstacles had haunted him by daylight and dark…”343

By April 9, the March had progressed some one hundred and fifty “farmer’s miles.” The odometer on Coxey’s phaeton actually showed some 218 miles as the March now began its third week. For the most part, it had proceeded along rutted paths that were often nothing more than dried out creek beds with rocks so large they had to be moved to avoid damage to the wagons. Yet finally, just outside of Brownsville, the marchers reached the National Pike that too had grown decrepit after years of neglect, a shadow of what Henry Clay had envisioned.344

344 “Coxey’s Rocky Road,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 9 April 1894.
At the beginning of their twelve mile journey on this day, yet another challenging obstacle emerged. Only two miles east of Brownsville, the Commonweal met an intransigent toll keeper, one Mrs. Clabaugh. Having let some of the initial wagons pass, this formidable female presence now asked Browne to pay the full toll. Taken aback for a moment, Browne quickly regained his customary theatrical form. He suggested that just as a funeral procession might pass, so too should this March since it commemorated the death of a “system.” Mrs. Clabaugh seemed unimpressed by this or several other explanations Browne gave, including that the Commonweal was a sacred gathering. Coxey now felt obliged to step in as he usually did, to settle the escalating tiff. But this day Coxey himself became so flummoxed with the toll keeper that he left in a huff, along with Browne to search out a lawyer in town that might help settle the dispute. Returning to confront Mrs. Clabaugh, but sans lawyer, Coxey reluctantly agreed to pay the one dollar and eighty seven cent toll in pennies and nickels. He emerged from the embarrassment with a toll slip reading “J.S. Coxey pays under protest; Received Payment.” But then, in a voice loud enough for all to hear threatened to sue the toll authority.345

The March proceeded along the Blue Ridge of the Alleghenies toward Uniontown. Schools along the route were dismissed and students climbed onto stone fences to cheer on the marchers as they tramped through welcoming crowds in Searight and Haddonville. Flags were raised, cannons fired, and the ever present bicyclists welcomed the marchers along the sunlit route to Uniontown. When they

reached town, the local railway offered the men free rides to the camp grounds in
Mountain View Park. It was the “best walking” of the March. The commissary,
suddenly replenished by shipments from Ohio, provided a more substantial evening
meal. And, the ranks of the March were also replenished with the return of astrologer
Kirtland, standard bearer Buchanan, and bugler Iler. Each of these press favorites
had been temporarily dismissed from the March when Browne found they performed
as exhibits for a Dime Museum in Pittsburgh. Now they would resume their acts for
Coxey’s Commonweal.346

In Uniontown, a blizzard of snow and driving rains caused
Coxey and Browne to decide to spend another day and night in a local hotel, while
their men huddled around a small stove at their Camp Abraham Lincoln in a grove at
Mountain View Park. Sparks wrote of the conditions that day:

Uniontown, Pa. April 10___The army has spent the day in huddling around a
small stove trying to keep warm. It could not keep dry. The rain, blowing like
a hurricane, has penetrated everything. The men have had wet bread, soggy
crackers, and streaming bologna sausage for lunch. Dinner will be served
when the weather gives the camp cook a chance….347

The marshals of each commune spent the idle time trying to scour up additional
provisions from townspeople. The March would likely be encountering less
sympathetic receptions and more inhospitable terrain in the days ahead and the
commissary wagon had few supplies. Protected as usual from the elements, Coxey’s

346 “Ran Up Against Toll Gate,” Boston Daily Globe, 10 April 1894; “Coxey Reaches Uniontown,” The
Washington Post, 10 April 1894; “The Coxey Army,” The Daily Picayune, 10 April 1894; “Coxey Puts Up A Toll,”
Chicago Daily Tribune, 10 April 1894.
347 “Says Smith is Jensen,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 11 April 1894.
major complaint seemed to be Browne’s now stained and malodorous buckskin jacket that he refused to shed. Coxey, as well as others, grumbled that the jacket’s aroma preceded its inhabitant into the room. Thus Coxey seemed relieved and impressed when his sidekick arrived for dinner at the hotel resplendent in black broadcloth suit, white shirt, standing collar and broad necktie.348

After dinner, Browne repaired to his room and wrote an order suggesting any man who feared climbing the highest peaks of the Blue Ridge should leave the March immediately. Perhaps Browne sensed what was coming. As he admitted years later, after days of trying weather and road conditions, the next twenty four hours would prove “the most trying and terrible of the trip.” Rumors swirled through camp that deep snow awaited them in the mountains and many of the marchers began to seriously consider dropping out. Indeed, the next day, of the 318 who camped at Uniontown, only 215 obeyed the command to march.349

When they awoke the next morning they found the weather forecasts of the night before unfortunately proved true. The men who did make the thirteen mile march from Uniontown to Chalk Hill, braved a mountain road that at times had as much as eighteen inches of snow. Though the grading of the National Pike at times seemed to mitigate the severity of the slope, moving the wagons again became a formidable challenge. In anticipation, the commissary wagons, accompanied by hostlers with lariats to assist them, departed three hours in advance of the March.

When the marchers finally caught up to them some five hours later they had to help
push them up the hills, with teams relieving one another until the wagons could
break free for a few more feet, and then a few more yards. Adding to the challenges
of this stretch along the Laurel Ridge of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the remote
mountain hamlets like Hepwood bore evidence of economic hardship, yet little
Populist sympathy. Rather their residents seemed to still harbor memories of armed
guerilla bands of quasi soldiers who roamed these same mountains during the Civil
War. Others seemed angry about a recent raid by government officials on a local
illegal distillery and thus seemed suspicious of any outside intruders. They now
brandished their rifles loaded with bear shot to meet what they feared might be a new
wave of violence. As bad as the elements were, the men began to ignore the cold and
feared instead for their own safety. Coxey meanwhile endured only a couple of hours
with the March before he retired to a nearby shelter in an old turnpike station that
was said to have housed his Good Roads predecessor, Henry Clay.  

Coxey seemed to sense that the men who left Uniontown and
endured the steep slog up the Blue Ridge now formed the core of his Commonweal.
The entire affair seemed to be taking on a renewed sense of purpose. Baker
observed this in his dispatch on this harrowing day in the mountains, noting that “It
is really remarkable how the men hang together. They seem imbued by a sense of
their responsibility. They are beginning to believe they are saving their country.”

Browne echoed that sentiment in the Order he released that night from an abandoned

mansion at Chalk Hill where the men lit fires in every room and tried to dry out. Since many were without overcoats or heavy clothing, it did not take long. Browne, unlike Coxey, seemed to revel in the severity of the day’s conditions, and now he took the opportunity to praise the heroism of the men. Invoking yet another one of his historical comparisons, he extolled the accomplishment of the marchers saying, “…when you reach the other side of the mountains your names will go on the scroll of fame. Like Henry V said to his men after the battle of Agincourt, your names will be as familiar as household words.”

The Commonweal left Chalk Hill early on the morning of April 12 and now made their way over the Keyser Ridge descending into the Kaindon Valley. The little town of Jockey Hollow appeared like a post card from out of the past; everything seemed to be old and worn out. This muddy stretch of the National Pike, like the day before, was sparsely populated and in Sommerfield, one hundred and fifty curious onlookers watched the men as they stopped for lunch. Far away now from the cheers they had encountered throughout the industrial regions of the Monongahela Valley around Pittsburgh, their entry into Somerset County and the Youghiogheny Valley proved far less hospitable. Coxey departed on the morning train from Sommerfield and headed back to Pittsburgh. But as the March approached the yellow barn of the influential Addison townsman Jasper Augustine, it encountered a boisterous rabble of drunken mountaineers. In recent days a long

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simmering tension between Browne and the Great Unknown had grown. Now they confronted the potential for a bloody encounter with the fractious locals.\textsuperscript{352}

The March braced for its first real conflict. Though the local Addison saloons had closed in anticipation of the Commonweal’s arrival, “mountain dew” had been “flowing like water” during the day. Many of The Commonweal also seemed to have found their own sources of liquor to shield them from the elements of the March. A local Sheriff wisely sent an armed posse of six deputies to escort the army in to town while the mountaineers shouted harsh words from the street corners. Local residents remained shuttered as the Army approached. Meanwhile the Unknown, sensing a conflict brewing, decided to erect a picket line to keep intruders out of their newly struck Camp Jefferson. Remarkably, the evening passed peacefully.\textsuperscript{353}

For all the discussion of armed conflict between the two drunken sides, the only real dispute was one still simmering within the March itself. Earlier in the day, Coxey had rebuked his son Jesse for disobeying one of Browne’s orders. When Browne later chided the young Coxey for his father’s dressing down, Jesse shot back with an intemperate response and the “Chief Marshal” (Browne) was almost hoofed by Jesse’s kicking stallion. Jesse yelled at Browne in words for all to hear, “You may be able to monkey with my father but it won’t go with me.” That sentiment seemed to pervade the camp. To a man the Commonwealers seemed to


have greater allegiance to the Unknown, who stood with the young Coxey in this confrontation and who had himself endured all the harsh conditions of the March, and never took comfort like Browne in the nearest warm hotel.\textsuperscript{354}

The next day, as the March approached the Maryland state line, the increasingly tense relationship between Browne and The Unknown threatened to bring the March to an end. Near the top of Negro Mountain and with General Coxey still in Pittsburgh, Browne decided to dismount his horse and ride in Coxey’s buggy. Almost simultaneously The Unknown decided to reach into the commissary wagon for some food. Seeing this, Browne became upset and rebuked Smith suggesting it wrong to eat in front of the hungry men. But the Unknown would have nothing of it. Ignoring Browne, he rode to the head of the procession and dressed him down: “See here Browne you fat headed fake, this is my bark today. Next time I’ll bite. Just you get it through your head that if ever you try to make another grandstand play around me, I’ll make a punching bag out of your face.” As the larger Unknown grabbed Browne by the collar, the Californian cowered and shrank into the corner of Coxey’s phaeton. Twice rebuked, first by the young Coxey, and now by the Great Unknown, Browne’s status in the March seemed to hang in the balance until the General could return.\textsuperscript{355}

Ironically, while Browne and Smith’s conflict had escalated, the “soldiers” continued their resolute forward progress. Traversing the remote areas of

Pennsylvania and approaching Maryland they were cut off from rail lines where they might seek quick refuge in the passing cars. Six miles outside of Addison they were within sight of a white post marking the boundary to the state of Maryland. J.J. Thayer came forward and began to play “Maryland, My Maryland” on his coronet to commemorate yet another important accomplishment. The rest of the brass band scurrying for its instruments quickly joined the melody, but was just as quickly drowned out by a mountaineer’s braying mule. Yet, one by one, the men came by the boundary post and doffing their hats gave three cheers for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The journey through this state, though marked by bad weather and worse roads, revealed the resilience of Coxey’s intrepid band and the resonance this spectacle created with people who could now experience the March firsthand from their windows, doors, balconies, and roadside fences.\(^{356}\)

**Maryland**

The peace from a comparatively uneventful night in Camp Ulysses S. Grant fittingly in Grantsville Maryland, gave way to a contentious morning as the March reached Big Savage Mountain. Browne, now riding on a lighter herding pony, went to assist the often stalled wagons up the slopes of this three thousand foot mountain. Repeatedly Browne called halts to the March, seemingly eager to speak to each and every Mountaineer who came to see the procession pass. But the men grew increasingly restless and irritable with Browne. Already weary after almost three weeks on the road, they were in no mood to dally as they faced an imposing thirteen

mile climb. Suddenly, as Browne ordered yet another halt, from the rear of the procession the Unknown gave the contrary command, “March On!” Browne was infuriated. “What do you mean by giving that order Marshal Smith? I am in command here. Wait till you get your orders from me,” Browne insisted. But the Unknown was having none of Browne’s imperiousness. Speaking to the men in his firm and military way he said, “I have never treated you with contempt or made you look like fools; neither have I issued daily addresses to you as if I were a King and you were my subjects.” He had now drawn the line with Browne, and between Browne and the restless campers who had endured many a cold night while their leaders rested comfortably in the warmth of a hotel.357

The dispute quickly escalated. Browne ignored Smith and continued to order the procession to stop. Browne’s orders to halt were quickly countermanded by Smith’s order to proceed. The Unknown, who had already won the men’s minds, also seemed to have won their hearts. The men clearly sided with the Unknown and began to ignore Browne. As the day wore on Browne grew more and more frustrated with the Unknown’s overt insubordination. He became even more infuriated when the threats he cast toward the Unknown rang hollow. He had no influence over what he considered a now mutinous army. To make matters worse, the soldiers were rallying behind the Unknown, with his yachting cap perched on his large head. They even began to chant what they thought was his real name, “Smith! Smith! Smith!”

357 Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 66-70; “Browne Gets Off His High Horse,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 15 April 1894.
Browne abandoned his now exhausted horse lying by the side of the road, took another horse, and went onto the next town to see if he could wire Coxey to quickly return and save his Commonweal. Reaching Frostburg well ahead of the March, Browne began to telegraph “wildly.” When the weary travellers did reach their destination Jesse Coxey, who was now allied with the Unknown, made certain all of the supplies be put under his guard. The heaviest men were put outside the opera hall to prevent Browne from speaking. The Unknown specifically ordered the men not to allow Browne to enter the hall preventing him from beginning one of his rants.358

The night passed without incident. But the next morning the dispute reached its surprising climax. Before the men left Camp Lee, they spotted a speeding wagon moving toward town. It turned out to be carrying Coxey himself. He had abruptly returned to the March having received Browne’s urgent communication about the Commonweal being hijacked. Coxey arrived to the enthusiastic cheers of the men. Browne beseeched Coxey to take back control. Coxey seemed both perplexed at Browne’s agitation, but also unaware of how deep seated the disdain for Grand Marshal.

Without understanding the level of the marcher’s disdain for Browne, Coxey asked a vote be taken with each the man standing either to show loyalty to Browne or the Unknown. Cheers immediately went up for the Unknown.

Then surprisingly, the Unknown revealed that he knew Browne from his days in Chicago. Following Browne’s confrontation with Mayor Harrison the previous summer, the Unknown claimed he saved the rabble rousing speaker from arrest. Yet despite their acquaintance, he told Coxey’s troops that Browne “never was anything but a medicine faker; a fat, greasy loafer, who never did an honest day’s work in his life.” Shouts could be heard in the hall of “Give us the Unknown.” Suddenly the tiny, but appropriately named Odd Fellows Opera Hall reverberated with calls in favor of the Unknown and denunciations of Browne. Others were yelling at Coxey, “We don’t want that leather coated freak.” At this point in the chaotic proceedings, Coxey looked confused. Nonetheless, he called for the vote. Out of the one hundred and fifty eight votes cast all but four were for the Unknown. At this critical juncture, Coxey defiantly raised his hand and told the assembled that he himself had cast one hundred and fifty four votes for Browne. He also told the men that if they wished to follow the Unknown they could, but that the commissary wagons and other provisions he had paid for were staying with him.

Coxey had spoken emphatically as if he were back at his quarry in Massillon directing employees. Chagrined and slighted, the Unknown took the embarrassing occasion to once more verbally thrash Browne. “I have been deposed by a patent medicine shark, a greasy coated hypocrite, a seeker for personal advancement,” he lamented. Nonetheless, Coxey remained firm, and ordered the Unknown to leave the camp or he would have him arrested. Smith wandered off, but not very far. He would now join the so-called “Veiled Lady,” a mysterious woman who had already been
shadowing the March for days. Smith, to the elder Coxey’s amazement, also took a willing Jesse Coxey with him and the three remained in close proximity to the March route.359

With Browne now back in the lead, the March dutifully began its descent out of the mountains, on its way toward Cumberland, Maryland. Browne selfishly designated the camp as “Victory” in honor of his restoration as the Grand Marshal. Meanwhile, Coxey embarrassedly turned his attention toward reclaiming his son Jesse. The seventeen year old having officially left, now checked in at the St. Cloud Hotel. But he seemed quickly persuaded to sever ties with the Unknown once he learned that he would no longer be receiving his father’s support. “If you go with Smith, the Unknown, you must look to him for support and comfort. I will not even buy cigarettes for you.” For the impressionable Jesse, now desperate for a smoke, the latter threat was perhaps the most compelling. Not only did he quickly return, but the Commonweal now received some additional new recruits that evening, as well as an estimated seven thousand visitors to their Camp Victory in Cumberland.

Having reclaimed his son, Coxey now resumed quietly making arrangements for three boats to ferry the men down the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal to make up for lost time and avoid even more difficult stretches of road than they had endured. News of the impending flotilla picked up the spirits of foot weary soldiers. Before the Coxey flotilla could launch, Coxey spent a day in Cumberland securing the

permission of the canal company to move his army eighty five miles downstream. April 16 also marked Coxey’s fortieth birthday and Browne decided to organize a celebration by staging a mock parade. The weather had finally turned a spring like seventy degrees. The men spent a leisurely day lounging in the grass at their camp site at a ball field two miles outside of Cumberland. They also ate well as the city’s welcoming Mayor Hobb raised seventy five pounds of cheese, sixty pounds of coffee, three hundred pounds of fresh beef, and six barrels of corn, among other supplies to replenish the empty commissary.360

Streams of street cars carried well wishers back and forth from Cumberland. An estimated 4,000 visited the camp site. And, as had become the routine, Coxey and Browne charged admission to the camp, and then upstaged the Unknown, still lurking in town, by offering a free lecture across the street from where the Unknown and the Veiled Lady would make an appearance for a quarter per head. When the 8 o’clock hour arrived, Coxey and Browne’s free lecture filled the auditorium, while the Unknown leaned against a podium at an empty Miller’s Opera Hall waiting for the first twenty five cent patron, and for Jesse Coxey, who never arrived.361

361 “Will Rest,” The Penny Press (Minneapolis), 16 April 1894; “Colonel Browne Bobs Up,” The Washington Post, 16 April 1894; “Tired of Walking,” Rocky Mountain News, 17 April 1894; “Worn Out and Footsore,” Boston Daily Globe, 17 April 1894; “On the Racing Canal,” The Washington Post, 17 April 1894; “Coxey’s Army on Show One Day,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 17 April 1894; See also copy of the notice of Great Unknown’s appearance reading: “To-night The Great Unknown (the Original Lewis Smith), Jesse Coxey and the Veiled Lady of the Commonweal Movement will appear at Miller’s Hall. The Unknown will be the speaker of the evening, and give an exciting account of this trip across the mountains while in charge of the Coxey Army. Admission 25 Cents; Lecture at 8 o’clock sharp,” See Box 23, Reel 23, Papers of Ray Stannard Baker, Library of Congress. See also Browne, When Coxey’s Army Marcht (sic), 13.
Coxey put this entire day off to good use, securing the boats from a local lumber Company and negotiating with local officials for the rite of passage down the canal. Two boats were to carry the men and all of their equipment, and horses, with a third trail boat carrying the reporters. The boat company charged Coxey fifty two cents per ton so the total cost came to about eighty five dollars, half of which came from contributions received from the camp admissions at Cumberland. With the horses and equipment the amount Coxey had to pay amounted to about the same as if he had decided to ship coal instead of his men.362

At about eight thirty the next morning, “Coxey’s Navy” (See Figure 16), as the press now jokingly referred to it, marched down a steep section of National Pike to board the flotilla Coxey had arranged. A mist highlighted their shadowy figures against a five hundred foot rock wall. Following their day of rest, the marchers seemed in particularly good spirits. The Commonweal passed by the greetings of early morning well wishers as it made its way to the docks. Cumberland Mayor Hobb and a posse of local officials saw them board the boats and cast off. Of course, as the men loaded the boats, Coxey and Browne had to make their farewell speeches to a town that had provided more than ample hospitality.363

The canal boats normally accustomed to shipping coal had to be prepared before they could accommodate this unusual assemblage of men, horses, equipment and wagons. Before the loading could begin, the fine coal dust now had to be swept

out and the decks below filled with hay. Each of the large stallions had to be carefully provided enough space. Finding space for the wagons and other equipment proved challenging. When all was loaded there was precious little space for all the men. Coxey mused it was good that he had not taken on any new recruits.

After several hours of arranging and then rearranging their load, the factory whistles blared their noontime calls, and Coxey’s three ship Navy pushed into the canal. First came the flagship “Benjamin Vaughn,” with Browne on board tending to his murals and banners, and the now dismantled band and panorama wagons in pieces. Then came the “Flying Demon,” carrying the some two dozen reporters that had continued to stay with the March. Behind these floated the transport ship, “A. Greenless,” with Coxey trying to blend in with the remainder of his troops. Six large mules dragged the boats along the tow paths as the men alternately sat or lay down on the narrow decks, enjoying a deserved respite from the travails of the previous three weeks. Indeed, the float trip became a welcome relief for these foot weary soldiers, many of whom started with the March in Massillon. Browne, contemplating their achievement, took the opportunity to mention that each of the men ought to receive certificates for their “heroic” crossing of the Alleghenies.

The peaceful journey took them along a picturesque route. The brown hills were laced with apple and cherry tree blossoms, and along the banks of the canal wild flowers bloomed. The incessant snow and cold air of their recent mountain journey now seemed a distant memory. When the men briefly pulled up to the locks near North Branch they were presented with a dozen boxes of cigars. Life could not
get much better. To top it off, a shoemaker was dispatched to come on board and began busily repairing the well worn souls of boots that bore the brunt of bad roads and worse weather.\textsuperscript{364}

In his own artful style Baker described the canal sojourn from the tailing press boat where reporters were so crammed in they wrote their dispatches lying down:

On Board the Flying Demon, Chesapeake and Ohio Canal, Near Hancock Md., April 18____A few stars were shining in a clear steel blue sky and the moon was just coming over the Maryland hills, silvering the ripples of the Potomac a hundred yards away. The air was full of the drowsy sounds of warm spring twilight. A chorus of frogs in a neighboring swamp was holding high carnival and a whirlpool whistled occasionally from a distant thicket of sycamores.\textsuperscript{365}

As the boats sailed pleasantly down the canal, Coxey seemed finally at ease. At times he could be found at the bridge of “Benjamin Vaughn,” though he seemed more at home on the less crowded “A. Greenless,” the “transport ship.” They passed steep cliffs which would have proved impassable by foot. As they wound down the canal paralleling the Potomac on the closely packed boats, most of the men seemed content to mend their clothing, write letters, or simply stare out at the night skies. On the banks, women and children would wander out to see them and cheer the flotilla. The men would wave their hats and cheer back. Passengers on trains on the Virginia side of the Potomac waved at the boats. But unlike at Homestead when workers

\textsuperscript{364} There is disparity in the names of the boats with some reporters calling them the Good Roads, the J.S. Coxey, and Argus of the Flying Demon, see McMurry, 100; While others thought the “A. Greenless” boat was rechristened by its occupants as the “Mertonville,” see Schwantes 76-77; “Coxey on Towpath,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 18 April 1894; “Coxey Takes Water,” The Chicago Record, 18 April 1894; Vincent, Story of the Commonweal, 95-96. “Army Still Afloat,” The Chicago Record, 18 April 1894; “Coxey’s Tramps Billed as Freight,” The New York Times, 19 April 1894; “Bozarro Got the Collection,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 19 April 1894.

\textsuperscript{365} “Army Still Afloat,” The Chicago Record, 19 April 1894.
streamed from their work stations to the side of the road, when the Commonweal barges passed industrial sites such as the South Cumberland Glass Works or the Tin Plate and Steel Works, the workers stayed inside forced to tend to their jobs.\textsuperscript{366}

Around midnight the boats sailed past Paw Paw and then drifted on to Bill Bell’s lock by morning. The members of the Chicago Commune now proudly wore pink certificates attesting to their having survived “the Cumberland Mountains in the face of snow and ice, and despite police persecution, and dissension breeders.” Browne had delivered on his promise, handing out certificates to all those who had come this far. The journey now neared three hundred miles, and Browne, for all his failings as a commander, seemed to have finally found a way to ingratiate himself with the men by recognizing their accomplishment.\textsuperscript{367}

After another long day on the boats they arrived at Hancock Maryland around dusk and found a small crowd gathered to greet them. The townspeople here seemed more curious than welcoming, and the men had to rely on their own commissary for a sparse meal of dry crackers. Part of the cool reception seems to have resulted from a pair of imposter advance men, allegedly including the Great Unknown accompanied by “Cheeky Childs,” and the “Veiled Lady,” who had arrived in town the day before, raised money for the advancing March, and then promptly left. Before settling into their routine speeches, Coxey and Browne asked local authorities to apprehend the imposters and reclaim the money. Yet, despite this initial

embarrassment, a healthy crowd eventually gathered for the evening’s rhetorical fireworks.  

At a little past six in the morning on April 19, after their all night journey from Hancock, the boats arrived in Williamsport where six smiling, bonneted women welcomed the Commonweal. The freshly white washed stone homes of Williamsport appeared off in the distance from a lovely vantage point in a meadow that Browne designated as Camp California. As the men disembarked, Coxey inadvertently made a splash landing into the canal while trying to step onto dry land. His annoyance turned to cheer when he heard the exciting news accounts that various armies from around the country were coming eastward by foot, boat, and rail to join ranks near Washington. Coxey had communicated with many of the others stalwart reformers now leading marches around the country. He was elated by the news that his efforts had apparently produced results. “I knew it, I knew it,” he exclaimed over and over again to himself, after having spent his first few moments back on terra firma trying to find a dry shirt. Browne, meanwhile, seemingly smitten by the smiling women in the welcoming party, decided to hold forth for an hour on his own version of the role of women in American history, though he had no good explanation for why the March did not have a single woman in its own ranks.  


369 “Girls Meet the Army, The Chicago Record, 19 April 1894; “General Coxed Falls Into the Canal,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 20 April 1894; Note Browne in When Coxey’s Army Marcht (sic) referred to it as Camp Cumberland though Baker’s byline refers to it as Camp California.
With the boats now back in the hands of their owners and the men refreshed from their peaceful journey, The Commonweal now resumed its March. On the six mile jaunt to Hagerstown, it quickly found itself in yet another snow storm, all the while encountering more irritating toll stations, where Browne again tried valiantly to flash his theatrical prowess and met with his customary lack of success. As was becoming routine, following Browne’s theatrics, Coxey proceeded to pay these tolls so the March might pass. The crowds now gathering to see them pass could notice many of the men now limped. The cobbler at North Branch repaired the shoes of some, but most remained indescibably tattered. More than a few of the weary used walking sticks. They had carved into the wood the names of the many towns through which they had passed this last month.

As they neared Hagerstown, they were met by the usual contingent of swarming bicyclists riding out to greet them on the city outskirts. As the March struck Camp Yorktown on Logan Hill, the Commonweal remained without its large tent that had torn back in Somerfield. Coxey innocently thought that the some three hundred dollars raised by the local sympathizers in Hagerstown before their arrival was to be used to help to purchase a new tent or some other quarters. But it quickly became apparent the money was to recruit extra police to make certain the marchers did not interfere with a money making circus that had come to town a few days before, though Baker observed that Coxey’s March was greeted by more well wishers than the circus parade. Nonetheless, the men found themselves on the night of April 20 sleeping in the open air. When a thunderstorm passed, it did not take long
for the quick sting of a cold spring rain to sink in, sending the men limping toward empty railroad box cars where they passed the rest of the night. Meanwhile, Coxey departed in the night for New York to attend yet another horse auction. This marked the third time he left the March either to raise money or make the necessary arrangements that would smooth the final entry into Washington.370

The three days they camped in Hagerstown allowed the men to move freely among the townspeople, and despite the initially chilly greeting they received, as the marchers mingled among the townspeople they seemed to gradually win them over. Public sentiment seemed to go through a complete change and the Mayor and Chief of Police both remarked how well the men behaved themselves. A local newspaper suggested, “Talk with the men and you speedily become convinced that they are not tramps in the common acceptance of the word. These men have worked, many of them work now. They are under discipline and they stand up like soldiers.” This only served to underscore Coxey and Browne’s continual emphasis on the March’s seriousness of purpose and the discipline they imposed. By Sunday, Browne drew a large gathering to Camp Nazareth, where, during his theosophical musings, he referred to possessing the reincarnated soul of Stonewall Jackson. This sermon was spiced with the usual rants against the plutocracy. With a larger than usual fifty

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cents admission fee and garnering more attendees this Sabbath than the local churches, the March raised fifty dollars.\textsuperscript{371}

The extra night’s stay in Hagerstown only served to fuel speculation that Coxey’s men were not waiting for his return, but instead stalling until other industrial armies could arrive. Yet on Monday morning April 23, the March resumed without Coxey or any of the other armies. Rumors also swirled that secret service agents had been sent up the road from Washington to begin to trail the March and report back to a capital on its movement to a Congress now enthralled in debate over just how to receive the fast approaching industrial armies.\textsuperscript{372}

The next morning Browne’s wary demeanor revealed the growing anxiety over the alleged surveillance. On a steep climb up the National Pike on their way toward Frederick, women on the side of the road near the steep banks of South Mountain began to look suspiciously upon the Commonweal. They whispered amongst themselves that the heavily covered wagons might be hiding stores of guns and rifles. Hundreds of onlookers had come to the tiny village of Middletown to get a glimpse of the marchers on their way toward Frederick. The crowd’s suspicions of the men in turn fed a growing air of unease. Apprehensions grew when an armed brigade on horseback confronted the marchers surrounding it on all sides. Reporter


Sparks reported on the rumors surrounding the approach to Frederick which now
seemed more than idle speculation:

Boonesboro, Md. April 23—Coxey’s army has stopped in a fright, just on the
borders of Montgomery County, just over the border of Montgomery County.
Just over the border, according to some hyper-imaginative commonwealer, a
troop of the United States cavalry is in ambush, just hungering to turn a storm
of bullets on the untidy ranks of the commonweal.\(^{373}\)

The men, practically slowed to a cautious crawl, and kept a wary eye on the now
visible uniformed men on horseback. At first, Browne was nowhere to be seen. Then
he emerged to reassure the anxious troops that this posse was under the direction of
the Frederick County Sheriff Tim Merman who told Browne privately that he sent
the troops to allay any fears of local residents about the approaching March.\(^{374}\)

Days in advance of their arrival, John E. Fleming, the Democratic Mayor of
Frederick Maryland expressed animosity toward the Marchers, though he did not
think they would cause trouble. As they entered town more and more well wishers
gathered along the road side to greet the procession. Trumpeter Oliver (“Tooting
Charlie”) rejoined the ranks after leaving the March near Hagerstown, disappearing
one evening from a saloon and apparently proceeding to conduct his own local “wine
tour.” However, when he reappeared he brought with him forty or so of his own
recruits, swelling the number of marchers to some 340.

Yet the toll the March took on the men also grew. Colds and flu had plagued
the marchers since they left Massillon. The weather and their scant clothing only

\(^{373}\) “Coxey’s Men Fear Cavalry Charge,” *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 April 1894.
\(^{374}\) “Met by the Armed Forces,” *The Chicago Record*, 24 April 1894.
made matters worse. Now, to the alarm of many reporters following the March, one marcher came down with small pox and another succumbed to a stroke. While the sick were removed and cared for, the quasi-healthy continued the final leg of this sixteen mile day as the clustered spires of Frederick emerged from a blue haze created by approaching storm clouds. On the city’s outskirts, the now familiar bicycle riders enthusiastically rode in and around the marchers. This warm greeting now seemed part of the routine entering almost every town as the cyclists felt obliged to symbolically greet these proud but weary emissaries for Good Roads. Carriages containing enthusiastic onlookers also drove to the outskirts of Frederick to witness the Commonweal’s approach. Baker wrote that day of the absurdity of those in arms now drowned out by those welcoming the March: 375

Frederick Md., April 24___Just inside the city limits a crowd of young men began to poke fun at the incongruous position of the deputies. The spectacle of thirty heavily armed and mounted men protecting the public from a drum and fife corps, a group of small boys with cymbals and sleigh bells, and a struggling column of meek and inoffensive paraders carrying a score of banners covered with ghastly drawings and bible verse was incredibly ridiculous. 376

At Camp Lafayette, a baseball field on the outskirts of Frederick, Browne explained why the March would delay yet another day. With his characteristically contentious populist fervor, he blamed the “Wall Street boodlers” for delaying the arrival of the enormous new canvas tent he had purchased in.


376 “Met by the Armed Forces,” The Chicago Record, 24 April 1894.
Hagerstown to replace the torn and tattered circus tent. Browne also took the occasion to display a new peace stick, made of oak. He suggested the men would carry these down Pennsylvania Avenue, each surrounded in a bouquet of flowers so as not to mistake their peaceful intent. As the marchers relaxed on a sundrenched baseball field, Oklahoma Sam bragged of his days herding cattle, and then decided to prove his skills by riding one of the newfangled bicycles. However, the cowboy failed valiantly in his effort to tame the “pneumatic steed” falling off it repeatedly and in every way imaginable, while leaving his fellow marchers rollicking in laughter at his expense.377

Yet, the real dramatic highlight of this day came when Coxey returned to Frederick from his latest New York City excursion. Met with loud cheers by the men, he promptly told them that although he could not promise a successful conclusion to his negotiation with the Trunk Rail Line, he did believe he had assurance the men could camp in Woodley Park upon reaching Washington. Later in the evening, however, disturbing telegrams arrived from Vincent, who had returned to Chicago to complete his The Story of the Commonweal in order to raise money for the final days of the March. The first of Vincent’s telegrams promised one thousand new marchers in a week from Chicago and brought cheers throughout the camp. However, this good news quickly turned to anger when the second telegram reported that the Iowa militia had killed six men in Kelly’s March. Though this report eventually proved untrue, it cast a pall over the camp. It seemed to heighten their

growing anxiety about what lay ahead as they approached a now fortified Washington DC. The constant presence of detectives, sheriffs, and other suspicious observers now amongst them only served to fuel their fears that a similar fate might await the peaceful Commonweal.\footnote{\textit{Coxey Arming his Followers}, The \textit{Chicago Record}, 25 April 1894; Schwantes, \textit{Coxey’s Army}, 142. “Troops are Called Out,” The \textit{North American}, 26 April 1894; “Coxey Resumes Command,” The \textit{Emporia Gazette} (Emporia KS) 26 April 1894; “Coxey’s Tramps Show Temper,” \textit{New York Times}, 26 April 1894; “Coxey’s Bright Hopes Fast Waning,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 26 April 1894; The reports of the skirmish between federal marshals actually involved what was being called Hogan’s Division of Coxey’s Army which had commandeered a Northern Pacific train in Butte Montana. As it sped through the night toward Glendive Montana it was chased down by a locomotive carrying U.S. marshals. After a tense stare down the train arrived in Billings where two of the marshals suddenly fired on the train filled with Hogan’s recruits. In the skirmish two citizens of Billings were killed and one of the leaders of Hogan’s Division. Newspapers, including the \textit{New York Times} sensationalized the story (see Chapter 4) but it is hard to see how Vincent derived six from Kelly’s Army (which was at that time in Iowa and undergoing its own mutiny); See “Blood Flows from Coxeyism,” \textit{The New York Times}, 26 April 1894; “Hot Fight with the Marshals,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 26 April 1894.}

At their Frederick Maryland Camp Andrew Jackson, named in honor of the populist seventh President, the men’s peaceful and friendly behavior won over many of the townspeople. When the Frederick sheriff’s posse escorted the men out of town the next morning, a local drum and fife corps played cheerful and patriotic songs. The Mayor had to acknowledge he had been justly criticized for his originally suspicious views of the Army. Yet another local official won over. On their way out of town, hundreds of women waived goodbyes from the balconies of homes. Now carrying their flags of peace that had survived the Allegheny, the Blue Ridge, and the Catoctin Mountains, a mere fifty miles lay between them and their Capital. After the travails of the last month they were coming ever nearer to the end of this first March to Washington. As they began their final push along the now familiar National Pike, Browne nursed a sore throat. Not only did his speech the night before in front of the Panorama Wagon last an amazing four hours, but he treated his hoarse voice with
what he thought to be soothing camphor, only to have it turn out to be the more caustic carbolic acid.\textsuperscript{379}

\textbf{Washington D.C.}

The men lunched on nothing but hard tack just outside Urbana Maryland pausing along the Bennett Creek. They drew their water from local wells. About a mile out of Hyattsville and near the Montgomery County border, Browne presented the now departing Frederick Sheriff Zimmerman with an honorary badge of The Commonweal as its protector these last three days. However, as one account suggested, protecting Frederick from the soldiers of The Commonweal was like protecting the city from an “assault of an orphan asylum.” Like the Mayor, Zimmerman’s initial skepticism had turned to begrudging admiration. Escorting the March to edge of his jurisdiction, the Sheriff turned his posse and road back as the March proceeded, now in its thirty third day.\textsuperscript{380}

Near Hyattown, the men encountered another group of spectators again lining the streets. Here, Browne finally having learned his lesson, contritely sent Oklahoma Sam ahead to pay the toll. Montgomery County Sheriff Mulligan met the approaching marchers without a posse of detectives, saying he expected no problem from the visitors. They then proceeded to march through town with Thayer’s brass band playing Sousa’s “High School March,” and settled at a quiet, spacious meadow

\textsuperscript{379} The camp was son named because on occasion Coxey claimed he was in part the reincarnated Andrew Jackson; “Coxey’s Bright Hopes Fast Waning,” \textit{Chicago Daily Tribune}, 26 April 1894; “Local Logic,” \textit{The Frederick Daily News}, 26 April 1894.

\textsuperscript{380} Thirty Miles From Washington,” \textit{The Chicago Record}, 26 April 1894;
near a stream. Here they pitched their large new tent purchased with money Coxey had raised in New York. In honor of the Coxey’s efforts and substantial sacrifice to keep the March liquid, the men declared this Camp Henrietta in honor of Coxey’s wife. And, in no time, Coxey and Browne began collecting their usual admission fees for all visitors who wanted to meet the now famous marchers and behold Browne’s bizarre artistry.\(^{381}\)

The March by now had achieved a national celebrity, and in the afternoon a group of peddlers entered Hyattown selling Coxey souvenirs of all sorts including pictures, badges, books and poems. While aware of their growing national notoriety, neither Coxey nor Browne, nor certainly the Marchers themselves, could have possibly understood its dimension. Newspapers from New York to Los Angeles, now typically published several front page stories about this and the other industrial army marchers. As if a sports contest they charted the progress of Coxey as and the other industrial armies now moving toward Washington to join him. Often this coverage came replete with score cards of the numbers estimated to be in each of the “industrial armies.” With May Day drawing closer and with this steady stream of reports of the advancing soldiers now only a few miles away, Washington anxiously prepared for violence from this apparent horde of invading armies of unemployed. Yet in Hyattown, the image of Coxey’s Commonweal tending to their nightly chores presented a different picture. One less sympathetic observer suggested the men were like circus performers after their matinee, with men lighting fires to boil coffee,\(^{381}\)

kneeling at the nearby stream to shave, washing their faces in the cold mountain water, or tending to the camp’s equipment. As Browne observed in his General Order that evening, “As we approach Washington everything is as peaceable as a summer day __ the doves of peace hover around our banners as bees around sweet August flowers.” The imagery of the Commonweal was in full force.  

Despite of the growing number of newspaper accounts predicting the convergence of other industrial armies that would swell Coxey’s ranks, less than a week before the scheduled May Day parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, the only new recruit to what was now called “Coxey’s Army,” was a prosperous Ohio farmer. Browne continued to optimistically insist that the arriving telegrams indicated “large numbers of men are waiting to join the Army at Rockville,” now only a day away. But it became obvious to some observers that Coxey appeared disappointed. He acknowledged to one reporter that he did not expect the March to enter Washington with more than four hundred men. As one newspaper speculated maybe “the story had already been told.” The grand climax of thousands of other marchers suddenly seemed illusory. Yet at the same time, Coxey seemed unprepared to admit that the March had seen its best days.

The reporters sensing Coxey’s uncharacteristically diminished energy began to suggest the Commonweal would disintegrate before it reached Washington. They legitimately asked where were the thousands of other troops from those other industrial armies reported to be marching eastward. A report coming out from the

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Chief of the District of Columbia police force reassured residents that the convergence of large numbers of dangerous men now appeared to have “fizzled.” Coxey’s Washington advance man, Colonel A. E. Redstone, who at one point spoke of recruiting over 150,000 men to join Coxey once he arrived in the nation’s capital, had assembled no more than 50 recruits of his own. With these sorts of disappointments mounting by the moment, and defections occurring, many men talked of quickly getting a job once they reached Washington. Occasional fights erupted during the evening camp and rumors swirled that The Unknown had returned and assembled his own brigade at Rockville. Some surmised he aimed for another confrontation with Browne. Even the leader of the Philadelphia March, Christopher Columbus Jones, was making statements that he might affiliate with The Unknown, prompting a spate of furious telegramming between Coxey and his fellow leader of the “Philadelphia Army.” Browne attempted to preempt a second mutiny by declaring that the Unknown’s men, whom he considered “drunks and thieves,” would not be allowed to rejoin. Indeed, as they entered Gaithersburg, The Commonweal had dwindled to less than two hundred and twenty or so and seemed rife with dissension from all accounts.\(^{384}\)

The men had arrived in Gaithersburg weary and sullen from a day marching in a hot sun. Their dampened spirits did not deafen them, however, to the entreaties of a man just outside of the forlorn little town of Clarksburg. He pleaded with then

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to help search for his missing son. The men did not hesitate to veer from their path and fan out in search of the missing boy. But the search ended to no avail, casting an even more somber note on the day. Nor, as they made their way through the rolling terrain of Montgomery County, did the communities rally with the same sort of outpouring of food that typically accompanied their arrival. On this day the men would have to live on a diet of hard tack and coffee. After the twelve mile march from Hyattown to Gaithersburg the men seemed to Baker “more jaded, ragged and demoralized than they ever did before.” As Sparks concluded in his dispatch: 385

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Gaithersburg, Md., April 27 [Special]___Nobody in Montgomery County is worrying anymore about Coxey’s gypsy caravan. They have seen it. There are only 214 men in it and half of these can be counted on to desert as soon as it reaches Washington. Out of the nearly 100 men talked to today 75 per cent declared their intentions of trying to get work in Washington. They will certainly make the attempt if the police do not coop them up in a camp. 386

Yet all was not doom and gloom at the Gaithersburg camp named in honor of Browne’s deceased wife, Camp Alice Maria. Coxey’s Populist compatriot, the peripatetic and diminutive Kansan Annie Diggs, now joined the ranks of sympathizers coming to welcome the March’s arrival to Washington. In preparation Diggs of the arrival, Diggs had formed a Public Comfort Committee, delivered encouraging speeches on Coxey’s aims, and generally communicated with her growing national constituency about the purpose of the March. Diggs was a
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385 “Will Ride with Coxey,” The Chicago Record, 27 April 1894.
prominent suffragist, and with her deep blue eyes and charismatic smile she quickly won over the soldiers who welcomed her “charming earnestness.”

By nine o’clock on April 29, the March left Gaithersburg and headed toward Rockville. Five miles outside of town the usual circling of enthusiastic bicyclists, prominent members of the Good Roads movement, cavalry troops, and a phalanx of large livery wagons carrying spectators greeted the weary marchers. During the morning, after enduring yet another stubborn toll collector, Browne kept a wary eye out for the Unknown and his troops, a few of whom hissed at the March from the roadside. Another 20 or so of the Unknown’s sympathizers were in a nearby meadow waiting for instruction. Meanwhile, Coxey went back up the road to greet his family just arriving in Gaithersburg. Both his daughter Mamie and wife Carrie would now join him for the final, and he hoped, historic leg of the March.

A few of the Unknown’s recruits tried to enter the newly struck Camp Legal Tender, named after Coxey’s baby son, and very near the Rockville fair grounds. Oklahoma Sam initially turned the intruders away. Yet the Unknown insisted on staying near the campgrounds and loomed right outside Browne’s tent as he changed socks. The California activist emerged to confront his onetime Chicago colleague, ending the face off almost abruptly as it began. This time the marchers turned on the Unknown rather than Browne, yelling epithets such as “Pinkerton” and “Traitor.”

The men had come too far to have their arrival in Washington marred by the

387 “Will Ride with Coxey,” The Chicago Record, 27 April 1894; For discussions of Annie Diggs see Michael L. Goldberg, “Non-Partisan and All-Partisan: Rethinking Women Suffrage and Party Politics in Gilded Age Kansas,” The Western Historical Quarterly 25, no.1, (Spring 1994): 21-44; Schwantes, Coxey’s March, 4; McMath, American Populism, 126-27;
Unknown’s confrontational tactics. They had endured a dusty and hot day on the road, relieved only by the sounds of boisterous crowds in Rockville greeting them with hardy cheers. The shadow tactics of the Unknown had lost him his credibility with the marchers and he finally departed ignominiously.388

Meanwhile, the “sleek, and well fed” Philadelphia contingent of some thirty five men now joined March. An inveterate and loquacious reformer Christopher Columbus Jones led this contingent, replete with his pug hat and long dress coat, a caricature of the very plutocracy he frequently railed against. The Philadelphia Commune settled under the big tent in Rockville that evening just in time for a horrific spring thunderstorm to blow it down. This forced the weary marchers to take shelter in wet horse stalls. After all they had come through, it was yet one more inconvenience to endure this final night before they reached the outskirts of Washington. As one commentator would remark, “Before the March would come to an end the country would be shown that the majority of the crusaders were men who would undergo considerable suffering for the sake of giving expression to the ideas in which they believed.”389

The core of these marchers who now arrived at the outskirts of Washington had endured a five week, almost four hundred mile journey. They succeeded largely because of the support they received from well wishers and their own steady determination. “We shall depend upon the outpouring of the down trodden people to

388 “Coxey at the Capital,” The Chicago Record, 29 April 1894; “Browne and Unknown Smith,” Los Angeles Times, 29 April 1894.
sustain us in our mission for the salvation of the Republic,” Coxey said in January before the March departed. Indeed the outpouring of food, clothing and donations, though hardly consistent at each stop, was more than sufficient to propel the Army forward. When Charles Jenkins of Snodes Ohio said he would meet the Army in Alliance “with potatoes, corn meal, and a few gallons of milk, and would ship flour if needed,” he was like so many hundreds who with their letters and telegrams not only expressed support, but also found ways to deliver supplies and donations along the way. Certainly some of those who may have paid to enter a camp and behold the characters they read about in the newspapers might have seen Coxey’s troupe as much a curiosity as a cause. Yet for many thousands who cheered this spectacle and welcomed it to their communities in the spring of 1894, this Commonweal seemed to capture the populist energy extant across America for almost twenty years in a way the upstart People’s Party could not.390

CHAPTER 6: THE ARRIVAL

“Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise.”

Frederick Jackson Turner

Leaving Rockville on April 29th, Coxey’s Commonweal of Christ by one count now numbered some 336 as it triumphantly approached the final camp site on the outskirts of Washington. Coxey prearranged a federal enclave known as Brightwood Riding Park some five miles from the Capitol where he thought the weary marchers could rest and prepare before their final triumphant march down Pennsylvania Avenue. Though the men remained small in number, thousands of people lined the streets and cheered them enthusiastically as they came from Rockville toward Silver Spring and then across the District line. Struck by the size of the turnout, Coxey’s men tried their best to approximate military order by marching in a column of twos. With the exception of the new recruits, they appeared to be understandably tired and footsore. One described the procession as “Three hundred and fifty miserably-dressed, woe-begone, grumbling, out-of-the-elbows and run –down- at-the-heels -specimens….‖ Remarkably they had arrived in the District a mere thirty three days after their departure from Massillon, and now were only a few miles from their final destination. As Skinner remarked in his

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dispatch that day, “They had bore the brunt of mud and storms and cold. They were the most unique and inexplicable aggregation ever brought together.”

The spectacle they presented drew the admiring, the curious, and the critical. As they approached Brightwood, the cyclists as usual, rode gleefully into the crowded streets. Secretary of Agriculture Morton, who’s Department now housed the fledgling Office of Roads Inquiry, came to the District outskirts to witness the March’s arrival. After surveying the scene, he sarcastically referred to the marchers as a “kindergarten class under protection.” Nonetheless the ever present and supportive wheelmen (see Figure 17) darted in and out of choking clouds of dust produced by the constant wagon traffic going back and forth to the park throughout the day. Coxey took a moment pulling his phaeton to the side of the road to speak to the riders calling them the most enthusiastic and intelligent supporters of his Good Roads legislation; a talk that brought loud cheers.

All day and into the evening, street cars overflowed with people eager to make their way to the riding park. In all, eight thousand people were said to have visited the camp. One press report characterized those flocking to the site as mostly from “the working class.” They were asked to pay a quarter just to get a glimpse of the marchers, though the park permit did not allow the March to charge a fee. This limited the days take to what some estimated at less than one hundred dollars. Those

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393 Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 172-75; “Coxey and His 300,” The Washington Post, 30 April 1894.
who came witnessed sallow faced men some eating chunks of bread, while others stretched out with their coats for pillows under weather beaten tents. The black painted wagons with their inscriptions and Browne’s now tattered banners looked the worse for wear. After four hundred miles the men appeared “weary, footsore, and generally dilapidated.” Though the press had proudly advertised the “Coxey Shoe,” (see Figure 18) these marchers actually seemed short on shoes. One marcher could be seen walking around with one foot in a rubber boot, and the other covered in a piece of canvass. Meanwhile, Coxey and Browne spent their night in the National Hotel, reportedly one of the best in Washington.394

Among those visiting the site were Populist Senators Peffer of Kansas and Allen of Nebraska who rode in their carriages to the Brightwood staging area to welcome their kindred spirits. Populist Representative Constantine Kilgore of Texas, with his long gray beard was also spotted amidst the onlookers that included other Congressional members and ambassadors. Thirteen Populists now sat in the 53rd Congress following the 1892 elections, gaining strength and numbers they pursued their own bold agenda, including introducing Coxey’s Good Roads legislation, ignored by their colleagues and the press. In the days leading up to Coxey’s arrival, they argued amongst themselves over how to receive Coxey. Though Peffer and Allen offered welcoming resolutions and led debates on how an “industrial army”

should be properly received, not every Populist in this Congress agreed with Coxey’s tactic of delivering a petition to the steps of the Capitol.\textsuperscript{395}

Coxey and Browne seemed frustrated that the Populist agenda seemed moribund in Congress. But so too did some Populist members have severe reservations about the March. This dispute around tactics first surfaced when Nevada Populist Senator William Morris Stewart wrote Coxey a letter on March 24 imploring him not to march. Though Stewart made it clear he sympathized with Coxey’s cause, he passionately defended the ballot as the only means to exercise the people’s voice in a democracy:

\begin{quote}
The ides of November are approaching. An opportunity for the people to strike for liberty will again be presented. The old parties which have surrendered the rights of the people to the rule of concentrated capital will ask for renewal of their lease of power at the ballot box. Every movement of the people to obtain relief outside of the forms of law will be denounced as anarchy.
\end{quote}

Stewart further suggested that the March would simply provide a platform for the “money power” to accuse Populists generally of being irresponsible. The whole exercise was sheer “folly,” as Stewart described it. He reassured Coxey in his letter

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}
that he personally wholly sympathized with the cause of the unemployed. However, he thought Coxey’s Army would do better if its members expressed themselves with millions of others at the ballot box in November. Stewart warned Coxey that the March would simply “augment the power of the oppressor and endanger the safety of the ballot itself.”

Senator Stewart was not the only Populist concerned with public perception of the March. On the evening of April 25, as Coxey grew nearer Washington, the Populist Senators and House members met in their own congenial caucus to discuss the imminent arrival of their fellow travelers. They met for almost two and half hours behind closed doors, yet apparently from all accounts could not agree to endorse the movement. Some Congressional Populists seemed concerned that Coxey’s petition on boots had attracted a criminal element and thus might end in violence. Like their colleague Stewart, they agreed the March might set back Populist electoral chances in November. As they adjourned toward 10:30 they failed to reach any agreement. They could not bring themselves to publicly endorse the “Committee of Welcome Resolution” that Senators Peffer and Allen placed before the Senate earlier in the week. At the same time, however, they also found it difficult to publicly criticize their fellow Ohio Populist, though a sufficient number were apparently nervous enough about the path he chose to prevent any public statement of support. To these

duly elected Populists, the specter of their kindred spirit marching toward the capital seemed somehow to challenge their newly acquired institutional sensibilities.397

By contrast, as he arrived in Brightwood Park, Coxey seemed more determined than ever to deliver his Plan for Good Roads to the doorsteps of Congress. He responded to Stewart and complimented him for his efforts against the Goldbugs. However, Coxey defiantly responded to the Nevada Senator that “…the Rubicon has been crossed…He who is not with us is against us.” At this triumphant moment on the eve of his final parade down Pennsylvania Avenue, Coxey seemed to have little patience for conventional politics or politicians. As his friend Annie Diggs noted, the People’s Party was a formality. The true Populists she contended actually represented “…a great uprising of the people aimed at a new regime where the nation’s business agents did the work of the people they served.” Like her fellow traveler Coxey, she seemed increasingly convinced the Populist Party’s political operatives had lost sight of their raison d’être.398

As the crowds gathered at Brightwood, Coxey mounted the Panorama Wagon and began to speak to a crowd estimated from five to eight thousand. He spoke for half an hour. Many in the crowd took seats in the grandstand of the racing track and the infield of the track itself was filled with carriages with women shading themselves under their parasols. Coxey spoke at the top of his lungs at an impromptu

397 “Populists in Caucus,” The North American (Philadelphia), 26 April 1894; Hicks, Coxey’s Army, 110.
398 “Coxey at His Goal,” The Evening Independent (Massillon OH), 30 April 1894; Diggs quoted in Postel, Populist Vision, 140; Postel provides interesting analysis in this chapter “Business Politics” regarding the frustration of many Alliance leaders, notably Charles Macune, with conventional “party” politics; in fact, their frustration with the very formation of the People’s Party. On page 139 he quotes Leonidas Polk, “We have at length learned the difference between partyism and politics. Politics is the science of government, partyism is a little white collar with a chain on it.”
podium in front of the track’s stands. Excoriating the Goldbugs and trusts, Coxey took this opportunity at Brightwood to speak for a half an hour. He said he hoped the Congress would pass his Good Roads legislation and put four million unemployed Americans back to work. Coxey noted it usually took Congress at least two years to do anything, but he hoped these bills would pass in the next two weeks. “Twenty million people are hungry and can’t wait two years to eat. Four million people idle for nine months. That’s what Grover Cleveland has cost this country,” Coxey shouted. The cheers echoed through the Park. Coxey went on defiantly, saying he and his men were prepared to endure the entire summer to see his legislation passed. There were more loud cheers. Then he described his plan for Good Roads, telling those assembled this was why these brave men that now stood before them, now swollen to over 300 men including an estimated 100 who comprised the same core of men who started in Massillon, marched all this way to Washington in the first place. The cheers of the sympathetic throng reverberated throughout the park.399

This chapter addresses the ways in which Washington’s varied anticipation and reaction to the arrival of Coxey’s Commonweal is indicative of how the spectacle of populism on display in of the March could both resonate and repulse. In 1894, Washington can be characterized as a city without much sympathy for populists, whether elected or in the rawer form marching toward it. Its growing government apparatus increasingly supported an emerging intellectual class. This chapter puts in perspective the city’s figurative distance from the almost two decade long populist fervor

399Coxey at His Goal,” The Evening Independent (Massillon OH), 30 April 1894; “More Men in Line,” Boston Daily Globe, 28 March 1894;
that gripped other regions. Unlike the many towns and hamlets through which the March had already passed, Washington had no real identity as a farm or industrial community. This limited the constituencies that might welcome the Coxey spectacle.

The most enthusiastic reception in Washington was from its African-American population. For weeks they anticipated the arrival with open arms, seeing in its symbolism of diversity the harbinger of perhaps a more tolerant future society. As Baker observed along the March route, African Americans were among the most enthusiastic in their support. Thus while official Washington might seem anxious over this unprecedented March, each week the Washington Bee proudly declared “Coxey is Coming.” When he finally arrived, Washington’s black population enthusiastically responded.  

This chapter also details how official Washington reacted to Coxey’s approach. The “General” found his much anticipated arrival in Washington anything but welcoming from those in control of the federal and District governments. The specter of Coxey’s army of industrials arriving in Washington, with the potential to be accompanied by thousands of other unruly and unemployed tramps, seemed to many of its officials the harbinger of a much darker reality. They worried less about the ideas represented by the March, than its potential to provoke widespread unrest and violence, perhaps outright anarchy in the nation’s capital. The District’s leadership thus became flummoxed by this approaching populist energy force now moving toward the federal enclave. In an increasingly government oriented town, the anxieties of officials who saw the potential

400 “Met By Armed Forces,” The Chicago Record 25 April 1894; For example on April 28 the Washington Bee under its standard “Coxey is Coming” headline said “Notwithstanding the opposition of certain newspapers in this city Coxey and his true and tried braves are coming.” See “Coxey is Coming,” The Washington Bee, 28 April 1894.
for chaos, even anarchy, resulting from the real and imagined portent of armies of
“industrials” invading the Capitol, magnified as daily newspaper articles added to their
anxious anticipation. The threatening approach of industrial armies caused the President
to convene special cabinet meetings, led the Secretary of Treasury to ask the Secret
Service to infiltrate the March, and resulted in the District Police and the National Guard
mobilizing for possible violence. The 53rd Congress had cordially accepted thirteen
Populist members as they were officially sworn in March 1893 under normal
Congressional custom, and then proceeded to largely ignore them. By contrast, the
approach of Coxey’s March, in its many dissonant dimensions, produced widespread
anxiety and condemnation among official Washington. The arrival was no ordinary
“political event,” but after weeks of incessant front page coverage appeared to be an
invasion of the unemployed which threatened the very “regular order” of their
institutionalized political world. As Senator George Vest of Missouri said in utter
frustration in a debate over how to receive Coxey, “It is time, Mr. President, that we had
the courage to stand together against socialism and populism and paternalism run
riot…. 401

Yet at the same time, as will be discussed, Coxey’s arrival did little to stir
Congress to enact a Good Roads Program or any other pending legislation that would
create jobs for the unemployed. Rather, with the Sherman Silver Act already repealed, the
Democrats now believed the remaining solution to the Panic lay in repeal of the
McKinley tariff. Bold populist ideas like Coxey’s Good Roads Plan languished in their

401 26 Congressional Record, April 26, 1894; 4107.
various legislative translations in the 53rd Congress. Only one Populist idea from the Omaha Platform, that advocating for adoption of a graduated income tax, emerged as a credible element in the final compromise to the all consuming tariff debate.

Finally, this chapter also reinforces how Coxey’s direct form of democratic expression challenged those Populists who now chose the route of more conventional political expression. Coxey challenged this institutionalized approach as he arrived in Washington with his petition of boots, and this predictably gave his fellow Populists pause. If Populist members occasionally expressed reservation about Coxey’s tactics, it was largely because they sought to overcome their own marginalized status by working within the existing rules that perpetuated the dominance of the two established political parties. Throughout the 53rd Congress the Populists sought to find innovative ways to procedurally break this chokehold, but always within the institutional rules and norms in which they operated.

Yet in spite of their understandable ambivalence about the consequences for them from Coxey’s raw protest, the dozen Populist members of the Congress nonetheless attempted in their own institutional ways to warmly receive Coxey as their kindred spirit. They offered resolutions that sought to insure Coxey’s men would be welcomed and Coxey would have his opportunity to be heard. They supported the Good Roads Plan by introducing Coxey’s legislation, and they reached out to defend Coxey and Browne after their arrest. Indeed Nebraska Populist Senator Allen, though he supported little else in the Omaha Platform, vociferously defended Coxey’s right to be heard. As this chapter concludes, Coxey’s protest seemed an echo of an earlier, more spontaneous populist
energy now losing ground to monopolists and corporate power, and to the inertia of government institutions.\textsuperscript{402}

**Government Town**

As Coxey marched, Washington remained a city largely insulated from the economic plight decimating rural and industrial America. The Capital city seemed to retain its southern charm and relaxed airs. Washington’s predominantly white population went about its business at a leisurely pace. One British observer commented that “It looks a sort of place where nobody has to work for his living, or at any rate, not hard.” Washington by the 1890’s remained a genteel city, charmed with a growing intelligentsia and what one observer thought a “slow pace of life that left its people time to enjoy it.” It was hardly a Populist stronghold.\textsuperscript{403}

After the Civil War, the District received an influx of ex soldiers and war contractors seeking newly minted government jobs and nearly doubling the city’s population. The growth of government jobs began to define the city’s economy. Prior to the Civil War, 2,199 were employed in the civil service or about 9 per cent of the District’s total employment. But by the 1890 census, 20,834 were employed by the federal government. Government employees had thus grown to a fifth of all those employed in the capital. One observer noted that the educated work force had produced

\textsuperscript{402} The Omaha platform states as its second point: “Resolved, That the revenues derived from a graduated income tax should be applied to the reduction of the burden of taxation now resting upon the domestic industries of this country.” See ‘The Omaha Platform of the People’s Party, 1892 reprinted in Irwin Unger, \textit{Populism: Nostalgic or Progressive} (New York: rand McNally, 1964), 36-44; According to Karel Bicha “Senator Allen’s private views and public performance were a denial of Populist convictions. For Allen accepted none of the Omaha Platform except its monetary and coinage sections.” See Karel Bicha, \textit{Western Populism: Studies in an Ambivalent Conservatism} (Lawrence: Coronado Press, 1976), 44. For a discussion of the Populists in Congress and their attempts to overcome the bias in favor of the established parties see Peter H. Argesinger, “No Rights on this Floor,” \textit{The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism} (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1997), 213-246.

an intellectual renaissance of sorts, with emerging arts, music and literary circles tied to this growing cadre of federal employees. In 1894 these government employees provided a growing nucleus of educated people who demanded the finer aspects of culture.⁴⁰⁴

As Gilded Age America’s industrial base formed to the north, Washington D.C. had little firsthand familiarity with its factories and hardened workers. An approaching industrial army therefore represented at best a curiosity, at worst a menacing prospect. Following the Civil War, Washington clumsily tried to form an industrial base. Efforts to restructure the city’s economy on a northeastern industrial model focused on development of a sound infrastructure. But this effort quickly went awry. Local businessman Alexander Shepherd’s failed $6 million effort to facelift the city’s muddy streets and open sewers during the decade of the 1870’s, led Congress to wrest control of the city government back from District residents.

Moreover, a short lived initiative by the city’s Board of Trade that sought to make the capital a seamless part of the burgeoning northeastern industrial corridor floundered. A competing vision that envisioned Washington as more a merchant’s “Gateway to the South” met with equally dismal results.⁴⁰⁵

Washington seemed deliberately intent on avoiding the travails of industrialization. As its federal bureaucracy grew, the alternative vision of a city where the Potomac waterway and the confluence of rail lines might create an industrial hub seemed illusory. As real estate sales in the District declined and new construction sagged

⁴⁰⁴ Reynolds Hole, A Little Tour of America, 92; Green, Washington: Capitol City, 100.
during the Panic, local business interests vainly tried to promote the availability of factory sites and the opportunity to hire plenty of unemployed workmen. But this vision gained little traction against the established view that the city remained dedicated to serving the federal government. Other than the Navy Yard which manufactured ordnance, Washington’s industrial economy, for what it was, consisted of beer making, power generation, and print shops. As one prominent historian of the capital observed, “At the end of the 1870’s knowledgeable Washingtonians had come to see the city’s future as forever tied to her status as the national capital.” Moreover, this self image of being a truly capital city seemed increasingly attractive when compared with the violence that beset America’s industrial centers. The Great Upheaval of 1877, the Haymarket riots of 1886, and the Homestead Strike of 1892, all were in close chronological proximity, and served as a backdrop for Washington’s trepidation over the approaching industrials.406

As Coxey approached the capital city, Washington fell woefully short of imitating northern and Midwestern industrial progress or to becoming an entry way to the southern economy. Washington’s increasingly federal government dominated economy seemed insulated from the depression affecting the rest of the country. On the day that Coxey left Massillon, The Washington Post featured a story about a much different sort of parade. A spectacular front page illustration and a headline “Sunday Afternoon on Connecticut Avenue” depicted a promenade of the powerful and the rich outfitted in their best spring attire. The illustration beckoned readers to a

406 Green, Washington: Capitol City,7-16. See also http://www.history.navy.mil/faq52-1.htm This discussion of the history of the Washington D.C. Navy Yard notes: “In 1886, the yard was designated the manufacturing center for all ordnance in the Navy.”
long description of Washington Gilded Age gaiety on display. Bedecked in their finest dress, the illustration of famous Washington “gentlemen” in top hats and tie, and “gentle ladies” in corseted gowns, cut across the entire front page of The Post. The accompanying magniloquent prose described the scene: “Here is the parade, the gay stream of humanity, the gaudy promenade of the fashion of youth, and beauty and distinction.” This hardly seemed a city prepared to welcome an invading army of “industrials.” Meanwhile, the Post’s account of Coxey’s departure from Massillon appeared quietly on page two surrounded by stories of the upcoming elections in England and a railroad scandal.407

In this comfortable Washington milieu, there was hardly any hint of populist fervor, or concerns voiced for those unemployed. Washington’s immigrant and black populations together comprising the largest segment of those in poverty remained largely ignored. Not only was the press complicit in this suppression, but by the mid 1890’s one writer suggested “a reader of white newspapers might have supposed Washington had no colored community.” Yet this was far from the case. Following the Civil War there was an immediate influx of 23,000 new black residents from tidewater Maryland and eastern Virginia. By the end of the decade, Washington D.C. would have the nation’s largest urban black population. Yet, in an economically and socially divided Gilded Age America, whites found it convenient to ignore this segregated black population of the District, and without any moral approbation, the growing numbers of destitute and disenfranchised poor. Just as elsewhere in America’s nascent corporate culture of the late


**Fortification**

In this context largely insulated from producer discontent, Washington suddenly confronted the reality of approaching industrial armies. This prospect created a heightened sense of nervous anticipation among those officials charged with the safety of its citizens. Increasingly alarmist news accounts exacerbated the anxieties of local and federal officials. Press accounts in the spring of 1894 suggested Coxey’s arrival would mean class warfare, and reported Washington to be in turmoil over this gathering storm. For example, the Portsmouth Ohio \textit{Daily News} reported that “Coxey is bringing terror to the national capital.” Accusing Coxey of organizing “predatory gangs” this news account from a Washington based reporter suggested that “Not since the opening days of the rebellion have the people here been so frightened.” Even before the march left Massillon, the \textit{Post} dutifully warned its leaders that Coxey, though he might be a businessman of some means, would find upon entering the District “that this wealth will be no excuse when charged with vagrancy under the District laws.”\footnote{“To Washington,” \textit{Portsmouth Daily News}, 27 April 1894; “Laws to Squelch Him,” \textit{The Washington Post}, 24 March 1894.}

During the week of April 26, as Coxey’s troops reached Frederick Maryland, increasingly disturbing reports emanated from news accounts that detailed the progress of other industrial armies in the West. Stories graphically depicting how these rowdier industrial armies commandeered trains, threatened local officers, and brandished arms
caught the attention of public officials in the East. With Coxey’s Army now near Washington these stories, often summarized daily on the front pages, flummoxed those responsible for law and order in the nation’s capital. They featured leads such as:

**Portland, Oregon:** Soldiers from Vancouver barracked to protect Northern Pacific property; police force of Washington to be increased two hundred men; men are now practicing riot drill; roads approaching the national capital are guarded.

**Indianapolis, Indiana:** Divisions of General Frye’s branch of the Commonweal army arrived today from Terre Haute on a Vandalia freight train which they had seized at Brazil.

**Omaha, Nebraska:** The Central Labor Union, at a meeting last night appointed a committee to confer with a similar committee from the Knights of Labor to discuss the advisability of ordering a general boycott of the Rock Island Railroad for its treatment of Kelley’s Army. It was also decided to see if the law would permit the arming of all labor organizations in the city, rather as a protective measure than for any other purpose.

As the armies approached Washington, these and similarly alarming press accounts not only became more frequent, but contributed to the mounting sense of anxiousness among officials. The Treasury Department deployed fifty five additional carbines and twenty revolvers to its seventy man security guard. The citizens of Takoma Park and Tenleytown within the District of Columbia organized their own committees of safety. The District’s Superintendent of Police William G. Moore acknowledged major preparations underway to confront the Coxeyites. In an interview on April 26, he sought to be reassuring to District residents. Yet in the same interview he alarmingly noted many criminals had already entered the city in advance of Coxey and were hoping for a riot. He then tried to reassure residents he had already deputized an additional 200 officers for the May 1 March. As the *Boston Daily Globe* reported to its readers, “The rest of the country has not the least conception of the state of nervousness which prevails in Washington at
this time.” Indeed, on April 26 the US Marines stationed in the nearby Navy Yard went through riot drills. 410

When he arrived at the outskirts of the Capital, Coxey’s own rhetoric did nothing to calm the city’s residents or its elected officials. He refused to be clear when reporters asked him what the marchers would do after they arrived on the Capitol grounds. “But the police will not allow you to enter the Capitol grounds?” reporters reminded him. “Wait until we get there” came Coxey’s terse response. “Do you mean by that you will force an entrance?” the reporters persisted. Coxey gave no response simply fueling the worst sort of speculation. Coxey indicated the men were prepared to stay the summer if necessary to make their point. If the police thwarted them, he indicated he would appeal to the highest court. Then, in rhetoric that only served to heighten Washington’s anxieties, he defiantly noted that if the courts refused them the result would be revolution. “I do not advocate revolution, nor do I desire it, but it will be irresistible and it will be the greatest revolution of history, if the American people are thoroughly aroused,” he warned. 411

Even prior to departing Massillon, Coxey and Browne fueled the anxieties in the Capital by dispatching an advance man to Washington to prepare for the March’s arrival and entice new recruits to join. Colonel Redstone, who knew Browne from their days together as part of the sandlot protests in San Francisco, had moved to Washington where he reportedly served as a patent attorney, and was

recommended to Coxey by Browne. Redstone began producing a small newspaper called *The National Tocsin* and used it as a way to publicize the arrival of Coxey’s Army and attract recruits. Redstone warned the capital’s residents that as many as an estimated 100,000 unemployed would soon be arriving in Washington, adding to the chorus of reports that put the capital city on edge. As reactions grew to Redstone’s predictions, the Colonel turned on the press accusing them of stoking fears. Alleging the press purposefully inflated the number of men gathered in Massillon, he noted their reports had consistently overestimated their actual numbers. In vein he tried to reassure District residents saying in an interview that he did not expect any large demonstrations anywhere in the city.

In the days leading up to the March’s arrival, Redstone continued to make his own clumsy attempts to overcome the increasing alarm generated by press reports in large part based on his own enthusiastic projections. He insisted the March would be peaceful and that its leaders would maintain a sense of “order and decency.” He sought to reassure Capitol residents that the Army would arrive in a Christian spirit of non-violence. Yet with each public statement, Redstone only seemed to fuel Washington’s growing nervousness by drawing attention to the whole affair and acknowledging the potential for upheaval, if not anarchy. By April 23rd he decided to leave the capital in order to join the March then about two miles outside of Boonsboro Maryland. The Demons spotted him with his white beard as he waited patiently on the trail of the National Pike for the first glimpse of the stars
and stripes along the horizon that might herald the slowly approaching Commonweal. 412

As Washington’s anxieties increased, President Cleveland, whose formidable and often stern formal manner belied a more jovial personality, attempted to appear outwardly calm. Yet actions by the administration revealed it too had significant concerns. The Secretary of the Treasury authorized Secret Service agents to infiltrate the procession as it approached Washington. As Matthew F. Griffin, one of the Service operatives assigned to the March noted some thirty years later, “Coxey’s army was treated as anything but a joke at the time.” The real possibility of 100,000 men or more, mostly unemployed men, descending on a city of approximately 250,000, caused the Service to begin monitoring the situation well before Coxey left Massillon. As Griffin noted, “Every bit of news that reached Massillon in the week preceding the March to Washington was eagerly read.” The Service focused particularly on what Griffin described as an “undertone of menace.” The March route was thought to pass near the Treasury building. Therefore some agents speculated as to whether raiding the nation’s money supply might not be the real aim of these desperate unemployed tramps. In short Griffin observed, “An army of 100,000 in the City of Washington was not a thought to be idly brushed aside.” 413


Griffin claimed that the public could not sense the real fears that beset those empowered to protect the capital. As the army had approached the outskirts of Washington two hundred cavalry riders from Fort Meyers greeted the March. These troops constituted part of a well known contingency plan weeks in preparation under the leadership of Richard Olney, President Cleveland’s Attorney General, himself a former railroad attorney, who also held significant railroad stock. Olney, who months later would take a leading hand in breaking the Pullman strike, now took the impending threat of approaching armies of unemployed very seriously. He was encouraged in his concerns by railroad attorneys who were fearful their company’s trains would be commandeered by the unemployed industrials. As Henry James wrote in his biography of the Attorney General, “In a vague way he [Coxey] had threatened Washington with something it had never experienced, and the prospect had excited alarmists into talking about a march of the Paris mob to Versailles.” In James view, Olney’s decisive order to federal officials in western states to prevent the commandeering of railroads by Coxey sympathizers saved Washington from being overrun. Olney’s April 25 order to a United States Marshal at Grafton North Dakota read: “Execute any injunction or other process placed in your hands by the United States Court for the protection of persons and property against lawless violence by employing such number of deputies as may be necessary.” To James

(March, 1926): 915-916; The newspaper accounts of the approaching armies and their size varied widely. Both Schwantes and McMurry devote considerable text to the other industrial armies. Geographically, Kelly’s departed from San Francisco, Frye’s from Los Angeles, and Jones from Philadelphia; but there were at least five others and perhaps as many as fifteen that tried to organize and join Coxey. *The Raleigh News Observer* reported the following tally on April 24 on page 1: General Kelly’s 1,000 men; Neola, Iowa; General Frye’s 1,000 Terre Haute, Indiana; General Frye’s second division, 800 men, McCleansboro, Illinois; General Grayson 1,000 men Plattville, Colorado; General Galcin 200 men, Loveland Ohio; Sergeant Randall, 500 men Chicago; 100 men at Little Falls, Minnesota; 300 men at Butte, Montana; 100 men at Monmouth, Illinois; 100 men at Ottumwa, Iowa; Captain Sullivan, 1,000 men, Chicago; 150 men at Anderson, Indiana; and General Aubrey, 700 men, Indianapolis, Indiana.”
aristocratic tastes, Olney’s preemptive intervention would stop hundreds of thousands of Coxey sympathizers from arriving in Washington.\textsuperscript{414}

According to Griff in the public was deliberately spared knowledge of the many secret meetings among cabinet officials and the preparations to bring in troops should the situation demand. Yet some obvious signs of the extent of preparation emerged as the March came towards the capital. For example, Montgomery County Maryland announced it would have its own 100 armed deputies on hand to meet the arrival. Two days prior to the March’s departure, the Washington Post detailed at length how the District National Guard commenced emergency drills in anticipation of the arrival of the industrial armies reported to be headed toward the Capital. The Post reported the militia’s drills in some detail. At the Center Market Armory, Colonel Cecil Clay addressed three battalions assembled in front of him. He noted the imminent invasion and said Congress should take notice of how quickly his troops could assemble and support the police in quelling any violence. Clay noted at least 1200 National Guard troops would be available immediately, and some 3,000 that could be called up within a half day’s time if circumstances warranted. Moreover District and National Guard officials could rely on forces from Pennsylvania and New York, as well as marines stationed at the local Navy yard and federal artillery. Newspaper stories reassured the

\textsuperscript{414} “Encamped at the Capital,” New York Times, 30 April 1894; “Capital Invaded,” Boston Daily Globe, 30 April 1894; Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 172-73; McMurry, Coxey’s Army, 102-3; Vincent, Story of the Commonweal, 104-5; “Coxey at the Capitol,” The Chicago Record, 29 April 1894; For discussion of Olney see Matthew Josephson, The Politicos 1865-1896 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1938), 559-604; Henry James, Richard Olney and His Public Service (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 36-41; Olney’s memorandum can also be found in the Cleveland Papers, April 20, 1894 at the Library of Congress.
anxious public that “The speed with which it will be possible to mobilize troops in an emergency…is not a matter of conjecture but of established fact.”

The District National Guard under the leadership of Brigadier General Albert Ordway, also carefully planned and charted its defense against the invading armies. Ordway in 1891 published his own detailed instructional manual detailing how to respond to various types of civil disturbances. In this volume Ordway cautioned that from a military standpoint, such premeditated protests could prove difficult to defend. He noted the spontaneous outbreaks of group violence such as the draft riots in New York City in 1863 or those associated with the rail strike of 1877 could be managed well by armed force. What he found more difficult to contain were premeditated protests that were carefully planned. For Ordway, Coxey’s March clearly fit this more challenging category.

While local militia and police prepared, the Secret Service dispatched Griffin and other agents to actually infiltrate the March so they might better understand the contingencies for which they needed to prepare. They were dispatched because of their “known capacity to play the parts of down-and-outers.” Griffin joined the March inconspicuously in the frenzy near Pittsburgh on April 1. Under the alias “William D. Murphy,” he reported directly to Browne who provided the new recruit a plate to wear around his neck and a badge indicating his membership in the Commonweal. Sporting his new identity, Griffin immediately blended in and began the typical daily regimen.

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including the usual breakfasts of hard tack, bacon and coffee. Apparently, unbeknownst to his fellow travelers, however, he also sent letters reporting his daily observations back to Secret Service headquarters in Washington.417

Griffin would later write that he became disturbed about one recruit he referred to as “Red.” In his dispatches to the Chief of the Service William P. Hazen, Griffin characterized Red as a potential agitator. He reported him complaining “Petitions! The only way of waking them [Congress and President] up is to blow up the whole damned works.” Griffin would learn later that “Red” was actually auditioning to become a secret service agent himself. The Coxey episode simply served as a trial for his qualification.

Of course, the accuracy of Griffin’s account needs to be weighed against the needs of the editors of Flynn’s Weekly, a pulp detective magazine where Griffin later wrote his brief memoir. Flynn’s naturally reveled in just this sort of intrigue. Yet notwithstanding the fact that Griffin may have embellished his account for the Flynn readership, he does corroborate that the Service paid close attention to the March and its personalities.

Another popular magazine, Old Cap Collier, claimed that the dime novel’s legendary character assuming the pseudonym of “Mose Miller” infiltrated the March as a Secret Service agent. Indeed threats being reported by the Service in the weeks prior to the March arriving in Washington led to the very first incidence of actual physical protection by agents for the President and the first family.418

417 Matthew F. Griffin, “Secret Service Memories (Part 1)” Flynn’s Weekly 13, no. 5 or 6 (University of Minnesota Library unable to verify) (March, 1926): 915-927; and Matthew F. Griffin, “Secret Service Memories (Part 2)” Flynn’s Weekly, 14, no. 1or 2 (University of Minnesota Library unable to verify), (March, 1926):86-89;
418 Matthew F. Griffin, “Secret Service Memories (Part 1)” Flynn’s Weekly; 13, no.5 or 6 (University of Minnesota Library unable to verify) (March, 1926): 915-927; and Matthew F. Griffin, “Secret Service Memories (Part 2)” Flynn’s Weekly, 14, no. 1or 2 (University of Minnesota Library unable to verify) (March, 1926): 86-89;Norman L. Munro, On to Washington, or Old Cap Collier with the Coxey’s Army, (New York: Munro’s Publishing House), 3-4.
From actual contemporaneous reports we know that two Secret Service agents, J.W. Cribbs and S.A. Donnella were in fact dispatched to Westport Maryland to meet the army as it disembarked from its canal venture. They both posed as new recruits. On April 19 the two began sending their reports back to William P. Hazen, the Chief of the Secret Service. Lacking any context from what occurred in the preceding days in the March, Cribbs and Donnella became confused by the appearance of the Unknown, who they referred to simply as “Smith.” They tried to make sense of his appearance in Westport the night before Coxey returned from New York. The agents erroneously concluded “Smith” was advancing for the March, but became alarmed by Smith’s inflammatory speech. After watching him take a collection from the audience, they accused him of being in it solely for the money. Indeed reports the two filed were no more insightful than the newspaper reports anyone could have read. For example on April 19 Cribbs reported “Donnella and I have become acquainted with a great number of them [the marchers]. They all have the same ideal, to move ‘On to Washington’ to move Congress to pass their bills.” This was also the impression Griffin gleaned from living with the men. He noted the men seemed to sincerely believe in Coxey’s visionary scheme. 419

On April 24, James Scanlon, another Secret service operative implanted with the March, reported that he dispatched one of his men to shadow Coxey on his trip to New York City. Following Coxey to Baltimore he reported Coxey “had met no known

419 Letter from William P. Hazen Chief of the Secret Service to John G. Carlisle, Secretary of the Treasury, April 20, 1894 found in the The Papers of President Grover Cleveland, Reel 84, Series 2, The Library of Congress; Matthew F. Griffin, “Secret Service Memories (Part 1)” Flynn’s Weekly 13, no. 5 or 6 (University of Minnesota Library unable to verify) (March, 1926): 919.
Anarchists….” Meanwhile Cribbs and Donnella stayed with the March reporting to Chief Hazen that the approach route to Washington had changed and that fifty new recruits joined the March. Though he did not elaborate, Cribbs now evidenced concern over some of the more incendiary language coming from one of the recruits who he had nicknamed “Butty.” In his April 25 dispatch, Cribbs said “…judging from his [Butty’s] tone I would advise you to be on the alert.” The character Cribbs referred to may well have been the very same aspiring agent Griffin labeled as ‘Red.” The time frames of the accounts coincide with Coxey’s trip to New York City. If so, Griffin’s account may well be accurate, even if embellished for Flynn’s Weekly. Regardless, both service members had obviously failed to identify a fellow operative, even if only auditioning for the role.\footnote{Letter from William P. Hazen Chief of the Secret Service to John G. Carlisle, Secretary of the Treasury, April 24, 1894 found in the The Papers of President Grover Cleveland, Reel 84, Series 2, The Library of Congress.}

Coxey, Browne, and the marchers must have suspected the Secret Service or other detectives had infiltrated the March. The press indeed reported the presence of detectives, and speculated concerning the Secret Service, though it may have been impossible for the marchers to determine who among them were spying. The agent’s dispatches were mailed, not telegrammed, so reporters would not have witnessed them conveying their stories at the makeshift telegraph stations improvised each night. Moreover, even if Coxey had suspicions or in fact knew he was being trailed to New York, it clearly did not alter the way he spoke or acted after arriving at The Sturtevant House on April 22.\footnote{“Sleuths Put on Coxey’s Trail,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 23 April 1894.}

At the same time, the news of the secret service infiltrating the March, even if only conjecture, in itself became the subject of concern to Chief Hazen. When the New
York Herald reported on April 23 that the Service assigned nine of its special agents to track the movements of Coxey, Hazen grew infuriated. He immediately accused A.J. Drummond, Chief of the Secret Service under President Benjamin Harrison for leaking the story to the press. Since Harrison’s defeat, Drummond domiciled in New York City where he started his own detective firm. When Drummond learned that Hazen accused him of the leak, he became so outraged, that he wrote then Attorney General Richard Olney’s brother, Peter, claiming “I have been outrageously insulted by a subordinate officer of one of the Departments at Washington…” He then asked the young Olney to represent him against the slander on his name. Drummond’s letter to Olney went on to excoriate his successor for charging him with such an outrage. Drummond hoped that Olney, perhaps through the good offices of his brother, the Attorney General, could exact an apology from Hazen.422

Drummond also wrote Agriculture Secretary Morton to suggest that based on information he had received about the Nebraska contingent of Coxey’s Army, the President now needed Secret Service Protection. As a veteran Chief of the Service, Drummond pointed out that there was probably $35,000 available in appropriated money for just such protection. Drummond later acknowledged that his letter to Secretary Morton may have been what offended Hazen, so much so he surmised that Hazen would allege Drummond to be the source of the leak to the press about the service tailing Coxey.

422 “Sleuths Put on Coxey’s Trail,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 23 April 1894; Letters from A.J. Drummond to the Honorable P.B. Olney, attorney at law, May 31, 1894; Letter from Secretary of Agriculture J. Sterling Morton to A.L. Drummond, May 6, 1894; Letter from A.L. Drummond to J. Sterling Morton, Secretary of Agriculture, May 7,1894, all found in the The Papers of President Grover Cleveland, Reel 84, Series 2, The Library of Congress.
Whatever the political machinations occurring between the former and current Secret Service Chief, Coxey and his men seemed indifferent to the presence of agents, nor could the agents do anything more than interpret random comments by the marchers as possible threats against the government. In New York City, Coxey spoke freely about the March, seemingly not concerned about who heard his words. He knew his own intentions and the peaceful nature of his producer Commonweal and for him the presence of agents or detectives simply seemed irrelevant to his grander purpose.423

Meanwhile although the number of guards at the White House was reported to have doubled, Cleveland seemed unperturbed about the preparations swirling about him. He tried to present an outwardly unconcerned demeanor by accompanying the First Lady in open carriage rides though the Washington streets. Yet behind this façade of calm, the President expressed concern when it was learned that Coxey’s Army upon its arrival might camp near the Cleveland summer home at Woodley Park. At the White House itself, Cleveland’s personal secretary Henry Thurber ordered that a special shelter be erected on the grounds where an extra guard might be posted. Quickly dubbed “Fort Thurber” by the press, its guards kept on the lookout for the suspicious criminals and anarchists rumored to be entering the District.424

423 In a Letter from A.L. Drummond to J. Sterling Morton, Secretary of Agriculture, May 7, 1894, Drummond categorically denies that he leaked the fact that the Secret service trailed the March: “I did not at that time nor at any other time, in New York City nor in any other place on this earth, speak to, write to, nor in any other manner convey to the New York City Herald or to any other newspaper directly or indirectly, any information regarding the movements of the Secret Service officers in connection with the Coxey Army, Coxey himself, nor any member of his band, as I knew nothing about it and could not if I wished,” found in The Papers of President Grover Cleveland, Reel 84, Series 2, The Library of Congress; The “Olney” that Drummond refers to in this letter and to whom he wrote on May 31 addressing as P.B. Olney is Peter B. Olney, Cleveland’s Attorney General Richard Olney’s young brother, see Footnote 2 Chapter one, Henry James, Richard Olney and His Public Service (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1923), 7.

On April 22, Cleveland convened a daylong conference with the District of Columbia’s Chief of Police Major William Moore and members of the cabinet to discuss the growing threat. Reports circulated that Cleveland’s Secretary of War, Daniel S. Lamont, ordered troops stationed at Fort Meyer to stop the Commonweal should it approach from west of the capital. Bands of cavalry men could be spotted riding through Washington’s outlying neighborhoods preparing to meet the invasion. As the Army approached from Frederick Maryland, the District Commissioners issued their own proclamation stating that the right to petition “did not justify methods dangerous to peace and good order, which threatens the quiet of the Nation’s Capital....” Similarly, the House of Representative’s Sergeant at Arms urgently met with the Chief of the Capitol Police, and though the two agreed not to resort to violence when Coxey approached, they did make a commitment the marchers would not be allowed to loiter on the capitol grounds or fill the galleries. Furthermore, a District Proclamation of April 23 passed by the D.C. City Board of Commissioners sent a clear warning to any Washingtonians who were thinking of joining the “evil doers.” The three Commissioners noted that “No possible good can come of such a gathering, and with no proper preparations or means of subsistence, suffering and ultimate disorder will certainly ensue.”

Placed in charge of the effort to protect the nation’s capitol, Chief Moore called up some 200 additional police. He cited an obscure 1882 “Act to Regulate the Grounds,”

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as his basis to use force if necessary. This he said would allow him to order his troops to forcibly interrupt the procession to the Capitol steps on May 1 if that became necessary. Moore also noted that the 1882 Act prohibited “loud, threatening or abusive language” from being uttered. Moreover, he warned any display of the flag which was simply designed to bring attention to a “party, organization or movement,” could also be considered an offense. In short Moore felt a variety of existing District ordinances provided the police ample authority to take care of Mr. Coxey and his assembly. Indeed as Coxey would soon discover, Moore’s District police would have no inhibition to enforcing even the seemingly most trivial ordinance. In addition to the congressionally authorized prohibitions the District Commission enacted its own emergency proclamation on April 23rd. It urged the March leaders to reconsider their plan to enter the District, noting “No possible good can come from such a gathering....” When asked by a reporter if the police would arrest Coxey since “he is a rich man,” one prominent District attorney dismissed any notion to the contrary replying, “Yes we could and would arrest Coxey too, as an idle and disorderly person.”

**Congress**

The intensity with which official Washington prepared for the impending arrival of Coxey’s armies far exceeded the routine greeting that awaited the thirteen Populist members of the 53rd Congress when they arrived in Washington in February 1893. The arrival of duly elected representatives seemed far less threatening than the prospect of unemployed men invading the nation’s capital. Thus for example when the courtly

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though physically imposing two hundred and fifty pound, six foot three Nebraska Senator William V. Allen, took his first steps into the Senate chamber on February 24, 1893, he was courteously greeted by his colleagues. Indeed the press speculated whether during the customary organization of the two chambers the Democrats might invite the Populists to caucus with them. Yet in the end, the new Populist arrivals were left to caucus by themselves. Though cordially received, they were now left largely to their own devices. They seemed to pose little threat to the new Democratic majority, and in fact, as ongoing fusion attempts suggested, seemed to agree with their Democratic colleagues more often than not.427

As Coxey marched, the Democrats controlled both Houses of Congress for the first time since 1881. Confirming the tactical wisdom of the Populists ongoing dalliance with fusion, the late nineteenth century version of the Democratic Party already aligned well with many notions at the base of the Populist ideology. Cleveland’s inaugural speech on a bitterly cold March 5, 1893, touched many of these common themes. He particularly decried the scourge of concentrated industrial power in the form of trusts and monopolies. His Democratic colleagues, drawing much of their support from urban ethnic minorities and white southerners, remained a party wedded to notions of Jeffersonian small government and state’s rights. They sought to keep the government out of the marketplace, which included repealing the McKinley tariff. In many ways the Democrat’s notion of restricted government seemed to align with the prevailing notions of the People’s Party. Neither party intended to create a large government apparatus.

Rather they sought to curb the power of the monopolists and corporate interests. Populists in particular, called on government to intervene to spur competition on behalf of the producer.⁴²⁸

Populist members of Congress proceeded to offer their own bold measures aimed at assisting those impacted by the Panic. Indeed amidst the uneven patchwork of underfunded social relief efforts came a plethora of Populist schemes to address the nation’s economic travail. Yet few of these gained any federal support. As Benjamin Flowers editor of the utopian Arena lamented, the Congress seemed entirely willing to spend “Millions for armories and the military instruction of the young, but not one cent to furnish employment to able-bodied industry in its struggle to escape the terrible alternatives of stealing or starving __ such seems to be the theory of government in the United States today.” Indeed the legacy of failed Populist offerings in the 53rd Congress grew as Coxey neared Washington. As early as December of 1893 Senator Peffer offered a bill calling on the federal government to spend some $63 million dollars to be dispensed to the states to relieve the conditions of the poor. Peffer thought that every poor man needed a home and every elderly person should have a pension, just like any soldier who fought for the Republic in the Civil War. Peffer also introduced Coxey’s Good Roads and Non-Interest Bearing Bonds bills a week before Coxey left Massillon. Yet, like most Populist measures the Good Roads legislation languished in the Committee on

⁴²⁸Brodsky, Grover Cleveland, 285-287; Gene Clanton, Congressional Populism in Crisis and the Crisis of the 1890’s (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1998), 63-66.
Education and Labor, and before being reported unfavorably by the Committee on April 10 as the March camped in Uniontown Pennsylvania.429

Populist proposals in the House met with similarly brief life spans. For example, Populist Kansas Congressman John Davis of California offered several emergency measures to help the poor, elderly, and unemployed. In addition to offering a House counterpart to Senator Peffer’s senior citizen relief measure, he proposed the government fund the establishment of a 500,000 man “industrial army,” much along the lines Coxey proposed, to attend to emergency needs, including public works. Davis explained, the men would work on “public improvements,” and be paid in legal tender. Stated simply Davis said, “I take the ground that it is better to employ men than to starve and shoot them; and that it is better to furnish the people money to do business with, paid out for useful purposes, than it is to decrease the money and increase the taxes.” Yet, though unemployment grew, and the year 1894 marked the single worst period of the Panic, not a single Congressional floor vote addressed any public works measures. The Populist measures failed to move at all. As Flowers concluded, “construction of roads and levees might have provided thousands with jobs, but gold was deemed more precious” [referring to repeal of Sherman Silver Purchase Act]. 430

Ironically, however, on the one singular measure that defined the Democrats' response to the Panic, the repeal of the McKinley Tariff of 1890, the Populist members of the 53rd Congress could finally claim some political relevance. Since George put forward his single tax idea, Populists saw taxation as a means of removing the inequities of an existing tariff system they believed protected the wealthy at the expense of the producers. The tariff was a tax, but it was an unfair and regressive tax that Populists saw as being imposed at the expense of the laborer. As Kansas Populist Thomas Hudson declared, “Let no man ask for protection and claim that he does so in the interest of labor until he submits to a law which distributes the products of his protected industry fairly among those who produce it.” For the most part, though not a central issue, most Populists saw nothing virtuous in a protectionist tariff whose revenues ended up in the hands of the industrialist. By the same token, a graduated income tax like the one proposed in the Omaha Platform, would go directly to the Treasury and could be redistributed for public works and other public purposes that accrued to the benefit of producers.431

In 1894, the McKinley Tariff remained a vestige of the Republican’s domination of Congress for almost twenty years. White Anglo-Saxon Protestants from the northeast constituted the demographic core of the late nineteenth century Republican Party, and their constituencies were comprised of northern industrial interests that benefited from protection. The Republicans not only supported high tariffs to protect their large industrial contributors, but carried on from enactment of the Homestead Act of 1862 with other proposals that extended the role of the federal government in the development of a

strong federal state on behalf of industrial interests. Indeed since the Civil War and through the period of Radical Reconstruction, the Republican Party became identified with the federal government’s assertion of power for the benefit of corporate interests. From the time Coxey began planning the March in January 1894, repeal of the McKinley tariff consumed much of the House’s floor time. Thomas Bracket Reed, the powerful former Republican Speaker from Maine, who championed continuance of the tariff, led the floor debate against Ways and Means Chairman William Wilson’s (D-WV) bill to repeal the McKinley tariff virtually in its entirety. So ecstatic was the Democratic controlled House when it voted the tariff’s repeal on February 1 by a vote of 204 to 140, that Wilson was carried around the floor of the House on the shoulders of his admiring colleagues. Now, in the spring of 1894, and as Coxey approached Washington, the Wilson tariff bill was mired in Senate debate. Loaded with over 600 amendments in the Senate it became the subject of some selective labor opposition. In the case of tariffs, a few northeastern labor groups felt compelled, or perhaps coerced, into lobbying for the continuance of protection. In fact, just two weeks before the arrival of Coxey’s Army, over 2,000 members of the Workingmen’s Protective Tariff League came by train from Philadelphia to protest passage of repeal. As Washington braced itself for Coxey’s arrival with thousands of accompanying “tramps and vagabonds,” the Salem Daily News, like many news commentaries, saw the Philadelphia union presence simply as a preview of the Coxey invasion. The paper hastily reminded, however, that the two groups were distinct; the Philadelphia Workingmen’s Protective Tariff League were a respectable

group of laborers fearful that a lower tariff would hurt their industries. Thus the paper pointed out they were distinct from Coxey’s army which represented a band of “cranks and tramps” chasing a “chimerical idea.”

Generally speaking, in the 53rd Congress, Republicans voted on the side of government supporting corporate interests while Democrats tended to be more aligned with the producer and a less intrusive government. The dozen Populists found themselves more often than not aligned with the Democrats. When it came to the tariff this generally proved to be the case. For example, Minnesota Populist Congressman Haldor Boen asked on the floor of the House, why farmers should be required to sell goods in a free market, while being forced to buy the raw materials they needed in a protected market? Yet Populist sympathy for tariff repeal tended often to fall more along regional lines, just as it did with the two major parties. Moreover, some members of the new Populist Party were themselves former Republicans who believed the Whiggish American System with protective tariffs was essential for smaller producers and help to check large concentrations of corporate wealth. Indeed, as previously noted, this strain of Populist sentiment tracing its intellectual roots in Henry Carey’s American System, viewed protective tariffs as enabling small manufacturers and their agricultural suppliers. From a very practical standpoint Populists were aware that many farmers in the south and west supplied the very raw materials (for example sugar and wool) required to sustain those industrial interests in the East being protected by the McKinley Tariff. Yet, in the end, the Populist members of Congress did tend to be among the most outspoken in their

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support of repeal of the McKinley Tariff. In the wake of the Panic, they saw the McKinley Tariff as a contributing factor and no longer benefitting the producer. As Populist House member Thomas Jefferson Hudson said, in remarks on the floor during the debate:

Protection is the hot-house wherein is bred and force fed the noxious weeds of monopolies, combines, trusts, stock gambling and vicious classes, each and all of which are un-republican, undemocratic, unjust, un-American and a thousand times more dangerous to the liberty of our people than all the anarchists and socialists in the world.

Indeed at the end of debate over the Wilson-Gorman bill in the House all but one of the Populist members voted “yea” for repeal, though the addition of an amendment that called for a graduated income tax perhaps more than repeal itself may well have predetermined Populist support; indeed the income tax provision, as we shall now see, was designed by the supporters of repeal to accomplish just that.434

The income tax amendment, the one remarkable Congressional Populist victory, succeeded largely because the majority party Democrats found it the politically expedient way to ensure a majority in favor of tariff repeal. Their compromise with the Populists was necessary for three reasons. For one, the Democrats faced growing Populist electoral strength in the South and West and they thus saw adoption of this Populist plank as politically pragmatic given the ominous contours of the upcoming 1894 elections.

Second, with the revenues from the McKinley Tariff now scheduled for extinction, they

needed to come up with new ways to raise revenues to balance the federal coffers.

Finally, given the regional nature of tariff politics, the Democratic leadership in Congress became concerned many of their own members would have to vote against repeal. Thus they needed every Republican and Populist vote they could muster.\footnote{Richard J. Joseph, \textit{The Origins of the American Income Tax} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004), 56-57.}

Therefore, the Populists in Congress found common cause with the Democrats on the most important issue of the day. If they needed any encouragement toward finding more reason to fuse with the Democrats in future elections, the tariff debate provided the additional impetus. Democrats shared the Populist aversion to trusts and monopolies. As F.W. Taussig, a prominent contemporary Harvard economist observed, “The outcry against trusts and monopolies, though in fact it describes an exceptional rather than normal working of protective duties, was probably the most effective argument in bringing about the public verdict against the McKinley Tariff.” It was a verdict that united Populists and Democrats.\footnote{John F. Witte, \textit{The Politics and Development of the Federal Income Tax} (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 71; F.W. Taussig, “The New United States Tariff,” \textit{The Economic Journal} 4, no. 16 (December, 1894): 585; F.W. Taussig, “The Tariff Act of 1894,” \textit{Political Science Quarterly} 9, no. 4 (December, 1894): 605.}

Yet while absorbed in trying to find ways to enact their own legislative initiatives as well as resolving the tariff issue, the Populists in Congress also paid close attention to the industrial armies coming eastward. Though they might disagree with Coxey’s tactics, they seemed prepared to welcome Coxey as one of their own. They seemed assured that Coxey was coming peaceably, and therefore countered those in Washington preparing to greet the industrials with force if necessary. They proceeded to draft their own
welcoming resolutions they thought might make it clearer the peaceful purpose of the March and help avoid any violent ending. From their own practical standpoint, as they sought to gain credibility and achieve their own political objectives, they realized they would not be served if the Commonweal provoked violence and upheaval.

On April 19 the long bearded Senator Peffer rose to debate a resolution he offered the day before, which would establish a welcoming committee of nine senators accompanied by the Vice President to officially greet Coxey as he came up the Capitol steps. Peffer represented the “Middle Road” Populist position. As such, he stood adamantly against moving toward the heretical positions espoused by the two major parties. “Populism,” said the Senator from Kansas should “benefit the whole people and not a scheming few.” Fusion thus represented an unholy alliance, a bastardization of principle, and a sordid dance with the devil of “politics as usual.” With this view he seemed the perfect ally to defend Coxey’s right to march to the capital, and to engage in this direct expression of the people to their government. Like Coxey, he hoped standing firm for Populist principle without allegiance to either of the conventional parties would lead to Populist majorities more rapidly than practicing fusion politics.\footnote{Peter H. Argesinger, \textit{The Limits of Agrarian Radicalism} (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1995), 102-105.}

By offering his welcoming resolution, Peffer joined the debate over how to receive the March with those who feared the worst. The Kansas Senator turned the tables on those now fortifying Washington. He saw nothing but trouble resulting from the very anxieties now rampant in official Washington. Rising on the floor of the Senate, he warned “I think we are on the verge of trouble, and unless we are wise and manage our
own course prudently, we may have occasion in the near future to regret it.” As Coxey’s Army calmly sailed down the C&O Canal, still some 80 miles from Washington, the prairie Populist suggested that the threats being made from those in “authority” might prompt the very violence they sought to avoid. Why should the police be preparing to arrest these marchers arriving in peace and carrying religious banners,” he asked rhetorically?438

As others rose to challenge Peffer and cited fresh reports of violence provoked by these roaming industrial armies, Populist Nebraska Senator Allen defended his colleague’s resolution. Striking at the very heart of what Coxey sought to accomplish, Allen observed that the “right of petition as it exists in this country, and as it is practiced in this body is a farce, and the great common American people know it full well. So seeing they cannot be heard they [Coxey] otherwise come here to lay their grievances before Congress in a peaceful manner.” Indeed, as the debate over the tariff swirled about them, the Congress seemed to be drowning in a sea of written petitions. Only Coxey seemed to have the audacity to physically deliver his right to the steps of the Capitol.439

However, there was clear bipartisan opposition to Peffer’s resolution. Republican George Hoar of Massachusetts challenged the very notion that Coxey’s Army was peaceable. Democratic Senators, Francis Cockerell of Missouri and Charles Faulkner of West Virginia rose to challenge the rights of “Coxey’s army” to parade without a permit, a requirement that the two contended was universally applied in every community

438 Congressional Record, April 19, 3843; “Peffer Champions the Armies,” Chicago Daily Tribune, 20 April 1894.
439 Congressional Record, April 19, 3842-44.
nationwide. Democratic Senator George Vest of Missouri rose to note that as a matter of fact that the Resolution was not necessary since the Constitution already protected the “law abiding” and their right to peacefully assemble. To Vest, however, Coxey’s March did not fall into this lawful category. On April 23 Peffer called for a vote on his welcoming committee resolution, but it failed 26-17 with 41 Senators not even present to vote. All four Populist Senators voted yes, including even the earlier skeptical Stewart who seemed to have decided such a committee might maintain the decorum he originally sought when trying to persuade Coxey against marching in the first place.440

Three days later on April 26, with Peffer’s amendment defeated, but the Army now on the outskirts of Washington, Senator Allen rose to offer a similar resolution that asked Congress to make no distinction among any petitioners regardless of how they chose to present their petitions. Allen’s Resolution stated:

That under the Constitution of the United States of America citizens of the United States, regardless of their rank or station in life, [emphasis added] have an undoubted and unquestionable right to peaceably assemble and petition the government for redress of their grievances at any place within the United States where they do not create a breach of the peace, menace or endanger persons of property, or disturb the transaction of the public business or the free use of streets and highways by the public.

The Resolution referred to the soon to be arriving Commonweal as deserving protection. It was phraseology not missed by opponents of the March.441 Again, the opposition was strong and bipartisan. Though his Colorado Republican colleague had earlier voted for Peffer’s resolution, the other Colorado Republican Senator

440 Congressional Record, April 23, 3960-3961; Interestingly, the 17 included only one Democrat, and only five Republicans were opposed. While Republicans had spoken against this measure they seemed more willing to provide a forum that might embarrass the Democratic Administration.
441 Congressional Record, April 26, 4105-4108.
Edward Wolcott expressed sheer exhaustion over all the talk of demonstration and insurrection. He reflected a prevalent bipartisan outlook toward Coxey’s Army when he noted with some disdain that these men, if they could not find jobs, would certainly find a helping hand from their fellow man. The solution to the question of the unemployed Wolcott conveniently concluded “…will not come by wandering bands visiting Washington; it will come through the beneficence of mankind….” Missouri Democrat George Vest meanwhile rose again to decry those Populist Governors who had encouraged the other industrial armies that formed in the West and were now thought to be amassing to enter Washington with Coxey. The Missourian, like his colleague Wolcott, saw no reason why these “wandering bands” cannot find work in the communities where they lived. With this overwhelming sentiment in opposition, Allen’s resolution did not even come to a vote. In a Congress dominated by procedural matters, his motion was tabled in favor of one that changed the time the Senate would convene each day.442

The dismissal of these resolutions left Coxey with only one choice as he arrived in Washington. As with the very decision to march in the first place, he decided he would take matters into his own hands. In order to be permitted to speak the next day, Coxey discovered he would need to receive the necessary permission from either the Sergeant at Arms of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, or from the Vice President. Without at least one of them granting permission, he would not be allowed to enter the Capitol

442 Congressional Record, April 26, 1894, 4106-8.
grounds and give his speech, much less present his petition. Thus he headed straight to the Capitol to receive the necessary permission.

On April 30 he left Brightwood Park and rode the trolley to the Capitol. Many on the trolley hopped off when he did and followed him as he walked right into the halls of Congress. There he seemed to be recognized by virtually everyone including young pages busily seeking his autograph. At 4PM the Senate had just adjourned for the afternoon and as he waited for the Sergeant at Arms to appear, he was greeted by passing Senators who stopped to speak to this new celebrity and wanted to shake his hand. As word spread Coxey was in the Capitol, clerks and staff members thronged to see him and he began signing autographs again for an impromptu crowd of some two hundred or so of the curious who gathered in the hallways.443

However, the meeting with the Senate Sergeant at Arms, Colonel R.S. Bright, did not go as well as Coxey’s warm greeting from admirers in the hallways. Police Superintendent Moore had warned Coxey earlier in the afternoon that he would not be allowed to speak, and Bright now confirmed this. “I am not responsible for the law” (against trespassing on the Capitol grounds) Bright told Coxey, but he assured him he would enforce it. From the time they arrived at Brightwood, Coxey made it clear that he not only intended to speak from the Capitol steps, but asserted that the Constitution trumped any city ordinance, police regulation, or Congressional grounds rule that forbade such assemblies on the Capitol grounds. Asked what he intended to do when the police interfered, Coxey had defiantly and consistently taken the position that “The

Constitution was written before any police regulations. If they come in conflict with the Constitution they are void.” Coxey seemed outwardly confident the police would not impede the peaceful assemblage of The Commonweal. “Does not the Constitution guarantee the right to peaceably assemble and petition Congress?” he rhetorically asked assembled reporters.444

After his discouraging meeting with Bright, Coxey then proceeded to meet with District officials to apprise them of the parade route and to obtain the necessary permit to march through Washington. Coxey outlined the route for Moore and the District Commissioners. He would march his parade straight down Fourteenth Street to the Peace Monument on Pennsylvania Avenue, then along First Street and onto B Street; there they would turn east proceeding down Delaware Avenue to the east steps of the Capitol. Coxey also informed the Superintendent and Commissioners he had arranged a vacant lot at Second and M streets as the site where the marchers would collect once he completed his speech and they departed the Capitol. Based on this presentation Coxey indeed received a permit for the parade, though reluctantly from Chief Moore who remained disturbed by Coxey’s continued insistence on speaking on the Capitol grounds. In the meeting, Moore and the District Commissioners not only threatened to revoke the parade permit when they heard about Coxey’s intention to speak, but also raised issues about the sanitary conditions of this space Coxey sought to occupy following the March. Perhaps as a pretense for rejecting this additional request for a new camp following the March, the Commissioners raised issues with the stench emanating from the old James Creek

adjacent to the vacant lot Coxey had already secured. Coxey not only reassured the commissioners he would have the area fumigated, but he reminded these local officials about the nature of the Army. “Our people are very healthy. They can stand a great deal. If you could only have seen the trials and tribulations they have undergone on their march you would not think the canal would affect them,” Coxey reassured. When the Commissioners seemed intent on knowing just how long the Army could be expected to stay in the District, Coxey smiled and said “Until Congress will enact the desired legislation.”

As evening approached and with the final leg of the March now just hours away, Coxey, still hopeful of receiving permission to give his speech, sought out Vice President Stevenson at the Normandy Hotel. He also sought after Speaker Crisp, the only other official that Colonel Bright told him might waive the restriction and permit him to give his speech. When he finally found the Speaker at 11pm, Crisp inquired about the nature of Coxey’s address. When Coxey obliged by giving him a preview, Crisp promptly told Coxey he could not approve it. Thus as the day ended Coxey still had not received permission to enter the Capitol grounds. He returned to the National Hotel to join his wife, infant son Legal Tender, and daughter Mamie. Mamie and her mother had also made the rounds in Washington that afternoon preparing for Mamie’s prominent role in the Spectacle as the Goddess of Peace the next day. As one newspaper reported, “If she

insists on wearing what was purchased she will look like one of the blonde beauties that ornament the top of a circus wagon.” The press continued to trivialize the event.\textsuperscript{446}

**Final Leg**

Thirty five days since their Easter Sunday departure from Massillon, Jacob Coxey and Carl Browne awakened to a sunny May 1, International Labor Day and began making the final preparations to parade their army of unemployed its final seven miles to the Capitol. Carl Browne deliberately chose this day as the appropriate day “to protest in the name of bankrupt people against further robbery by interest upon paper notes (bonds), based upon the public credit, when that same credit can be used to issue other pieces of paper (notes or legal tender) without interest or profit to national (so-called) banks.”

While the March was scheduled to leave at 10 AM, Coxey was still finishing his breakfast as the hour approached. He hurried to the camp from the National Hotel. The men at Brightwood, filled with anticipation, already had devoured their own hearty breakfast supplied by neighborly sympathizers. The day was warm with a gentle spring breeze and the crowds were already forming on the route Coxey announced. The crowds would swell by some estimates to as many as 30,000 with an estimated half of those watching African-American.\textsuperscript{447}

Coxey looked forward to finally being able to deliver a carefully prepared speech on the steps of the Capitol. He would leave discussion of the Good Roads Plan for another day. In this speech, sensing his place in the populist moment he would say:

We have come here through toil and weary march, through storms and tempests, over mountains and amid the trials of poverty and distress at the doors of Congress in the name of Him whose banners we bear, in the name of Him who pleaded for the poor and the oppressed, that they should heed the voice of the distress and despair that is now coming up from every section of our country, that they should consider the conditions of the unemployed of our land and enact such laws as will give them employment, bring happier conditions to the people and the smile of contentment to our citizens.

Coxey with this fiery speech in his breast pocket and accompanied by his wife and Legal Tender took his customary place in his phaeton at the rear of a procession of an estimated 600 marchers, perhaps more. For this final leg of the March, in addition to the core of 122 or so who had made the entire March, the Philadelphia contingent swelled the ranks as did other sympathizers and those simply wanting to revel in the moment by marching along. The police also assembled in full force. According to Skinner’s dispatch, “Since the days of the war [Civil] the Capitol and other buildings have not been guarded as they are now.” Policeman reportedly slept at their posts on the Capitol grounds, and the March route. In all, with over 200 new policemen sworn in overnight, the city was patrolled by some 600 or so officers, or the equivalent of one per marcher. Many police were ominously mounted on horseback.

As the procession formed to depart (See Figure 19) Commune Marshal Schrum handed out war clubs of peace. These staves were about four feet in length and had a white banner that fluttered in the breeze at the end of each. Carl Browne, whose sleep at the Randall House the night before was interrupted by a fire, rallied the men with his own speech, reminding them “the eyes of the world are on you and you must conduct

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yourselves accordingly.” The men were then put through a drill with Browne giving the command “Gloria Peace,” and the men responding by waving their peace sticks in the air three times and shouting in response. Coxey’s stunningly beautiful daughter Mamie was mounted upon a white horse decorated with red and yellow trappings. Dressed as the Goddess of Peace, according to Baker’s dispatch she “wore a long white skirt, white gloves and a brimless cap trimmed with blue from which a single gold star shone, her only ornament. A wealth of blonde hair flowed loosely down her shoulders. Her delicate face was flushed with excitement and her fingers toyed nervously with the bridle.” Browne with his typical Conestoga cowboy attire now fell into line behind her on his magnificent Percheron stallion. He carried one of his own peace banners. The communes were all aligned in alphabetical order, with the Philadelphia contingent led by Christopher Columbus Jones with his trademark stovepipe hat at the rear. Leading the procession was the brass band immediately followed by the black standard bearer Jackson who would lead the rest of the marchers to the Capitol.449

Carl Browne gave the order to march sometime well after 10AM and the March proceeded down the dusty 14th Street corridor. Jesse Coxey wore a mixed gray and blue uniform (See Figure 20), symbolically depicting the reconciliation of north and south. He too was mounted on a magnificent stallion and relayed orders to the men from his father. Populist supporter Diggs, who had greeted the men at Rockville, rode in an open carriage with her family. Little Legal Tender Coxey, draped in white embroidered flannel was in the open carriage with the Coxey’s. The marchers tried to keep formation in their


The core of Coxey’s Army who had made it from Massillon took particular time in preparing themselves. Though the banners and wagons appeared the worse for the journey, the men tried hard to keep up appearances. As Baker reported, “The army itself looked better than it had for many a day. Most of the men spent hours in getting ready for the great occasion.” As they marched peaceably, the crowds grew in number and enthusiasm. Ironically, given Browne’s past association with the anti-Chinese sandlot protests two decades before, the marchers found themselves warmly greeted as they passed by the Chinese diplomatic quarters. The delegation’s women waved “gaily colored handkerchiefs” from the embassy windows above. Meanwhile, four mounted policeman provided an escort for the parade. As the army turned onto Pennsylvania Avenue the crowds became so thick they nearly choked the procession and more mounted police were summoned to carve a path. Oklahoma Sam, who as usual was riding his pony backwards in the saddle, actually helped the police in parting the increasingly thick crowds. As they approached the east side of the Capitol the crowds grew even more frenzied and some even tried to jump in the carriage with the Coxey’s. At his point Mrs. Coxey handed Legal Tender over to a nurse for safe keeping.\footnote{March Ends in Riot,” *The Chicago Record*, 2 May 1894; “‘Gen’ Coxey’s Waterloo,” *The Boston Globe*, 2 May 1894.}

As they made the turn from Pennsylvania Avenue onto New Jersey, Baker described the scene as now approaching one of near pandemonium. “Several thousand
persons lined the terraces, the plaza and every available foot of space on the grass plot. The fronts of neighboring buildings were crowded and the hotel at the corner presented windows and doors full of sightseers.” As they made it to the B street entrance to the Capitol, it became impossible any longer to ride. Browne dismounted his stallion and entered into the crowds that now occupied the east front of the Capitol. Coxey stepped from his phaeton and then turned and kissed his wife, a gesture that brought more cheers from the admiring audience. While Browne was able to leap the small retaining wall onto the Capitol grounds, Coxey tripped and was nearly trampled by those well wishers now chasing after Browne toward the Capitol steps. The crowd surged forward and simply ignored the “Keep off the Grass” signs. Browne made it to the corner of the steps before one of the mounted policeman, now wielding his club, tried to grab him. Browne flailed, swinging back wildly. He was accosted by police who reportedly punched him several times. With clothing torn and bloodied, and a necklace made by his deceased wife broken and in pieces on the ground, Browne found himself suddenly under arrest.452

In the chaos now ensuing, flag bearer Buchanan tried to come to Browne’s rescue. But the police turned on him with special fury and he was so bloodied he had to be taken to the hospital. The Bee, which had supported every phase of the March, decried the harsh treatment of the black standard bearer. In a harsh rebuke of the District’s white chief of police, the paper noted that he admitted to being more afraid of the “colored people than he was of Coxey’s Army.” The Bee reported, “Finding the Negro the less offensive [than the rest of white marchers] they [the police] clubbed him.” The Bee’s

452 “March Ends in Riot,” The Chicago Record, 2 May 1894; “Gen’ Coxey’s Waterloo,” The Boston Globe, 2 May 1894.
critique of police conduct at the Capitol concluded with the following rebuke: “The scene was disgraceful and the act cowardly on the part of some of those brutal and pusillanimous officers of the police force.” The entire event, the paper concluded, tested not only the endurance, but the motivation of this army. Tests it passed. As for the response of the officials in Washington, their reaction served to the Bee writers as ample evidence of the harshness of the times.453

Meanwhile, Coxey coming to his feet after nearly being trampled respectfully asked a policeman to be ushered toward the capitol steps. The officer obliged and Baker artfully described how “the two wormed their way through the mob like sparrows through a wheat field.” As they approached, the Secret Service sent a telegram to the Cleveland White House from the scene describing in virtual real time the final moments:

Coxey went to the steps of the East Portico and went up about five steps. Lieutenant Kelly and other police officers met Coxey and informed him he could make no speech. Coxey said he wished to enter a protest. The officers said “you can take no action here of any kind. Coxey said he wished to read a program. The officers told him, “It cannot be read here.” Coxey showed no inclination to yield and the officers hustled him off the steps into the middle of the plaza in front of the Capitol. He made no physical resistance but protested all the while and the crowd gathered and obstructed the way but seemed moved by curiosity only. No one was struck. Coxey was not formally put under arrest.

In contrast to this dispassionate Secret Service dispatch, however, Skinner’s contemporaneous account, telegraphed immediately to meet the Massillon Evening Independent’s afternoon deadline, captured the chaos of the moment:

Coxey and Browne are walking up to the Capitol. Every inch of space seems to be occupied. There seems to be a stampede and people say that the police are using clubs. Coxey has been arrested. He just passed me, very white, in the center of

one hundred policemen. Tens of thousands of people are following and yelling. The excitement is beyond anything the mind can conceive, yet no ugliness is manifested. The police are in entire control…. In clearing the Capitol steps clubs were freely used….Browne got severely clubbed.

Neither the Secret Service, nor Skinner nor any of the remaining Demons got it completely right. The confusion of the moment created varying versions of the moments around one o’clock when the March finally reached the Capitol. 454

Baker provided one of the most detailed accounts of Coxey’s attempt to speak. Noting he proceeded up the central steps of the Capitol, Coxey was greeted there by a Captain Garden of the Congressional police, and a Lieutenant Kelly of the District Police. When Captain Garden asked Coxey his intentions, Coxey indicated he wished to speak. When Garden told him he would not be allowed to do so, Coxey reached into his lapel for the speech he had been long preparing. At this point the officers firmly took him by the arms and escorted him firmly back down the steps (See Figure 21). Coxey was placed back into his phaeton and those from the Commonweal still half assembled in their communes outside the capitol grounds now retreated peaceably to their new camp grounds at 2nd and M streets. The curtain thus fell ignominiously on this five week old spectacle that had endured so much. Baker wrote in the aftermath, “As for the Commonweal, it vanished in thin air.” 455

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454 Telegram from Capitol May 1, 1894 from Secret Service to the Executive Mansion, see The Papers of President Grover Cleveland, Reel 84, Series 2, The Library of Congress; “Coxey and Browne Arrested,” The Massillon Evening Independent, 1 May 1894).

455 “March Ends in Riot,” The Chicago Record, 2 May 1894; Baker’s letter to his father written from Pennell’s Grand Hotel in Fostonia Ohio en route back to Chicago can be in Box 23 Reel 23 of Ray Stannard Baker papers at Library of Congress.
Verdict

The immediate verdicts on Coxey’s March and his seemingly failed cause were severe. Cleveland biographer Allen Nevins noted that “Coxey’s movement passed rapidly through the phases of a great radical crusade, an itinerant catchpenny show, and a fiasco.” In its wrap up of the events of May 1, Harper’s editors gave a similarly bleak rendition of the events noting that “…the crowds that had gathered from all parts of the city to enjoy a dramatic scene were returning in swarms to their homes, most of them having seen nothing whatever.” In the May 2 Chicago Daily Tribune’s Sparks pronounced:

Coxey’s play, “The Commonweal of Christ,” is over. The drop has been rung down and the iron curtain of oblivion is falling. It will never rise again upon the same characters for Coxey has had enough. Today has been seen a failure so dismal that it is pitiable rather than ridiculous.

Indeed the March ended as anti-climax and at its conclusion its industrial remnants retreated to a malodorous vacant lot near a garbage site at First and L Streets.456

One of the Demons, O’Donnell of the New York Press, thought to be one counted upon to be naturally sympathetic to the March now excoriated it. O’Donnell had spoken with Browne along the Chicago Lakefront in the summer of 1893. His own notoriety derived from his leading role in the Homestead Strike, and his subsequent imprisonment and trial. Though acquitted of murder charges for his role in defying the Pinkerton’s, O’Donnell nonetheless played a pivotal role at the showdown at the Carnegie steelworks near Pittsburgh. Yet O’Donnell did not take kindly to Coxey or the March he led. In an interview with the Washington Post after the March arrived he denounced both the March

456 Nevins, 605; “Coxey in Washington,” Harpers, May 12, 1894, 43; Chicago Daily Tribune, 2 May 1894; The Boston Globe, 2 May 1894; Schwantes, Coxey’s Army, 183.
and its leaders exclaiming, “I have only two sentiments in regard to the movement. One is pity for the poor deluded devils who have been induced to join it and the other of contempt for Browne and Coxey, the two men who have led them into the greatest piece of folly ever perpetrated in this country.” 457

At the end of the March Baker seemed equally put out with Coxey and the whole affair. Just a few days after it ended, and on his return to Chicago, he wrote to his father that he was “terribly tired of the whole infernal business.” In short, he did not have anything more left to say about it and departed from Washington in frustration. Yet the soon to be famous muckraker and ultimately confidant to Woodrow Wilson would stay in touch with Coxey’s sidekick Browne and in later years Baker would later write more admiringly of his experience. Indeed his earlier views about the March prevailed as he recalled later in his autobiography. Baker saw the Commonweal’s triumphal procession through Pittsburgh and wondered whether there had ever been anything quite like it before. He had enjoyed the camaraderie of the marchers, noting the tramps and vagabonds were largely a fiction of those not actually marching with Coxey:

To call them an army of “bums, tramps and vagabonds,” as some of the commentators were doing, was a complete misrepresentation. A considerable proportion were genuine farmers and workingmen whose only offense was the fact that they could not buy or rent land__ having no money__ or find a job at which they could earn a living

The young journalist began “thinking this is the craziest enterprise I had known in all my life,” but the spectacle, and particularly Carl Browne were to eventually win his respect.\footnote{Baker’s letter to his father written from Pennell’s Grand Hotel in Fostonia Ohio en route back to Chicago can be found in Box 23 Reel 23 of Ray Stannard Baker papers at Library of Congress.}

Other commentators also would rally to Coxey’s cause. Bellamy, whose best selling utopian novel \textit{Looking Backward} helped shape the millennialism that was so much at the core of the March spoke of the sheer physical feat the marchers accomplished:

\begin{quote}
The cost and difficulty of moving even 100 men across the country for 1,000 miles with no organized commissariat, is simply enormous, as any soldier will testify. That these armies have done what they have done, made the marches they have made, and maintained the good discipline they have, with the resources at their disposition, is an astounding fact, and will be so regarded by future historians.
\end{quote}

Similarly, the Commonweal’s historian Vincent summarized what had been accomplished in his own version saying “The narrative of the journey of Coxey abounds with proofs of the determination, the iron will of the man.” Vincent was much more prescient than his contemporary commentators when he said that the Coxey story, “…with its many possibilities of more extended dimensions, is one not likely to perish in a day, or soon take its place among the forgotten things of the past.” Yet as a quintessential Kansas Populist, Vincent might be severely disappointed that Coxey would fall from occupying a more central place in the historiography of populism.\footnote{Stead quotes Bellamy in W.T. Stead, “‘Coxeyism and Its Commonwealers,’” \textit{The Review of Reviews} (June, 1894) 569; Vincent, \textit{Commonweal}, 18, 243.}
Coxey himself provided perhaps the most eloquent epithet to the March.

Some three weeks following its inglorious end, the retiring and bespectacled Ohio businessman stood before a federal judge and was anticlimactically sentenced to twenty days in federal prison and to pay a fine of five dollars for displaying a banner on the grounds of the United States Capitol (see Figure 22). He had been vigorously defended in District of Columbia Police Court by Senator Allen who affirmed Coxey’s Constitutional right to free speech. However, to no avail. On May 21 he was sentenced to spend twenty jails in jail. Before he departed for his cell block, the man whose “shrewd gray eyes stared out through gold bowed spectacles” and who a cynical press corps had come mockingly to refer to as “General Coxey,” decided to tell his own brief story of what happened during this first March to Washington:

Some newspapers said we would never leave Massillon Ohio. We left. They said we would never cross the Pennsylvania line. We crossed. Next that we would never pass through Pittsburgh. We passed. Next that we would never have the courage to go on the steps of our nation’s home. We went and were arrested. For what?“ Exercising our revolution-sire founded constitutional right of free speech. Oh no! They dare not do that; their crack of doom would come too soon if they attempted that, and they knew it, too. Their tactics were to bring odium upon us, and to rely upon a servile and soot gathering press to blacken us.

Writing in this same year following the March, Coxey described how “history could contain no more heroic picture than those footsore, weary and ragged men, idle through
no fault of their own, plodding over the mountains through ice and snow, sleet and rain many leaving their tracks stained with their own blood…\textsuperscript{460}

As he sat in his jail cell on May 24, Coxey wrote a brief letter to Mr. F. D. Baldwin back in Massillon. He reported being very busy even in jail, receiving bouquets from Washington ladies and sorting through many sympathetic letters and telegrams. As comfortable as he seemed, resting on a good mattress and feather pillows that Mrs. Coxey delivered, he could not help but also remark on his plight, or as he described, “imprisoned for an Idea, not an Offense Committed.” Yet his idea continued to languish in Congress. It would be June before a first term Democratic Congressman from Wyoming, Henry Coffeen, introduced Coxey’s Good Roads bill in the House. But since Peffer’s bill had already died in the Senate it seemed on a road to nowhere.\textsuperscript{461}

The fate of Coxey’s bold Good Roads Plan was not dissimilar from that of the trademark idea that defined the populist energy. Before Coxey’s Good Roads bills could be offered, Charles Macune’s Sub-Treasury idea had long since reached a similar fate. As Coxey’s weary Commonwealers reached Washington, the iconic figure of the Texas Farmers Alliance movement, Dr. Macune, himself now a Washington resident, travelled to Alabama vainly trying to organize a meeting to revitalize the Farmer’s Alliance on behalf of the candidacy of Populist candidate for Governor R.F. Kolb. Macune invited

\textsuperscript{460} “Coxey Goes to Court,” \textit{The Evening Independent} (Massillon OH), 4 May 1894; “The Commonweals Woe,” \textit{The Evening Independent} (Massillon OH), 21 May 1894; Coxey, \textit{The Cause and the Cure}, 21-22.

delegates from twenty states. Yet only six arrived, leading organizers to postpone the
meeting. Kolb’s candidacy seemed another example at a flawed attempt at fusion.
Populists, some Republicans, and a larger number of disaffected Jeffersonian Democrats
served as the basis for Kolb’s support. Macune, who now edited the lone remaining
voice of the Alliance, the *National Economist*, had already turned to more modest
proposals. With his efforts on behalf of Kolb sputtering, he addressed a small gathering to
advocate his own latest idea for challenging corporate greed; a 20 percent reduction in
cotton acreage. Retreating from his earlier bold vision, Macune seemed to recognize his
grand Sub Treasury scheme, in many ways the signature idea that propelled the populist
movement, simply represented an idea too grand for the existing political system.
Therefore he now seemed satisfied advocating that cotton farmers deliberately reduce
their production as a way for the producer to get a fair return.462

Unlike Macune, however, Coxey was not yet willing to retreat from his bold
populist ideas and principles. After serving his brief 22 day jail term, the leader of
the Commonweal returned to Massillon and throughout the remainder of his life
became an inveterate reformer. He ran for public office repeatedly, including for
President. But he was elected only once as Mayor of Massillon in 1931. He seemed
marked by a curious energy, if not stubbornness, never accepting electoral defeat as a
reason to not keep espousing his vision of how to achieve a more economically just
society. He planned other marches and returned to Washington on May 1 1944 to
deliver the speech he tried to deliver fifty years before. He would visit with Franklin

Roosevelt in 1932 at Warm Springs about his concepts for public works well before the Works Progress Administration (1935). Yet he would die (1951) twenty years before the official end of the Gold Standard in the United States (1971). In a statement that well characterized the remainder of his life, Coxey noted before leaving Massillon in the spring of 1894 “That while we reaffirm our faith in the Omaha Platform...as progressive men have the right to advance over the lines.”

Coxey, a conventional businessman in an Edwardian wing collar, seemed always willing to advance over the lines on behalf of America’s producers. He was a capitalist, yet as much concerned about public as his own financial affairs. The March he led and which gave him his notoriety, however tarnished, represented the essence of the populist energy that first emerged with disgruntled farmers on the Texas Prairie in the 1870’s. It echoed in the demands of striking workers at Homestead in 1892. As it marched passed farm villages and industrial towns, Coxey’s Commonweal resonated with both tillers and toilers. It seemed to rekindle a restless populist energy known to every period in American history. It was the same energy Turner remarked upon as constantly in need of a new space following the symbolic closing of the American frontier.

In its time, Coxey’s March challenged the boundaries erected by those who sought to channel this diversified popular expression of producer discontent into a

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463 Embrey Bernard Howson, Jacob Sechler Coxey (New York: Arno Press, 1982) 388-419; See WHBC Interview with J.S. Coxey by E.T. Heald, April 16, 1949 from Coxey Papers at Massillon Museum; See November 15 Letter from Jacob Coxey to Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt (President Elect) in the Coxey Papers at the Massillon Museum; According to one account, “Franklin D. Roosevelt took office as President of the United States in 1933 and began calling in experts in every line of activity. While on one of his trips to Warm Springs, Georgia, Roosevelt called Coxey in for a conference on his ideas for the unemployment program; From William H. Lewis, “General Jacob S. Coxey,” The Glass Cutter 20, no. 9 (March, 1955): 5.

People’s Party. The spectacle Coxey and Browne conceived, became the very expression of the powerless and the underdog, and reminded many observers of what the populist energy was all about in the first place. In its grassroots spontaneity, this spectacle challenged the formality and the tactics of the new People’s Party.

Ridiculed by the press, and marginalized as were its fellow Populists in the Congress, the March’s anticlimactic ending shuttled it into history as a failed spasm of industrial unrest. Yet in revisiting the March we can now see that this singular episode, in all of its many dimensions, is in fact very much a reflection of the intense reformist and evangelical energy that characterized the larger populist moment in the late nineteenth century. And, beyond this particular populist moment, it suggests that the energy of populism is at its spontaneous best when divorced from the rigor of political institutions; even those imperfect ones expressly designed to allow democracy to flourish.
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APPENDIX A: The Omaha Platform

NATIONAL PEOPLE’S PARTY PLATFORM

Assembled upon the 116th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the People’s Party of America, in their first national convention, invoking upon their action the blessing of Almighty God, put forth in the name and on behalf of the people of this country, the following preamble and declaration of principles:

PREAMBLE

The conditions which surround us best justify our co-operation; we meet in the midst of a nation brought to the verge of moral, political, and material ruin. Corruption dominates the ballot-box, the Legislatures, the Congress, and touches even the ermine of the bench. The people are demoralized; most of the States have been compelled to isolate the voters at the polling places to prevent universal intimidation and bribery. The newspapers are largely subsidized or muzzled, public opinion silenced, business prostrated, homes covered with mortgages, labor impoverished, and the land concentrating in the hands of capitalists. The urban workmen are denied the right to organize for self-protection, imported pauperized labor beats down their wages, a hireling standing army, unrecognized by our laws, is established to shoot them down, and they are rapidly degenerating into European conditions. The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind; and the possessors of those, in turn, despise the republic and endanger liberty. From the same prolific womb of governmental injustice we breed the two great classes—tramps and millionaires.

The national power to create money is appropriated to enrich bondholders; a vast public debt payable in legal tender currency has been funded into gold-bearing bonds, thereby adding millions to the burdens of the people.

Silver, which has been accepted as coin since the dawn of history, has been demonetized to add to the purchasing power of gold by decreasing the value of all forms of property as well as human labor, and the supply of currency is purposely abridged to fatten usurers, bankrupt enterprise, and enslave industry. A vast conspiracy against mankind has been organized on two continents, and it is rapidly taking possession of the world. If not met
and overthrown at once it forebodes terrible social convulsions, the destruction of civilization, or the establishment of an absolute despotism.

We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder, while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them. Neither do they now promise us any substantial reform. They have agreed together to ignore, in the coming campaign, every issue but one. They propose to drown the outcries of a plundered people with the uproar of a sham battle over the tariff, so that capitalists, corporations, national banks, rings, trusts, watered stock, the demonetization of silver and the oppressions of the usurers may all be lost sight of. They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives, and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds from the millionaires.

Assembled on the anniversary of the birthday of the nation, and filled with the spirit of the grand general and chief who established our independence, we seek to restore the government of the Republic to the hands of “the plain people,” with which class it originated. We assert our purposes to be identical with the purposes of the National Constitution; to form a more perfect union and establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.

We declare that this Republic can only endure as a free government while built upon the love of the whole people for each other and for the nation; that it cannot be pinned together by bayonets; that the civil war is over, and that every passion and resentment which grew out of it must die with it, and that we must be in fact, as we are in name, one united brotherhood of free men.

Our country finds itself confronted by conditions for which there is no precedent in the history of the world; our annual agricultural productions amount to billions of dollars in value, which must, within a few weeks or months, be exchanged for billions of dollars' worth of commodities consumed in their production; the existing currency supply is wholly inadequate to make this exchange; the results are falling prices, the formation of combines and rings, the impoverishment of the producing class. We pledge ourselves that if given power we will labor to correct these evils by wise and reasonable legislation, in accordance with the terms of our platform.

We believe that the power of government—in other words, of the people—should be expanded (as in the case of the postal service) as rapidly and as far as the good sense of an intelligent people and the teachings of experience shall justify, to the end that oppression, injustice, and poverty shall eventually cease in the land.
While our sympathies as a party of reform are naturally upon the side of every proposition which will tend to make men intelligent, virtuous, and temperate, we nevertheless regard these questions, important as they are, as secondary to the great issues now pressing for solution, and upon which not only our individual prosperity but the very existence of free institutions depend; and we ask all men to first help us to determine whether we are to have a republic to administer before we differ as to the conditions upon which it is to be administered, believing that the forces of reform this day organized will never cease to move forward until every wrong is remedied and equal rights and equal privileges securely established for all the men and women of this country.

PLATFORM

We declare, therefore—

First.—That the union of the labor forces of the United States this day consummated shall be permanent and perpetual; may its spirit enter into all hearts for the salvation of the Republic and the uplifting of mankind.

Second.—Wealth belongs to him who creates it, and every dollar taken from industry without an equivalent is robbery. “If any will not work, neither shall he eat.” The interests of rural and civic labor are the same; their enemies are identical.

Third.—We believe that the time has come when the railroad corporations will either own the people or the people must own the railroads, and should the government enter upon the work of owning and managing all railroads, we should favor an amendment to the Constitution by which all persons engaged in the government service shall be placed under a civil-service regulation of the most rigid character, so as to prevent the increase of the power of the national administration by the use of such additional government employees.

FINANCE.—We demand a national currency, safe, sound, and flexible, issued by the general government only, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, and that without the use of banking corporations, a just, equitable, and efficient means of distribution direct to the people, at a tax not to exceed 2 per cent. per annum, to be provided as set forth in the sub-treasury plan of the Farmers’ Alliance, or a better system; also by payments in discharge of its obligations for public improvements.

1. We demand free and unlimited coinage of silver and gold at the present legal ratio of 16 to 1.

2. We demand that the amount of circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than $50 per capita.
3. We demand a graduated income tax.

4. We believe that the money of the country should be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people, and hence we demand that all State and national revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government, economically and honestly administered.

5. We demand that postal savings banks be established by the government for the safe deposit of the earnings of the people and to facilitate exchange.

TRANSPORTATION—Transportation being a means of exchange and a public necessity, the government should own and operate the railroads in the interest of the people. The telegraph, telephone, like the post-office system, being a necessity for the transmission of news, should be owned and operated by the government in the interest of the people.

LAND.—The land, including all the natural sources of wealth, is the heritage of the people, and should not be monopolized for speculative purposes, and alien ownership of land should be prohibited. All land now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of their actual needs, and all lands now owned by aliens should be reclaimed by the government and held for actual settlers only.

EXPRESSION OF SENTIMENTS

Your Committee on Platform and Resolutions beg leave unanimously to report the following:

Whereas, Other questions have been presented for our consideration, we hereby submit the following, not as a part of the Platform of the People’s Party, but as resolutions expressive of the sentiment of this Convention.

1. RESOLVED, That we demand a free ballot and a fair count in all elections and pledge ourselves to secure it to every legal voter without Federal Intervention, through the adoption by the States of the uperverted Australian or secret ballot system.

2. RESOLVED, That the revenue derived from a graduated income tax should be applied to the reduction of the burden of taxation now levied upon the domestic industries of this country.

3. RESOLVED, That we pledge our support to fair and liberal pensions to ex-Union soldiers and sailors.

4. RESOLVED, That we condemn the fallacy of protecting American labor under the present system, which opens our ports to the pauper and criminal classes of the world and
crowds out our wage-earners; and we denounce the present ineffective laws against contract labor, and demand the further restriction of undesirable emigration.

5. RESOLVED, That we cordially sympathize with the efforts of organized workingmen to shorten the hours of labor, and demand a rigid enforcement of the existing eight-hour law on Government work, and ask that a penalty clause be added to the said law.

6. RESOLVED, That we regard the maintenance of a large standing army of mercenaries, known as the Pinkerton system, as a menace to our liberties, and we demand its abolition.

7. RESOLVED, That we commend to the favorable consideration of the people and the reform press the legislative system known as the initiative and referendum.

8. RESOLVED, That we favor a constitutional provision limiting the office of President and Vice-President to one term, and providing for the election of Senators of the United States by a direct vote of the people.

9. RESOLVED, That we oppose any subsidy or national aid to any private corporation for any purpose.

10. RESOLVED, That this convention sympathizes with the Knights of Labor and their righteous contest with the tyrannical combine of clothing manufacturers of Rochester, and declare it to be a duty of all who hate tyranny and oppression to refuse to purchase the goods made by the said manufacturers, or to patronize any merchants who sell such goods.

APPENDIX B: Good Roads Legislation

53rd Congress, 2d Session, H.R. 7463, June 15, 1894.

A BILL to provide for public improvements and employment of the citizens of the United States.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That whenever any State, Territory, county, township, municipality, or incorporated town or village deem it necessary to make any public improvements they shall deposit with the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States a non-interest-bearing twenty-five year bond, not to exceed one-half of the assessed valuation of the property in said State, Territory, county, township, municipality, or incorporated town or village, and said bond to be retired at the rate of four per centum per annum.

Sec. 2. That whenever the foregoing section of this act has been complied with it shall be mandatory upon the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States to have engraved and printed Treasury notes in the denominations of one, two, five and ten dollars each, which shall be a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, to the face value of the said bond and deliver to said State, Territory, county, township, municipality, or incorporated town or village ninety-nine per centum of said notes, and retain one per centum for expense of engraving and printing same.

Sec. 3. That after the passage of the his act it shall be compulsory upon every incorporated town or village, municipality, township, county, State or Territory to give employment to any idle man applying for work, and that the rate be not less than one dollar and fifty cents per day for common labor and three dollars and fifty cents per day for team and labor, and that eight hours per day shall constitute a day's labor under the provision of this act.

53d Congress, 2d Session, H.R. 7438, June 12th, 1894

A BILL to provide for the improvement of public roads, and for other purposes.

Be in enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States is hereby authorized and instructed to have engraved and have printed, immediately after
the passage of this bill, five hundred millions of dollars of Treasury notes, a legal tender for all debts, public and private, said notes to be in denominations of one, two, five, and ten dollars, and to be placed in a fund to be known as the "general county-road fund system of the United States," and to be expended solely for said purpose.

Sec. 2. That it shall be the duty of the Secretary of War to take charge of the construction of the said general county-road system of the United States, and said construction to commence as soon as the Secretary of the Treasury shall inform the Secretary of War that the said fund is available, which shall not be later than sixty days from and after the passage of this bill, when it shall be the duty of the Secretary of War to inaugurate the work and expend the sum of twenty millions of dollars per month pro rata with the number of mile of roads in each State and Territory in the United States.

Sec. 3. That all labor other than that of the office of the Secretary of War, "whose compensations are already fixed by law," shall be paid by the day, and that the rate be not less than one dollar and fifty cents per day for common labor and three dollars and fifty cents for team and labor, and that eight hours per day shall constitute a day's labor under the provisions of this bill, and that all citizens of the United States making application to labor shall be employed.

The Constitution of the United States guarantees to all citizens the right to peaceably assemble and petition for redress of grievances, and furthermore declares that the right of free speech shall not be abridged.

We stand here to-day to test these guaranties of our Constitution. We choose this place of assemblage because it is the property of the people, and if it be true that the right of the people to peacefully assemble upon their own premises and utter their petitions has been abridged by the passage of laws in direct violation of the Constitution, we are here to draw the eyes of the entire nation to this shameful fact. Here rather than at any other spot upon the continent it is fitting that we should come to mourn over our dead liberties and by our protest arouse the imperiled nation to such action as shall rescue the Constitution and resurrect our liberties.

Upon these steps where we stand has been spread a carpet for the royal feet of a foreign princess, the cost of whose lavish entertainment was taken from the public Treasury without the consent or the approval of the people. Up these steps the lobbyists of trusts and corporations have passed unchallenged on their way to committee rooms, access to which we, the representatives of the toiling wealth-producers, have been denied. We stand here to-day in behalf of millions of toilers whose petitions have been buried in committee rooms, whose prayers have been unresponded to, and whose opportunities for honest, remunerative, productive labor have been taken from them by unjust legislation, which protects idlers, speculators, and gamblers: we come to remind the Congress here assembled of the declaration of a United States Senator, “that for a quarter of a century the rich have been growing richer, the poor poorer, and that by the close of the present century the middle class will have disappeared as the struggle for existence becomes fierce and relentless.”

We stand here to remind Congress of its promise of returning prosperity should the Sherman act be repealed. We stand here to declare by our march of over 400 miles through difficulties and distress, a march unstained by even the slightest act which would bring the blush of shame to any, that we are law-abiding citizens, and as men our actions speak louder than words We are here to petition for legislation which will furnish employment for every man able and willing to work; for legislation which will bring universal prosperity and emancipate our beloved country from financial bondage to the descendants of King George. We have come to the only source which is competent to aid
the people in their day of dire distress. We are here to tell our Representatives, who hold their seats by grace of our ballots, that the struggle for existence has become too fierce and relentless. We come and throw up our defenseless hands, and say, help, or we and our loved ones must perish. We are engaged in a bitter and cruel war with the enemies of all mankind—a war with hunger, wretchedness, and despair, and we ask Congress to heed our petitions and issue for the nation’s good a sufficient volume of the same kind of money which carried the country through one awful war and saved the life of the nation.

In the name of justice, through whose impartial administration only the present civilization can be maintained and perpetuated, by the powers of the Constitution of our country upon which the liberties of the people must depend, and in the name of the commonweal of Christ, whose representatives we are, we enter a most solemn and earnest protest against this unnecessary and cruel usurpation and tyranny, and this enforced subjugation of the rights and privileges of American citizenship. We have assembled here in violation of no just laws to enjoy the privileges of every American citizen. We are now under the shadow of the Capitol of this great nation, and in the presence of our national legislators are refused that dearly bought privilege, and by force of arbitrary power prevented from carrying out the desire of our hearts which is plainly granted under the great magna-charta of our national liberties.

We have come here through toil and weary marches, through storms and tempests, over mountains, and amid the trials of poverty and distress, to lay our grievances at the doors of our National Legislature and ask them in the name of Him whose banners we bear, in the name of Him who plead for the poor and the oppressed, that they should heed the voice of despair and distress that is now coming up from every section of our country, that they should consider the conditions of the starving unemployed of our land, and enact such laws as will give them employment, bring happier conditions to the people, and the smile of contentment to our citizens.

Coming as we do with peace and good will to men, we shall submit to these laws, unjust as they are, and obey this mandate of authority of might which overrides and outrages the law of right. In doing so, we appeal to every peace-loving citizen, every liberty-loving man or woman, every one in whose breast the fires of patriotism and love of country have not died out, to assist us in our efforts toward better laws and general benefits.

J. S. COXEY

Commander of the Commonweal of Christ

It was once my fortune to travel a few weeks with a "push" that numbered two thousand. This was known as "Kelly's Army." Across the "wild and woolly West," clear from California, General Kelly and his heroes had captured trains; but they fell down when they crossed the Missouri and went up against the effete East. The East hadn't the slightest intention of giving free transportation to two thousand hoboes. Kelly's Army lay helplessly for some time at Council Bluffs. The day I joined it, made desperate by delay, it marched out to capture a train.

It was quite an imposing sight. General Kelly sat a magnificent black charger, and with waving banners, to the martial music of fife and drum, company by company, in two divisions, his two thousand countermarched before him and followed the wagon-road to the little town of Weston, seven miles away. Being the latest recruit, I was in the last company of the last regiment of the Second Division, and, furthermore, in the last rank of the rear-guard. The army went into camp at Weston beside the railroad track—beside the tracks, rather, for two roads went through, the Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul, and the Rock Island.

Our intention was to take the first train out, but the railroad officials "coppered" our play and won. There was no first train. They tied up the two lines and stopped running trains. In the meantime, while we lay by the dead tracks, the good people of Omaha and Council Bluffs were bestirring themselves. Preparations were making to form a mob, capture a train in Council Bluffs, run it down to us, and make us a present of it. The railroad officials coppered that play, too. They didn't wait for the mob. Early in the morning of the second day, and engine, with a single private car attached, arrived at the station and side-tracked. At this sign the life had renewed on the dead roads, the whole army lined up beside the track.

But never did life renew so monstrously as it did on those two roads. From the west came the whistle of a locomotive. It was coming in our direction, bound east. We were bound east. A stir of preparation ran down our ranks. The whistle tooted fast and furiously, and the train thundered past at top speed. The hobo didn't live that could have boarded it. Another locomotive whistled, and another train came through at top speed, and another, and another, train after train, train after train, till toward the last the trains were composed of passenger-coaches, box-cars, flat cars, dead engines, cabooses, mail-cars, wrecking-appliances, and all the riffraff of worn-out and abandoned rolling-stock that collects in the yards of great railways. When the yards at Council bluffs had been
completely cleaned, the private car and engine went east, and the roads died for keeps.

That day went by, and the next, and nothing moved, and in the meantime, pelted by sleet and rain, Kelly's two thousand hoboes lay beside the tracks. But that night the good people of Council Bluffs went the railroad officials one better. A mob formed in Council Bluffs, crossed the river to Omaha, and there joined with another mob in a raid on the Union Pacific yards. First they captured an engine, next they made up a train, and then the united mobs piled aboard, crossed the Missouri, and ran down the Rock Island right of way to turn the train over to us. The railroad officials tried to copper this play, but fell down, to the mortal terror of the section-boss and one member of the section-gang at Weston. This pair, under secret telgraphic orders, tried to wreck our train-load of sympathizers by tearing up the track. It happened that we were suspicious and had our patrols out. Caught red-handed at train-wrecking, and surrounded by two thousand infuriated hoboes, that section-gang boss and assistant prepared to meet death. I don't remember what saved them, unless it was the arrival of the train.

It was our turn to fall down, and we did, hard. In their haste, the two mobs had neglected to make up a sufficiently long train. There wasn't room for two thousand hoboes to ride. So the mobs and the hoboes had a talkfest, fraternized, sang songs, and parted, the mobs going back to Omaha on their captured train, the hoboes pulling out next morning on a one-hundred-and-forty-mile march to Des Moines. It was not until Kelly's Army crossed the Missouri that it began to walk, and after that it never rode again. It cost the railroads slathers of money, but they were acting on principle, and they won.

Underwood, Avoca, Walnut, Atlantic, Anita, Adair, Casey, Stuart, Dexter, Earlham, Desoto, Vanmeter, Booneville, Commerce, Valley Junction—how the names of the towns come back to me as I con the map and trace our route through the fat Iowa country! And the hospitable Iowa farmer folk! They turned out with their wagons and carried our baggage and gave us hot lunches at noon by the wayside; mayors of comfortable little towns made speeches of welcome and hastened us on our way; deputations of little girls and maidens came out to meet us, and the good citizens turned out by hundreds, locked arms, and marched with us down their main streets. It was circus day when we came to town, and every day was circus day for us, for there were many towns.

In the evenings our camps were invaded by whole populations. Every company had its camp-fire, and around each fire something was doing. The cooks in my company, Company L, were song-and-dance artists and contributed most of our entertainment. In another part of the encampment the glee-club would be singing—one of its star voices was the "dentist," drawn from Company L, and we were mighty proud of him. Also, he pulled teeth for the whole army, and, since the extractions usually occurred at meal-time, our digestions were stimulated by a variety of incident. The dentist had no anesthetics, but two or three of us were always ready to volunteer to hold down the patient. In addition to the diversions of the companies and the glee-club, church services were usually held, local preachers officiating, and always there was a great making of political speeches. A lot of talent can be dug out of two thousand hoboes. I remember we had a picked baseball nine, and on Sundays we made a practice of putting it all over the local nines. Sometimes we did it twice on Sundays.
Last year, while on a lecturing trip, I rode into Des Moines in a Pullman—I don't mean a "side-door Pullman," but the real thing. On the outskirts of the city I saw the old stove-works, and my heart leaped. It was there, at the stove-works, a dozen years before, that the army lay down and swore a mighty oath that its feet were sore and that it would walk no more. We took possession of the stove-works and told Des Moines that we had come to stay—that we'd walked in, but we'd be blessed if we'd walk out. Des Moines was hospitable, but this was too much of a good thing. Do a little mental arithmetic, gentle reader. Two thousand hoboes, eating three square meals a day, forty-two thousand meals a week, or one hundred and sixty-eight thousand meals for the shortest month in the calendar. We had no money. It was up to Des Moines.

Des Moines was desperate. We lay in camp, made political speeches, held sacred concerts, pulled teeth, played baseball and seven-up, and ate our six thousand meals a day, and Des Moines paid for them. Des Moines pleaded with the railroads, but they were obdurate; they had said we shouldn't ride, and that settled it. To permit us to ride would be to establish a precedent, and there weren't going to be any precedents. And still we went on eating. That was the terrifying factor in the situation. We were bound for Washington, and Des Moines would have had to float municipal bonds to pay all our railroad fares, even at special rates; and if we remained much longer she'd have to float bones anyway to feed us.

Then some local genius solved the problem. We wouldn't walk. Very good; we should ride. From Des Moines to Keokuk on the Mississippi flowed the Des Moines River. This particular stretch of river was three hundred miles long. We could ride on it, said the local genius; and, once equipped with floating-stock, we could ride on down the Mississippi to the Ohio, and thence up the Ohio, winding up with a short portage over the mountains to Washington. Des Moines took up a collection. Public-spirited citizens contributed several thousand dollars. Lumber, rope, nails, and cotton for calking were bought in large quantities, and on the banks of the Des Moines was inaugurated a tremendous era of ship-building. Now the Des Moines is a picayune stream, unduly dignified by the appellation of "river." In our spacious Western land it would be called a "creek." The oldest inhabitants shook their heads and said we couldn't make it, that there wasn't enough water to float us. Des Moines didn't care, so long as it got rid of us, and we were such well-fed optimists that we didn't care either.

On Wednesday, May 9, 1894, we got underway and started on our colossal picnic. Des Moines had got off pretty easily, and she certainly owes a statue in bronze to the local genius who got her out of her difficulty. True, Des Moines had to pay for our boats; we had eaten sixty-six thousand meals at the stove-works; and we took twelve thousand additional meals along with us in our commissary—as a precaution against famine in the wilds; but then think what it would have meant if we had remained at Des Moines eleven months instead of eleven days. Also, when we departed, we promised Des Moines we'd come back if the river failed to float us.

It was all very well having twelve thousand meals in the commissary, and no doubt the commissary "ducks" enjoyed them; for the commissary promptly got lost, and my boat, for one, never saw it again. The company formation was hopelessly broken up during the river trip. In any camp of men there will always be found a certain percentage
of shirks, of helpless, of just ordinary, and of hustlers. There were ten men in my boat, and they were the cream of Company L. Every man was a hustler. For two reasons I was included in the ten. First, I was as good a hustler as ever "threw his feet," and, next, I was "Sailor Jack." I understood boats and boating. The ten of us forgot the remaining forty men of Company L, and by the time we adn missed one meal we promptly forgot the commissary. We were independent. We went down the river "on our own," hustling our "chew-in's," beating every boat in the fleet, and, alas! that I must say it, sometimes taking possession of the stores the farmer folk had collected for the army.

For a good part of the three hundred miles we were from half a day to a day or so in advance of the army. We had managed to get hold of several American flags. When we approached a small town, or when we saw a group of farmers gathered on the bank, we ran up our flags, called ourselves the "advanced boat," and demanded to know what provisions had been collected for the army. We represented the army, of course, and the provisions were turned over to us. But there wasn't anything small about us. We never took more than we could get away with. But we did take the cream of everything. For instance, if some philanthropic farmer had donated several dollars' worth of tobacco, we took it. So, also, we took butter and sugar, coffee, and canned goods; but when the stores consisted of sacks of beans and flour, or two or three slaughtered steers, we resolutely refrained and went our way, leaving orders to turn such provisions over to the commissary-boats whose business was to follow behind us.

My, but the ten of us did live on the fat of the land! For a long time General Kelly vainly tried to head us off. He sent two rowers, in a light, round-bottomed boat, to overtake us and put a stop to our piratical careers. They overtook us all right, but they were two and we were ten. They were empowered by General Kelly to make us prisoners, and they told us so. When we expressed disinclination to become prisoners, they hurried ahead to the next town to invoke the aid of the authorities. We went ashore immediately and cooked an early supper; and under the cloak of darkness we ran by the town and its authorities.

I kept a diary on part of the trip, and as I read it over now I note one persistently recurring phrase, namely, "Living fine." We did live fine. We even disdained to use coffee boiled in water. We made our coffee out of milk, calling the wonderful beverage, if I remember rightly, "pale Vienna."

While we were ahead, skimming the cream, and while the commissary was lost far behind, the main army, coming along in the middle, starved. This was hard on the army, I'll allow; but then, the ten of us were individualists. We had initiative and enterprise. We ardently believed that the grub was to the man who got there first, the pale Vienna to the strong. On one stretch the army went forty-eight hours without grub; and then it arrived at a small village of some three hundred inhabitants, the name of which I do not remember, though I think it was Red Rock. This town, following the practice of all towns through which the army passed, had appointed a committee of safety. Counting five to a family, Red Rock consisted of sixty households. Her committee of safety was scared stiff by the eruption of two thousand hungry hoboés who lined their boats two and three deep along the river bank. General Kelly was a fair man. He had no intention of working hardship on the village. He did not expect sixty households to furnish two thousand meals. Besides,
the army had its treadsure-chest.

But the committee of safety lost its head. "No encouragement to the invader," was its program, and when General Kelly wanted to buy food, the committee refused to sell. It had nothing to sell; General Kelly's money was "no good" in that burg. And then General Kelly went into action. The bugles blew. The army left the boats and on top of the bank formed in battle array. The committee was there to see. General Kelly's speech was brief.

"Boys," he said, "when did you eat last?"
"Day before yesterday," they shouted.
"Are you hungry?"
A mighty affirmation from two thousand throats shook the atmosphere. Then General Kelly turned to the committee of safety.

"You see, gentlemen, the situation," said he. "My men have eaten nothing in forty-eight hours. If I turn them loose upon your town, I'll not be responsible for what happens. They are desperate. I offered to buy food for them, but you refused to sell. I now withdraw my offer. Instead, I shall demand. I give you five minutes to decide. Either kill me six steers and give me four thousand rations, or I turn the men loose. Five minutes, gentlemen."

The terrified committee of safety looked at the two thousand hungry hoboes and collapsed. It didn't wait the five minutes. It wasn't going to take any chances. The killing of the steers and the collecting of the rations began forthwith, and the army dined.

And still the ten graceless individualists soared along ahead and gathered in everything in sight. But General Kelly fixed us. He sent horsemen down each bank, warning farmers and townspeople against us. They did their work thoroughly all right. The erstwhile hospitable farmers gave us a cold reception. Also, they summoned the constables when we tied up to the bank, and loosed the dogs. I know. Two of the latter caught me with a barbed-wire fence between me and the river. I was carrying two buckets of milk for the pale Vienna. I didn't damage the fence any; but we drank plebeian coffee boiled in vulgar water, and I had to throw my feet for another pair of trousers. I wonder, gentle reader, if you every essayed hastily to climb a barbed-wire fence with a bucket of milk in each hand. Ever since that day I have had a prejudice against barbed wire, and I have gathered statistics on the subject.

Unable to make an honest living so long as General Kelly kept his horsemen ahead of us, we returned to the army and raised a revolution. It was a small affair, but it devastated Company L of the Second Division. The captain of Company L refused to recognize us; said we were deserters, traitors, scalawags; and when he drew rations for Company L from the commissary he wouldn't give us any. That captain didn't appreciate us, or he wouldn't have refused us grub. Promptly we intrigued with the first lieutenant. He joined us with the nine men in his boat, and in return we elected him captain of Company M. The captain of Company L raised a roar. Down upon us came General Kelly, Colonel Speed, and Colonel Baker. The twenty of us stood firm, and our revolution was ratified.

But we never bothered with the commissary. Our hustlers drew better rations from the farmers. Our new captain, however, doubted us. He never knew when he'd see the ten of us again, once we got under way in the morning, so he called in a blacksmith to clinch his captaincy. In the stern of our boat, one on each side, were driven two heavy eye-bolts of
iron. Correspondingly, on the bow of his boat, were fastened two huge iron hooks. The boats were brought together, end on, the hooks dropped into the eye-bolts, and there we were, hard and fast. We couldn't lose that captain. But we were irrepressible. Out of our very manacles we wrought an invincible device that enabled us to outdistance every other boat in the fleet.

Like all great inventions, this one of ours was accidental. We discovered it the first time we ran on a snag in a bit of a rapid. The head-boat hung up and anchored, and the tail-boat swung around in the current, pivoting the head-boat on the snag. I was at the stern of the tail-boat, steering. In vain we tried to shove off. Then I ordered the men from the head-boat into the tail-boat. Immediately the head-boat floated clear, and its men returned into it. After that snags, reefs, shoals, and bars had no terrors for us. The instant the head-boat struck, the men in it leaped into the tail-boat. Of course the head-boat floated over the obstruction and the tail-boat then struck. Like automatons the twenty men now in the tail-boat leaped into the head-boat, and the tail-boat floated off.

The boats used by the army were all alike—made by the mile and sawed off. They were flatboats, and their lines were rectangles. Each boat was six feet wide, ten feet long, and a foot and a half deep. Thus, when our two boats were hooked together, I was at the stern steering a craft twenty feet long, containing twenty husky hoboes who "spelled" each other at the oars and paddles, and loaded with blankets, cooking-outfit, and our own private commissary.

Still we caused General Kelly trouble. He had called in his horsemen, and substituted three police boats that traveled in the van and allowed no boats to pass them. The craft containing Company M crowded the police boats hard. We could have passed them easily, but it was against the rules. So we kept at a respectable distance astern and waited. Ahead, we knew was virgin farming country, unbegged and generous; but we waited. White water was all we needed, and when we rounded a bend and a rapid showed up we knew what would happen. Smash! Policed boat number one goes on a boulder and hangs up. Bang! Police boat number two follows suit. Whop! Police boat number three encounters the common fate of all. Of course our boat does the same thing; but, one, two, the men are out of the head-boat and into the tail-boat; one, two, they are out of the tail-boat and into the head-boat; and one, two, the men who belong in the tail-boat are back in it, and we are dashing on. "Stop!" shriek the police boats. "How can we?" we wail plaintively as we surge past, caught in that remorseless current that sweeps us on out of sight and into the hospitable country that replenishes our private commissary with the cream of its contributions. Again we drink pale Vienna and realized that the grub is to the man who gets there.

Poor General Kelly! He devised another scheme. The whole fleet started ahead of us. Company M of the Second Division started in its proper place in the line, which was last. And it took us only one day to get ahead of that particular scheme. Twenty-five miles of bad water lay before us—all rapids, shoals, bars, and boulders. It was over that stretch of water that the oldest inhabitants of Des Moines had shaken their heads. Nearly two hundred boats entered the bad water ahead of us, and they piled up in the most astounding manner. We went through that stranded fleet like hemlock through the fire. There was no avoiding the boulders, bars, and snags except by getting out on the bank.
We didn't avoid them. We went right over them, one, two, one, two, head-boat, tail-boat, tail-boat, head-boat, all hands back and forward and back again. We camped alone that night, and loafed in camp all the next day while the army patched and repaired its wrecked boats and straggled up to us.

There was no stopping our cussedness. We rigged up a mast, piled on the canvas (blankets), and traveled short hours while the army worked overtime to keep us in sight. Then General Kelly had recourse to diplomacy. No boat could touch us in the straight-away. The ban of the police boats was lifted. Colonel Speed was put aboard, and with this distinguished officer we had the honor of arriving first at Keokuk on the Mississippi. And right here I want to say to General Kelly and Colonel Speed that here's my hand. You were heroes, both of you, and you were men. And I'm sorry for at least ten per cent. of the trouble that was given you by Company M.

At Keokuk the whole fleet was lashed together in a huge raft, and, after being wind-bound a day, a steamboat took us in tow down the Mississippi to Quincy, Illinois, where we camped on Goose Island. Here the raft idea was abandoned, the boats being joined together in groups of four and decked over. Somebody told me that Quincy was the richest town of its size in the United States. When I head this I was immediately overcome by an irresistible impulse to throw my feet. No "blowed-in-the-glass profesh" could possibly pass by such a promising burg. I crossed the river to Quincy in a small dugout; but I came back in a large river-boat, down to the gunwales with the results of my thrown feet. Of course I kept all the money I had collected, though I paid the boat hire; also I took my pick of the underwear, socks, cast-off clothes, shirts, "kicks," and "sky-pieces"; and when Company M had taken all it wanted there was still a respectable heap that was turned over to Company L. Alas, I was young and prodigal in those days! I told a thousand "stories" to the good people of Quincy, and every story was "good"; but since I have come to write for the magazines I have often regretted the wealth of story I lavished that day in Quincy, Illinois.

It was at Hannibal, Missouri, that the ten invincibles went to pieces. It was not planned. We just naturally flew apart. The Boiler-Maker and I deserted secretly. On the same day Scotty and Davy made a swift sneak for the Illinois shore; also McAvoy and Fish achieved their get-away. This accounts for six of the then; what became of the remaining four I do not know.

As a sample of life on the road, I make the following quotations from my diary of the several days following my desertion:

Friday, May 25th. Boiler-Maker and I left the camp on the island. We went ashore on the Illinois side in a skiff and walked six miles on the C. B. & Q. to Fell Creek. We had gone six miles out of our way, but we got on a hand-car and rode six miles to Hull's, on the Wabash. While there we met McAvoy, Fish, Scotty, and Davy, who had also pulled out from the army.

Saturday, May 26th. At 2.11 a. m. we caught the Cannon-ball as she slowed up at the crossing. Scotty and Davy were ditched. The four of us were ditched at the Bluffs, forty miles farther on. In the afternoon Fish and McAvoy caught a freight while Boiler-Maker and I were away getting something to eat.

Sunday, May 27th. At 3.21 a. m. we caught the Cannon-ball and found Scotty and Davy on the blind. We were all ditched at daylight at Jacksonville. The C. & A. runs through here, and we're going to take that. Boiler-Maker went off, but didn't return. Guess he caught a freight.

Monday, May 28th. Boiler-Maker didn't show up. Scotty and Davy went off to sleep somewhere an
didn't get back in time to catch the K. C. passenger at 3.30 a.m. I caught her and rode her till after sunrise to Mason City. Caught a cattle train and rode all night.

Tuesday, May 29th. Arrived in Chicago at 7 a.m. . . .

And years afterward, in China, I had the grief of learning that the device we employed to navigate the rapids of the Des Moines—the one-two-one-two, head-boat-tail-boat proposition—was not originated by us. The Chinese river-boatmen had for thousands of years used a similar device to negotiate "bad water." It is a good trick all right, even if we don't get the credit. It answers Doctor Jordan's test of truth: "Will it work? Will you trust your life to it?"

From the October, 1907 issue of Cosmopolitan magazine.
## APPENDIX E: The Chronicle of the March

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CURRICULUM VITAE


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