

The Last Tax:
Henry George and the Social Politics of Land Reform in the Gilded Age and Progressive
Era

A Dissertation

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Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The Last Tax: Henry George and the Social Politics of Land Reform in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

A dissertation presented to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Brandeis
Waltham, MA

By Alexandra Wagner Lough

In the aftermath of one of the nation's worst economic disasters—the economic depression of the 1870s—the California journalist Henry George strived to understand a distinctive dilemma of modern industrial capitalism: how could an era of unprecedented economic growth and industrial output produce widespread poverty, unemployment, financial panic, and acute inequality of wealth? The result of George's investigation was *Progress and Poverty* (1879). The book challenged widely accepted doctrines of property rights and laissez-faire and changed the way many people thought about and understood the political economy.

George proposed a deceptively simple solution to the problems of economic inequality and industrial depression. In contrast to other social commentators of his era, who attributed economic disruptions to overproduction or unsound monetary policies, George singled out one of the most cherished institutions of liberal capitalist societies: private property in land. He called for the replacement of all federal, state, and local

taxes with one tax on the full value, or market price of land—a proposal that became known as “the single tax.” Unlike the general property tax which taxed the value of land *and* buildings, the single tax *only* applied to the value of land. Furthermore, the single tax only reached land upon which value had attached as a result of location and natural fertility.

Although the single tax was never fully implemented anywhere in the world, George’s concept inspired and animated many of the most notable social reform movements of the era of high industrialism including socialism, labor activism, and the Social Gospel. More than any other late-nineteenth century reformer, George reintroduced land and the concept of economic rent into political economic debates that had in recent years become heavily focused on the clash of capital versus labor. As a result, the issues of land ownership and land distribution remained important components of Gilded Age and Progressive Era reforms and policies.

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Introduction

In the aftermath of one of the nation's worst economic disasters—the economic depression of the 1870s—the California journalist Henry George (1839-1897) strived to understand a distinctive dilemma of modern industrial capitalism: how could an era of unprecedented economic growth and industrial output produce widespread poverty, unemployment, financial panic, and acute inequality of wealth? The result of George's investigation was *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth. The Remedy* (1879). The book challenged widely accepted doctrines of property rights and laissez-faire and changed the way many people thought about and understood political economy. By the close of the nineteenth century, *Progress and Poverty* had become an international bestseller and ignited a transnational land reform movement designed to end poverty in the modern industrial world.

Henry George proposed a deceptively simple solution to the problems of economic inequality and industrial depression. In contrast to other social commentators of his era who attributed economic disruptions to overproduction, under-consumption, or unsound monetary policies, George singled out one of the most cherished institutions of liberal capitalist societies: private property in land. He called for the replacement of all federal, state, and local taxes with one tax on the full value, or market price of land. His

proposal became known as “the single tax” and those who supported it were called “single taxers.”

The single tax was neither a property tax nor a land tax. Unlike the general property tax which taxed the value of real estate (land) and personal property (buildings), the single tax only applied to the value of land. Furthermore, the single tax only reached land upon which value had attached as a result of land’s location and natural fertility. Under the single tax, land without value would not be taxed.

Taxing only land values would generate all the revenue needed to operate government, George believed, and doing so would produce ever greater levels of opportunity, as man’s right to the bounty of nature and his desire for a productive life was strengthened. Taxing only land values, George believed, would ameliorate and one day eliminate the hardship caused by continually bursting bubbles of land speculation. Finally, taxing only land values was not just the application of sound public policy, but the acknowledgement of a spiritual duty.

George employed a broad definition of land, arguing that the term applied not only to “the surface of the earth,” but all the “natural materials, forces, and opportunities” freely supplied by nature.¹ George used this definition to determine the legitimate basis of private property and the scope of the single tax. Drawing on the ideas of the 17th century British philosopher John Locke, George argued that “There can rightfully be no exclusive possession and enjoyment of anything not the production of labor.”² Farms, buildings, houses, machines, tools, etc., George claimed, represented capital—the result

¹ Henry George, *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry Into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth. The Remedy*, 50th Ann. ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1929), 38.

² *Ibid.*, 335.

of combining one's labor with natural resources. Unlike land, capital presented a defensible source of personal property and should not be taxed.

The distinction George drew between land values and capital helped distinguish the single tax from the general property tax. Since the Civil War, the general property tax has provided the bulk of revenue for state and local governments. Today, the general property tax accounts for more than three-fourths of all local income.³ Most state constitutions require that the general property tax adhere to the principles of uniformity and universality. Uniformity mandates that the same rate of taxation be applied to all types of property. Universality requires the property tax to reach all classes of property—real, personal, tangible, and intangible. The single tax would only tax the value of real estate and exempt personal property.⁴ In so doing, the single tax would violate the principles of uniformity and universality.

The distinction George drew between land values and capital also helped differentiate the single tax from socialism. In contrast to many socialists, who advocated public ownership of all factors of production, including capital, George only sought to make land common property through the socialization of land rent, or what many have called the “unearned increment” of land value. Socialists considered the single tax an incomplete antidote to poverty and wealth inequality and criticized George for his failure to recognize the unearned value in the profits of capitalists. Karl Marx referred to this increment as “surplus value,” which he defined as the difference between the value of the

³ Elizabeth Malm and Ellen Kant, “The Fiscal Fact: The Sources of State and Local Tax Revenues,” *The Tax Foundation* 354 (January 29, 2013): 1, <http://taxfoundation.org/article/sources-state-and-local-tax-revenues.pdf>

⁴ For more on the general property tax, see: Glenn W. Fisher, *The Worst Tax? A History of the Property Tax in America* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 1-13; Robin L. Einhorn, “Species of Property: The American Property-Tax Uniformity Clauses Reconsidered,” *The Journal of Economic History* 61 (Dec., 2001): 974-1008; and, Edwin R. A. Seligman, *Essays in Taxation*, Ninth ed. (New York: Macmillan Co., 1921), 19-63.

product created by labor and the price of labor—what labor is paid in wages. According to Marx, the private appropriation of surplus value accounted for the exploitation of labor in a capitalist economy.⁵

Though he believed that private property in land was unjust, George did not support the confiscation or redistribution of land. Instead, he proposed to eliminate the privilege of private ownership of land by taxing its value. As he explained:

I do not propose either to purchase or to confiscate private property in land. The first would be unjust; the second, needless. Let the individuals who now hold it still retain, if they want to, possession of what they are pleased to call their land. Let them continue to call it their land. Let them buy and sell, and bequeath and devise it. We may safely leave them the shell, if we take the kernel. *It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent.*⁶

By rent, George referred not to the monthly fee tenants paid in exchange for an apartment lease, but to “economic rent:” a term which economist Michael Hudson has succinctly defined as “the profit one earns simply by owning something.”⁷

George believed that rent accounted for the reduction of wages despite the increased productive power of labor. He also believed rent provided a legitimate source of taxation because it was “unearned.” By unearned, he meant that personal improvements did not account for the entire increase in the value of land. Instead, the natural richness of the soil, the growth of the surrounding community, and the proximity of land to railroads, canals, and other industrial developments determined the return landowners received for possessing land. Like the earth, rent was not the product of one

⁵ For more on Marx’s interpretation of surplus value see, Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume I: The Process of Capitalist Production*, rev. ed., trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, & Company, 1915), parts III-V and VII.

⁶ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 405.

⁷ Michael Hudson, “The New Road to Serfdom: An Illustrated Guide to the Coming Real Estate Collapse,” *Harper’s Magazine* 312 (May 2006), 39. Hudson points out that economic rent can take many forms, including “licensing fees for the radio spectrum, interest on a savings account, dividends from a stock, or the capital gain from selling a home or vacant lot.”

man's exertion, but the result of a combination of natural and social forces for which no individual could claim responsibility. As such, George argued that land values irrespective of improvements rightfully belonged equally to all members of the community. Through the single tax he proposed to socialize land rent.

George failed to outline a specific procedure for the assessment or collection of land values under the single tax. Nor did he specify which level of government—local, state, or national—should take responsibility for implementing the single tax. However, George believed that the single tax would be easy to collect and would not require the creation of any new government machinery. As he explained:

Our plan involves the imposition of no new tax, since we already tax land values in taxing real estate. To carry it out we have only to abolish all taxes save the tax on real estate, and to abolish all of that which now falls on buildings or improvements, leaving only that part of it which now falls on the value of the bare land, increasing that so as to take as nearly as may be the whole of economic rent, or what is sometimes styled the “unearned increment of land values.”⁸

George also was a strong advocate of local self-government, believing that “in things which concerns only themselves, the people of each political sub-division—township, ward, city, or State, as may be—shall act for themselves.”⁹ These passages suggest that George intended for the single tax to be administered locally and by the same bodies then charged with the administration of the general property tax.

This dissertation reveals the significance of land ownership and distribution in late nineteenth and early twentieth century thought and discourse. By exploring the influence of George's ideas on social and economic reform, I show that the author and his followers enjoyed more success than historians have hitherto recognized. That national,

⁸ Henry George, “The Single Tax—What it is, and Why We Urge It,” *The Christian Advocate* 65 (July 24, 1890), 481.

⁹ Henry George, *Social Problems* (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1992, orig. 1883), 174.

state, and local governments did not replace all other taxes with George's single tax on land values should not obscure the importance of his work and its impact on some of the era's most prominent social and economic reformers. Some of these individuals included: Sidney and Beatrice Webb, co-founders of the British socialist organization the Fabian Society; the popular and controversial New York City priest, Father Edward McGlynn; and, the streetcar monopolist turned public servant Tom L. Johnson, who served four consecutive terms as mayor of Cleveland from 1901-1909.

Aside from proposing a remedy to what many believed to be the political economy's most vexing problem—the fact that progress seemed perversely to deepen social inequality—George's work presented an original and compelling analysis of the causes of recurring industrial depression and economic panic. Furthermore, the lucid prose and impassioned tone of George's writings resonated with the public's growing interest in political economy. "Tens of thousands of laborers have read 'Progress and Poverty' who never before looked between the two covers of an economic book, and its conclusions are widely accepted articles in the workingman's creed," observed the economist Richard T. Ely.¹⁰ Even those who disagreed with the single tax recognized the remarkable breadth and popularity of George's work.

Despite the economic nature of his subject, George wrote for the common reader. He rejected the idea that one must possess a good deal of formal schooling to grasp the laws of political economy. "Although political economy deals with various and complicated phenomena," George wrote, "these are phenomena which may be resolved into simple elements, and which are but the manifestations of familiar principles. The

¹⁰ Richard T. Ely, "Recent Phases of Socialism in the United States. In Three Chapters. -I" *Christian Union* 29 (April 24, 1884), 389.

premises from which it makes its deductions are truths of which we are all conscious and upon which in every-day life we constantly base our reasoning and our actions.” George believed that the laws governing economic processes were easily observed and understood by those willing to study the world around them.

Toward a More Professional Discipline: Changes in Economic Thinking Circa 1880

The popularity of George’s work threatened a growing number of professional economists who, in the early 1880s, led an effort to formalize the study of political economy in the United States. The severe depression of the 1870s challenged accepted notions regarding the cause of financial panics and encouraged the study of how to prevent them. Classical economics sustained attacks from within and outside its ranks. Generally conservative economists, including M.I.T. President General Francis A. Walker, began to embrace a larger role for government in the regulation of economic affairs. Additionally, young American economists returned from Germany with new theories of and approaches to the discipline. Unlike many of their predecessors, this new generation of economists led by E.R.A. Seligman, Richard T. Ely, and John Bates Clark, challenged the idea that universal and immutable laws governed economic processes. Instead, they viewed economics as an evolutionary science, subject to variances based on place and time and which formed the basis for a new school of thought called neo-classical economics.

George stood at the nexus of this economic change. Rather than overturn classical economic theory, he hoped to reform it. For the most part, George accepted and utilized the classical economic doctrines associated with Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus, and John Stuart Mill. Those doctrines had dominated economic

thought in the Western world for nearly a century. Classical economics had changed substantially between the publication of Smith's *Wealth of Nations* in 1776 and Mill's *Principles of the Political Economy* in 1848, but as economist William J. Barber and others have noted, "an important thread of continuity – a common concern with the process of economic growth – linked the work of its main contributors."¹¹ From Adam Smith to John Stuart Mill, the field of economics was overwhelmingly concerned with the discovery of the economic laws that governed the production and distribution of wealth in society.

The work of Adam Smith (1723-1790) reflected three currents present in late-eighteenth century British thought. The first involved the celebration of philosophic liberalism in the works of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Locke (1632-1704). The second included increasing dissatisfaction with the mercantile policies of the British Empire, and the work of the French Physiocrats comprised the third current. Under mercantilism—the term used by the critics of British economic policy—the state pursued policies designed to maintain a positive balance of trade and increase the stock of gold and silver in the country. Such goals led the government to impose heavy tariffs on imported goods and to constantly search for new markets for British products.¹²

Mercantilism received its first major challenge from French economists Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-1781) and François Quesnay (1694-1774), founders of the Physiocratic school of economics and popular during the reigns of King Louis XV and XVI. The Physiocrats centered their economic policies on agriculture, which they

¹¹ William J. Barber, *History of Economic Thought* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2009), 107.

¹² John Mills, *Critical History of Economics: Missed Opportunities* (Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 59 and Richard T. Ely, et. al., *The Outlines of Economics*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 744.

claimed represented the sole source of *produit net* (surplus value) upon which all sectors of the economy depended. Surplus value, according to Richard Ely, referred to “a reward or premium appearing in production for which nature rather than man is responsible, and which is not required to induce men to put forth the effort necessary to produce wealth.”¹³ Physiocrats believed surplus value represented a legitimate source of taxation and proposed, although it was never implemented, that the French government raise all revenue from an *impôt unique* (single tax) on land value. While George ultimately adopted the term single tax to describe his remedy from the Physiocrats he followed a different line of economic thought. As Arthur Nicholas Young has noted, for example, in contrast to George who believed the state should take the entire rental value of land, the Physiocrats envisioned that the *impôt unique* would take only a third of the total surplus value generated from agricultural land. Furthermore, George’s single tax was designed to fall on the value derived from *all* land, not merely the values generated from land used for agricultural purposes.¹⁴

While Smith disagreed with the central Physiocratic premise that agriculture was the sole generator of productive surplus, he built upon Turgot and Quesnay’s critique of mercantilism. Smith’s analysis in *A Wealth of Nations* revolved around three questions: what motivates economic activity, what determines prices and wages, and what policies should the state pursue to encourage economic growth. Smith answered his first question with the following, oft-quoted passage: “Every individual is continually exerting himself to find out the most advantageous employment for whatever capital he can command. It

¹³ Ely, et. al., *The Outlines of Economics*, 745.

¹⁴ Alfred Nicholas Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1916), 16-17. For George’s discussion of the Physiocrats see *Progress and Poverty*, 423-424.

is his own advantage, indeed, and not that of the society, which he has in view. But the study of his own advantage naturally, or rather necessarily leads him to prefer that employment which is most advantageous to the society.”¹⁵ Self-interest, Smith believed, operated as a sort of “invisible hand” that directed individuals and nations, towards the employment and industries for which they were best suited. Given this, Smith promoted a minimal and laissez-faire role for government in economic affairs. He also, as economic historian John Mills has pointed out, opposed combinations of workers and employers for the tendency of such arrangements to restrain trade and disrupt economic activity.¹⁶

To answer his second question regarding the determination of prices and wages, Smith relied heavily on the long-established labor theory of value. Although later economists, including David Ricardo and Karl Marx, added their own variations, the essence of the labor theory of value remained the same: the value of various goods and services is largely determined by the amount of labor required to produce them. Later economists criticized Smith for his failure to consider the margin of utility of various goods and services that affect their value.

After Smith, most historians credit David Ricardo (1772-1823) and his friend Robert Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) for the next major developments within the field of classical economics. In 1798, Malthus, a clergyman turned economics professor, published the first volume of *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, in which he investigated the major impediments to “the progress of mankind” and the possibility for their removal. In looking at the history of human civilization and the laws of the animal

¹⁵ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and the Causes of the Wealth of Nations. With an introduction and notes, Volume 10*, ed., C.J. Bullock (New York: P.F. Collier & Son Company, 1909), 333.

¹⁶ Mills, *Critical History of Economics*, 67.

kingdom, Malthus discovered a “constant tendency in all animated life to increase beyond the nourishment prepared for it.” Furthermore, Malthus reasoned that since humans require food to exist, “the population can never actually increase beyond the lowest nourishment capable of supporting it.” Thus, the misery and fear arising from the lack of food necessary to support human life, serve as a “constant check” on man’s natural impulse to reproduce. Other less permanent checks to population growth include war, famine, disease, and moral restraint. Whether he intended it to, Malthus’ theory of population cast a long shadow over classical economics and, as Ely and others have suggested, probably contributed more than any other doctrine to the reputation of political economy as the dismal science.¹⁷

The Malthusian theory of population certainly influenced Ricardo, who most famously fashioned the classical economic theory of rent. He used that theory to modify (or, as economic historian Robert E. Wright has suggested, to complete) Smith’s theories on the determination of wages and prices. George drew most heavily from Ricardo in the formulation of his own economic philosophy. Like the Physiocrats, Ricardo viewed agriculture as the dominant—although not the sole—generator of surplus value. He noticed a correlation between the rise of rent and an increase in economic production. Ricardo viewed higher rent, not as a cause, but rather a “symptom” of increased wealth and economic development.

Ricardo defined rent as “that portion of the produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil.” In other words, rent was not the product of labor but the reward a landowner received for merely

¹⁷ Thomas Robert Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population. Volume I*, 4th ed. (London: T. Bensley, 1807), 2-4 and Ely, et. al., *The Outlines of Economics*, 746.

owning valuable land. Furthermore, Ricardo believed that in its natural and uncultivated state land lacked economic value; land only gained value—economic rent—when, as a result of the progress of society and population increase, less fertile land was brought into the market for productive use. Land of lesser natural quality always demanded more labor to produce the same value of goods as land of better quality. Thus, as he explained, “rent is always the difference between the produce obtained by the employment of two equal quantities of labor and capital” to land.¹⁸

Ricardo insisted that the increase of rent also led to an increase in prices and wages. In his justification of this stance, Ricardo alluded to another of the most “dismal” theories associated with classical economics: the Iron Law of Wages. Under this theory, employers always paid the minimum wage—no more and no less—necessary to maintain the lives of their workers. Since the “natural price of labor,” Ricardo claimed, “depends on the price of food, necessaries, and conveniences required for the support of the laborer and his family,” when the price of rent increases, so must the price of goods necessary to maintain labor.¹⁹

While accepting Ricardo’s theory of rent, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) proposed an alternative theory of wages that proved equally gloomy. According to Mill, employers paid labor from a pre-established fund—the wages fund—in return for their work. Given this, as Mill argued in volume one of *Principles of the Political Economy* (1848): “Wages (meaning, of course, the general rate) cannot rise, but by an increase of the aggregate funds employed in hiring labourers, or a diminution in the number of competitors; nor fall, except either by a diminution of the funds devoted to paying labour, or by an

¹⁸ David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. With an Introduction by Robert E. Wright (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), xi, 27, 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 45. See also Mills, *Critical History of Economics*, 75,

increase in the number of labourers to be paid.”²⁰ Mill’s theory assumed that nothing save an increase in the funds from which labor is paid or a decrease in the size of the labor force could increase the rate of wages. As a result, Mill argued, labor unions, strikes, boycotts, and any other attempt utilized by labor to increase wages must ultimately prove futile.

The economic theories of Smith, Ricardo, Malthus, and Mill largely dominated the field of political economy at the time George penned *Progress and Poverty*. Soon after its publication, and partly as a result of the book’s appearance, the field began to change and the discipline became more professionalized. Alarmed by the informal nature of economic discussion in the United States, in 1885 the younger generation of German-trained economists formed the American Economic Association to “replace the speculative economics of the day with a body of thought based upon historical and statistical investigation.”²¹ The following year Harvard began publishing the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, the first professional journal printed in English and devoted to the study of economics.

In addition to becoming more professionalized, in the 1880s and 1890s, political economy also shed much of the doom and gloom it had inherited from classical theorists and became more humanized. The immense popularity of *Progress and Poverty* contributed to this change. As Richard Ely noted:

Henry George’s work “Progress and Poverty,” was published in 1879. In 1884, not five years later, it is possible to affirm without hesitation, that the appearance of that one book formed a noteworthy epoch in the history of economic thought

²⁰ John Stuart Mill, *Principles of the Political Economy with Some of their Applications to Social Philosophy*, Vol. I, 2nd ed. (London: John W. Parker, 1848), 418.

²¹ Lewis H. Haney, *History of Economic Thought: A Critical Account of the Origin and Development of the Theories of the Leading Thinkers in the Leading Nations*, Rev. ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1922), 615.

in England and America...A severe crisis in 1873, with all train of varied disasters, checked economic progress and brought the crushing weight of poverty upon tens of thousands. Bright visions gave place to gloomy forebodings, and six years later the ground was ripe for the seed sown by Henry George, till then an obscure journalist in the “Far West,” and the fruit has been abundant, and the promises for the future overwhelming.²²

Although they disagreed with much of his economic analysis and most of his conclusions, professional economists like Professor Ely noted the book’s wide appeal and applauded George for helping to broaden the scope and perspective of the discipline.

America in the Gilded Age: Economic Panic, Wealth Inequality, and Land Monopoly

Henry George’s ideas enjoyed broad salience in the decades prior to and immediately following the turn of the 20th century—the historical periods known as the Gilded Age and Progressive Era—because he addressed the issues of growing importance to a majority of Americans: financial panic, wealth inequality, and land monopoly. In 1879, when the first edition of *Progress and Poverty* appeared, the country had just emerged from a long depression of trade and agriculture with staggering levels of unemployment and wealth inequality. According to historian Nell Irvin Painter, in the 1880s the wealthiest two percent of the population earned more than half of the aggregate income and the wealthiest one percent owned more than half of the property in the United States. “This tiny class of rentiers,” Painter writes, “received as large a total income from its property as the poor half of the families received from both property and wages.”²³ The majority of Gilded Age Americans survived on hourly wages that sustained a bare existence. While the rich became richer, the poor grew poorer. According to historian

²² Ely, “Recent Phases of Socialism in the United States,” 389.

²³ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), xx.

Philip Foner, in 1870, the Census Bureau estimated the average annual income at just over \$400 per capita; ten years later that number had fallen to a little over \$300.²⁴

George's followers extended beyond those who advocated for the single tax. Populists drew on his description of how land reform would benefit small and individual farmers struggling to compete with corporate growers. Labor activists believed *Progress and Poverty* addressed workers' constant struggle to maintain wages high enough to cover the increasing costs of urban life. The United Labor Party nominated George as its candidate for mayor of New York City in 1886. State and local government officials utilized the single tax in their efforts to municipalize natural monopolies such as street cars, electricity, and water delivery. George's social ethics inspired religious leaders in the U.S. and Great Britain to more actively question the morality of social and economic policy. Irish nationalists and their supporters in the U.S. applied George's ideas to attack landlordism and advocate for greater representation of Irish interests in Parliament. The publication and popularity of *Progress and Poverty* in Britain in 1880 helped jumpstart the modern British socialist movement.

The growing awareness of what George's contemporaries called the "land crisis"—the shrinking of the nation's once vast public domain—in public thought and discourse by the end of the nineteenth century helps account for the enormous popularity and success of *Progress and Poverty*. In his elucidation of the causes of poverty and industrial depression, George promoted the "land question" to the highest importance. As he had observed while living and working in California, monopolization and speculation drove up the price of land, reduced labor's net wages, and fostered a system

²⁴ Philip S. Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States. Volume II: From the Founding of the A.F. of L. to the Emergence of American Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1998, orig. 1955), 15.

of landlordism. Additionally, state and federal land policy accelerated the shrinking of the public domain, which George believed had not only served as a source of national strength and independence, but also prevented rule by aristocracy.

Fourteen years before the appearance of Frederick Jackson Turner's famous essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893) George argued that the disappearance of the public domain threatened America's exceptional progress and democratic character. "This public domain has been the transmuting force which has turned the thriftless, unambitious European peasant into the self-reliant Western farmer; it has given a consciousness of freedom even to the dweller in crowded cities, and has been a well-spring of hope even to those who have never thought of taking refuge upon it," he explained.²⁵ Anticipating Turner's frontier thesis, George argued that the vast supply of public land found at the edge of eastern settlement had served as a buffer to shield democracy from the excesses of capitalism and industrialization.²⁶

The press echoed George's concerns. Fearful of the rise of landlordism—the system in which most of the land is owned by a small class of landlords who charge others to live and work upon it—as a result of large purchases of the public domain by a handful of individuals and land speculators, the *North American Review* devoted four issues to the topic in 1886. Additionally, the editors appointed a special commissioner, Thomas P. Gill, to investigate the extent and growth of landlordism in several states. As various authors, including George, debated whether the number of tenants was in fact increasing faster than the number of landowners, all agreed on the importance of cheap

²⁵ George. *Progress and Poverty*, 390.

²⁶ For a thorough comparison of the ideas of George and Turner, see Alex Wagner Lough, "Henry George, Frederick Jackson Turner and the 'Closing' of the American Frontier," *California History*, 89 (March 2012): 4-23.

and available land to a healthy democracy. According to Gill, “The soil of a country is like the blood: once it is badly vitiated it seems impossible ever to cleanse it, and the poison keeps constantly breaking out.”²⁷

Even Henry Strong, another contributing writer in the series who doubted the severity of the land crisis, recognized the benefits of a wide distribution of land ownership in America. According to Strong, “Every man who owns the land he cultivates has given a pledge to sustain law and order; to resist and put down the despotism of anarchy, whether it appear in the unmasked conspiracy of anarchy, whether it appear in the unmasked conspiracy of Catiline, or the less threatening but more dangerous guise of socialism.”²⁸ George and other late nineteenth century commentators believed that land ownership promoted stability, virtuous citizenship, and shielded America from the “revolutions and agrarian agitations” that plagued Europe.²⁹

George’s ideas also enjoyed a wide reception because his discussion of land policy and taxation in *Progress and Poverty* built on longstanding political traditions and Americans’ growing interest in curbing monopoly power at the end of the nineteenth century. Since the colonial era, tax revolts and crusades for land reform have been two of the most prominent expressions of popular political and economic discontent.³⁰ The importance of land throughout American history stems, in part, from its association with individual economic and political opportunity. According to historian William Cronon,

²⁷ Thomas P. Gill, “Landlordism in America,” *The North American Review* 142 (January 1886), 52.

²⁸ Henry Strong and David Bennet King, “American Landlordism,” *The North American Review* 142 (March 1886), 253. In 63 B.C., the Roman senator Lucius Sergius Catilina devised a plan to overthrow the Roman Republic and its aristocratic leaders.

²⁹ Gill, “Landlordism in America,” 53.

³⁰ Examples of important tax revolts include Daniel Shays Rebellion in Western, MA in 1787 and the South Carolina’s Nullification Crisis of 1832. Land reform movements have dotted the nation’s history beginning with Bacon’s Rebellion in colonial Virginia in 1676 to the Workingmen’s Party and National Reform Association movement in the 1830s and 1840s.

the perception of land as a commodity that could be bought, sold, and traded has significantly influenced economic, ecological, and human relationships throughout North America since the colonial era.³¹ European colonists viewed uncultivated land as useless and wasteful and implemented a system of enclosure in response to God's command to "subdue the earth" and Locke's supposition that "As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his property."³² Fixed boundaries and improvements conveyed ownership of land and the wealth derived from its soil.

More than the perception of land as a commodity, however, the resolute belief in man's natural right to the use and enjoyment of the earth influenced American land policy and approaches to social and economic reform. George's proposal to discourage private property in land through the taxation of land values, as historian Mark Hulliung has pointed out, "was in reality a recapitulation of a century of American pronouncements on the inviolability of the social contract, the need to secure the rights of the next generation, and the natural right to the land."³³ America's founders believed that prior to the creation of governments, man possessed nothing but the uncultivated earth from which to provide for his sustenance. Upon entering into a social contract and forming a national government, individuals did not relinquish their natural right to the land, but instead, empowered government to protect and preserve that right for current and future generations.

³¹ William Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 54-81. See also Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 150.

³² John Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government*, ed. Thomas Hollis (London: A. Millar, et. al. 1764), 220.

³³ Mark Hulliung, *The Social Contract in America: From the Revolution to the Present Age* (Lawrence, KS: The University Press of Kansas, 2007), 77.

Both Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine considered it a primary duty of civil government to protect man's natural right to use and benefit from the soil. As Jefferson explained in a letter to James Madison, "The earth is given as a common stock for man to labor and live on. If for the encouragement of industry we allow it to be appropriated, we must take care that other employment be provided to those excluded from the appropriation. If we do not, the fundamental right to labor the earth returns to the unemployed."³⁴ Given that the earth provided the main source of employment, Jefferson reasoned that if governments allowed land to become private property, society must also ensure that other fields of employment remained open to those without access to the soil.

Paine expressed a similar concern in a pamphlet titled *Agrarian Justice* (1796). He believed that an essential component of the social contract included the guarantee that "every person born into the world, after a state of civilization commences, ought not to be worse than if he had been born before that period." If a person was to be found in a worse state, Paine argued that provision should be made to aid in his comfort.³⁵ To Paine, land monopoly, the purchase and hoarding of large tracts of the public domain by private individuals and families, violated this principle of civilization.

Paine believed that access to land was a natural and essential human right. Similar to George's single tax, he argued that "landowners should pay both a lump sum and an annuity to all deprived of their birthright."³⁶ In other words, Paine believed that landowners should essentially purchase the land they owned from the state and pay an annual tax for holding that land. In justifying his scheme, Paine distinguished man's

³⁴ Thomas Jefferson to James Madison, Fontainebleau, Oct. 28, 1785 in *Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826. Letters*, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library. <http://etext.virginia.edu/>

³⁵ Paine quoted in Gregory Claeys, *Thomas Paine: Social and Political Thought* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1989), 201.

³⁶ Claeys, *Thomas Paine*, 197.

natural rights to land from those “artificially” created by society, such as the right to personal property. “Land...is the free gift of the Creator in common to the human race,” Paine wrote, “Personal property is the *effect of society*; and it is impossible for an individual to acquire personal property without the aid of society, as it is for him to make land originally.”³⁷ He concluded that personal property beyond what one man could produce proved impossible without the aid of society and often occurred as a result of “paying too little for the labour that produced it.”³⁸ Paine’s proposal to support the poor and landless from a tax on monopoly holdings of land did not amount to charity, the revolutionary believed; it represented the fulfillment of the social contract by recognizing every man’s natural right to the soil.

Congress did not adhere to Jefferson and Paine’s warnings regarding the dangers of allowing the nation’s land to become concentrated into the hands of a small class of landowners. From 1780 through the end of the nineteenth century, the sale and appropriation of the nation’s vast reservoir of “free” land provided the central function and source of revenue for the federal government.³⁹ The Land Ordinance of 1785 outlining a system for the transfer of public land into private hands remained largely unchanged until 1862 when Congress passed the Homestead Act.⁴⁰ Under the earlier system, after Indian land had been relinquished to the federal government—often by force—federal land surveyors marked the land by a grid of six square miles and divided it

³⁷ Paine, “Agrarian Justice” in *Common Sense and Other Writings*, ed. Joyce Appleby (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2005), 342. See also Clayes, *Thomas Paine*, 196-197.

³⁸ Paine, *Agrarian Justice*, 342.

³⁹ In most cases, the land appropriated by the federal government was not free as it had been used and inhabited by Indians for centuries prior to European Americans’ arrival. Additionally, there were high costs associated with the U.S. government’s acquisition of Indian land; the exchange was almost never fair. For more on the role of the federal government in the west see Richard White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own:*” *A New History of the American West* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 137-152.

⁴⁰ White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own,*” 137.

into one square mile sections, which were then sold as townships or to individuals at a public auction. Any land not sold at the auction could be bought from the federal government initially for \$2.00 an acre before it was reduced to \$1.25 in 1820.⁴¹ Because the federal government originally did not discriminate against who could purchase public land or how much, speculation was rampant, especially during the middle decades of the nineteenth century when thousands of settlers moved out west for economic opportunity and to fulfill the nation's "Manifest Destiny."

Land speculation had consequences beyond increasing land prices and making it harder for the common individual to purchase land. Speculation in land, as in any other commodity, encouraged gambling. Investors took out credit on the expectation that values would continue to rise, and as long as they did, the economy expanded. In 1837, however, following what Cronon has called "the most intense land speculation in American history," the land bubble burst, banks recalled their loans, and "millionaires teetered on the edge of bankruptcy" sending shock waves throughout the economy.⁴² Widespread unemployment and a retraction of available credit resulted. The federal government did little to prevent speculation in land because without it, according to historian Richard White, the land system might not have worked at all.⁴³ Cash strapped farmers who lacked the capital to buy land outright often turned to speculators, who loaned them the purchase price, with interest.

Calls for land reform and an end to speculation usually surfaced in hard economic times and were often led by proponents of labor, who believed America's vast public domain should operate as a safety valve to relieve eastern unemployment and poverty. In

⁴¹ Ibid, 138.

⁴² Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 29.

⁴³ White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own," 140.

the aftermath of the Panic of 1837 newspaper editor Horace Greeley and labor activist George Henry Evans joined forces to support national land reform. Using the slogan “Vote yourself a farm,” Evans organized workers into the National Reform Association (NRA) and lobbied Congress to grant public land to wage workers.⁴⁴ In a move both to raise revenue and broaden individuals’ access to land, Congress acted on the NRA’s proposals when it passed the Homestead Act in 1862. The Act granted individuals and their families 160 acres of public land in exchange for a small filing fee and five years of residence. After six months, homesteaders had the option to purchase the land outright for \$1.25 an acre.

In addition to the history of America’s land policies, the nation’s long tradition of property taxation informed George’s single tax proposal. While the federal government mainly relied on public land sales and tariffs for revenue, local and state governments utilized direct poll and property taxes. The Constitution prevents the federal government from levying direct taxes by requiring uniformity and the apportionment of all direct taxes based on population. “The apportionment of direct taxes,” as historian Robin Einhorn has explained, “was and remains an almost laughably unfair way to distribute the tax burden.” If Congress were to levy an apportioned tax, Einhorn continued, it “must fix a population-based quota for every state and then levy the separate tax rates in each state that will raise these quotaed sums.”⁴⁵ An apportioned income tax would mean that residents of small, but rich states would pay a lower percentage rate than residents of larger, but poorer states.

⁴⁴ Hulliung, *The Social Contract in America: From the Revolution to the Present Age*, 84, 91.

⁴⁵ Robin Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 158.

Historians disagree on the motivation behind the uniformity and apportionment clauses of the Constitution. Einhorn attributes the measures to the efforts of slaveholders to prevent Congress from taxing slaves at higher rates than other types of property, thereby, attempting to abolish slavery through taxation. Other historians have explained that the limitations stemmed from the framers' shared desire to limit the power of the federal government by removing Congressional power to "preempt the use of property taxation by state and local governments."⁴⁶ According to historian W. Elliot Brownlee, the founders viewed taxpaying as "one of the normal obligations of a citizenry bound together in a republic by ties of affection and respect."⁴⁷ For most citizens of the early republic, state legislatures and local councils played a larger role than the federal government in their lives. By 1860, general property taxation represented the dominant source of income for most state and local governments.

Most Americans accepted property taxation, Einhorn writes, as the "best way to distribute tax burdens to individuals in proportion to their total wealth."⁴⁸ Although provisions varied from state to state (or even county to county), in addition to land, taxed property usually included houses, farms, livestock, machinery, furniture and liquid assets such as bonds, stocks, and loans. Like the federal government, many states passed uniformity clauses to prevent certain types of property, such as slaves in the South or financial assets in the North, from receiving differential treatment. Behind these decisions, as Einhorn has shown, was the desire to take politics out of the decision of who should pay taxes. Whereas southerners supported uniformity to prevent legislatures (in

⁴⁶ W. Elliot Brownlee, *Federal Taxation in America: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (West Nyack, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 19.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁸ Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery*, 207.

the new age of universal white male suffrage) from levying higher taxes on slave property, Northern governments adopted these clauses, she has argued, because they “misunderstood them.” By passing uniformity clauses “they thought they were prohibiting *lower* taxes on financial and corporate assets. They actually were prohibiting *higher* taxes on these assets.”⁴⁹ In addition to uniformity clauses, the goal of property taxation—to distribute tax burdens based on the ability to pay—was further corrupted by lax regulations regarding property valuations and assessments, leading historian C. K. Yearly to claim, “Before the enactment of Prohibition probably nothing in American life entailed more calculated premeditated lying than the general property tax.”⁵⁰

Given the long history of property taxation in America, some of George’s critics viewed the single tax as merely an attempt to reform the corrupt system. By the end of the nineteenth century, some economists had begun to advocate for the replacement or supplementation of property taxes with levies on corporate profits and personal income. Economists—on the right and the left—accused George of naivety for believing a single tax on land values could raise enough revenue to support the activities state and local governments. The Progressive economist and supporter of income taxation, Edwin R.A. Seligman devoted a chapter of his book, *Essays in Taxation* (1895) to discrediting the single tax. Its main economic weakness, Seligman believed, was that it was inelastic and “inevitably intensifies the inequalities resulting from unjust assessments” of land values.⁵¹ Conservative economist Francis Amasa Walker argued that the single tax would do nothing for workers, whom he claimed needed to become better “economic

⁴⁹ Ibid., 231.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 208.

⁵¹ Edwin R. A. Seligman, *Essays in Taxation*, 10th ed. (New York: MacMillan Co., 1928, 1895) 76-77.

agents” through sobriety, education, and “freedom from premature family responsibilities.”⁵²

George’s ideas received almost as much criticism from the left as the right, which makes any attempt to classify the land reformer difficult. *Progress and Poverty* appeared among dozens of books advocating various reform schemes, and George represented merely one of several individuals committed to the eradication of poverty in the industrial world. But unlike many of his contemporaries, George more firmly grounded his ideas in traditional Christian values and the belief in natural and *a priori* truths. In this way, as historian Anthony Francis McGinn has claimed, George represented something of an “anachronism” among late nineteenth and early twentieth century reformers.⁵³

The appearance of *Progress and Poverty* in 1879 coincided with the early beginnings of an epistemological swing away from the use of natural law theories and toward a more experiential-based understanding of knowledge and justice.⁵⁴ George was on the other side of this shift. As judges, lawyers, and policy experts were beginning to rely more on social scientific methods to understand the world and its problems, George rooted his social philosophy in the belief of a higher order based on the fundamental and “moral” law of human progress. “Political economy and social science cannot teach any lessons,” George wrote, “that are not embraced in the simple truths taught to poor fishermen and Jewish peasants by One who eighteen hundred years ago was crucified.”⁵⁵

Although it could also be confirmed through the principles of the political economy and

⁵² John K. Whitaker, “Enemies or Allies? Henry George and Francis Amasa Walker One Century Later,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 35 (Dec., 1997): 1903.

⁵³ Anthony Francis McGinn, “An Anachronism in Progressive Thought: Henry George and the Natural Law” (Master’s thesis, University of Texas, 1975).

⁵⁴ For more on this shift, see James T. Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory: Social Democracy and Progressivism in European and American Thought, 1870-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁵⁵ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 526.

the application of modern social science, the simple truth of the injustice of private property in land was a natural and therefore moral law. By embracing a role for Christianity in social reform, George attracted a number of religious reformers who struggled to secure a place for faith in an industrial world faced with problems that only science and reason seemed capable to solve.

While many historians have noted the religious tenor of *Progress and Poverty*, few have explored the depth or origins of George's spirituality and its impact in attracting the support of Christian reformers who used the single tax to further religious goals.⁵⁶ I address this oversight by examining the influence of George's ideas on two of the era's most formidable religious activists—Anglican clergyman Stewart Headlam and American Catholic priest Edward McGlynn. Both drew on elements of George's philosophy to inform their social activism and encourage other Church leaders to become more involved in secular matters that affected the lives of their congregants. I have selected Rev. Headlam and Father McGlynn because both men adapted the single tax to further specific and clearly defined religious goals. For Headlam, these goals included greater religious tolerance for secular activities including the ballet. McGlynn pursued the single tax to find personal spiritual satisfaction and like Headlam, to carve a larger place for organized religion in social reform.

Despite the existence of *both* conservative and progressive elements in George's thought, historians have tended to identify George as a key protagonist in the story of American radicalism. John L. Thomas, for example, presents George alongside two other prominent journalists—Edward Bellamy and Henry Demarest Lloyd—whose works, he

⁵⁶ Two exceptions include Fred Nicklason, "Henry George: Social Gospeller," *American Quarterly* 22:3 (Autumn, 1970): 649-664 and Eileen Williams Lindner, "The Redemptive Politic of Henry George: Legacy to the Social Gospel" (Ph.D. diss. Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York, 1985).

argues, collectively formed a new and “alternative” view of America that both preserved and adapted “inherited liberal creeds” to the post-Civil War era. Central to the thinking of all three men, and especially to George, Thomas claims, was the desire to return to a producer-based economy composed of small and diversified units. Thomas locates the radicalism of all three reformers in the various schemes and methods each proposed to realize their utopian visions. The single tax, with its aim to socialize land rent, embodied George’s revolutionary spirit.⁵⁷

I challenge the notion that the single tax represented a radical reform. By looking seriously at the works of George’s predecessors including Thomas Paine, Thomas Spence, William Ogilvie, John Stuart Mill, and many others, this study elucidates the long tradition in American and British history of proposals to tax land values for the purpose of making land more accessible to a wider class of people. George’s immense popularity stemmed in part from the way the single tax built upon ideas, values, and concerns deeply rooted in the American and British experience. Concerns about the distribution of land, a belief in man’s natural right to use the soil, and the notion that some resources belonged outside of the private market influenced the efforts of social reformers on at least two continents for more than a century prior to the publication of *Progress and Poverty*.

George’s popularity and lasting influence, however, also derived from his ability to connect the various grievances of turn-of-the-twentieth century Americans to the nation’s legal treatment of land and land values. The causes of wealth inequality,

⁵⁷ John L. Thomas, *Alternative America: Henry George, Edward Bellamy, Henry Demarest Lloyd and the Adversary Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 36, 50. Historian Chester McArthur Destler also portrays George as a key figure in the history of American radicalism in his study tracing George’s influence on both Populism and organized labor. See, *American Radicalism, 1865-1901. Essays and Documents* (New London, CT: Connecticut College, 1946).

unemployment, financial panic, and the exploitation of wage earners, George illustrated, resulted from the monopolization of land and the treatment of land values as the private property of individuals instead of the common property of the community which helped create them. George showcased the universality of the land question; he showed that the issues of land ownership and distribution represented urban and rural concerns as they affected farmers and wage earners alike.

The transnational influence of George's ideas warrants more attention from historians.⁵⁸ Within a decade of its publication in 1879, *Progress and Poverty* became an international bestseller and was translated into dozens of languages including Russian, German, French, and Yiddish. George attracted more converts to the single tax abroad than at home. Daniel Rodgers goes further than most historians in his recognition of George's international influence.

Although the bulk of his 1998 study of the transnational exchange of ideas and reforms during the Progressive Era focuses on those transplanted from Europe into American municipal, state, and national governments—including old age pensions, workers insurance, city planning and cooperative farming—Rodgers makes clear that this one-sided exchange was not inevitable. As he writes:

That American progressives should have found themselves drawing so much more heavily on the experience and ideas of their European counterparts than Europeans on theirs was no historical given. In the transatlantic radical world of the 1880s, the biggest splash of all had been made by the American radical economist Henry George. His influence on Australasian labor politics was formative; his five tours of Great Britain and Ireland in the 1880s took the islands

⁵⁸ For studies focusing on the transnational influence of George and the single tax, see Peter d'A. Jones, *Henry George and British Socialism* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1991) and Michael Silagi, "Henry George and Europe: George and His Followers Awakened the British Conscience and Started a New, Freer Society," translated by Susan N. Faulkner *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 50 (Apr., 1991): 243-255.

by storm. The Fabian society was jolted out of its initial gauzy spiritualism by George's lectures on land monopoly.⁵⁹

George's transatlantic impact sprung in part from the fact that he viewed land the way social reformers had come to view certain resources such as education, transportation, water—as a resource too precious and important to allow competitive market processes to determine its use and distribution. “Against the onrush of commodification,” Rodgers writes, “the advocates of social politics tried to hold certain elements out of the market's processes, indeed to roll back those parts of the market whose social costs had proved too high.”⁶⁰ For George, land was the most important of these elements. “The Last Tax” reveals the centrality of George's ideas to the era's transatlantic exchange of social political ideas and reform technologies.

This study also builds on the work of Charles Albro Barker and his 1955 account of George's life. Besides a rich source of biographical detail, Barker's study provides a useful framework for thinking about George's legacy. While for some, Barker writes, the single tax presented a powerful fiscal antidote to corrupt and inefficient tax systems, others emphasized its potential to affect major political and moral change.⁶¹ In the pages which follow, I reveal the influence of the single tax in all three areas of reform.

Chapter One explores the events, experiences, and ideas that motivated and influenced George's writing of *Progress and Poverty*. It also examines the book's reception among academic economists and argues that *Progress and Poverty* changed the course of economic thought and discussion in the United States. Even its detractors

⁵⁹ Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossing: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998), 70.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 25, 29-30.

⁶¹ Charles Albro Barker, *Henry George*, rev. ed. (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1991), 621.

admitted that *Progress and Poverty* generated more enthusiasm, debate, and general interest in political economy than any other text published on the subject at that time. This chapter also traces the origins of the term “single tax” and discusses the ideas it encompassed. In 1887 George adopted the term single tax to describe his plan to rid the world of poverty, industrial depression, and acute inequality of wealth by replacing all federal and state taxes save one on the full value of land. The single tax represented more than a mere fiscal reform. To George, the single tax encompassed his spiritual, moral, political, and social understanding of the world.

George’s views especially resonated with British audiences who had more direct experience than Americans did with the evils of landlordism and land monopoly that George denounced in *Progress and Poverty*. Chapter Two shows how George’s ideas echoed more than a century of British thought that asserted private property in land violated man’s natural rights. While the issue of land ownership had long dominated British politics, George helped redefine the question and reveal its significance to other pressing concerns. Unlike land reformers before him, George more purposefully and effectively connected the system of land ownership to unemployment, poverty, and wealth inequality. In doing so, George unintentionally encouraged many to advocate for the nationalization of *all* factors of production in addition to land. This chapter shows how the publication of *Progress and Poverty* in England in 1881 fueled calls for land reform throughout the country and helped inspire the modern British Socialist movement.

The connection between land reform and labor activism is deep and underappreciated in U.S. history. Chapter Three uses the New York City mayoral election of 1886 to explore these connections as well as the reasons for George’s widespread

popularity among the working classes in the Gilded Age. In doing so, it both builds upon and challenges the claims of John L. Thomas and Thomas O'Donnell who have argued that George's support among the working classes mainly derived from his particular republican ideology, which celebrated those who labored for themselves and denigrated those who lived off the labor of others. This chapter demonstrates the central role of land reform in the campaign and how George's proposal to shift the burden of city taxes onto land values helped attract both middle and working class supporters.

Chapter Four examines the religious dimension of George's ideas and their impact on two of the era's most important Christian reformers. Throughout his life, George challenged the complacency of organized religion to rampant suffering and criticized the tendency of religious leaders to attribute poverty to divine providence or moral deprivation. The popularization of his ideas in the 1880s and 1890s pushed some socially-minded churchmen to become more involved in secular affairs and prompted their efforts to abolish poverty and reduce wealth inequality through land reform. The work of New York City's Father Edward McGlynn on behalf of the single tax "christened" him into the world of politics; after encountering George's work McGlynn enjoyed a successful, albeit controversial, career as a fervent advocate of social justice and leader of the interdenominational Anti-Poverty Society. For the eccentric Anglican priest Stewart Duckworth Headlam, the single tax provided a political method for establishing a Christian social order. The lives and work of Headlam and McGlynn illustrate the ways some Christian reformers mobilized around the single tax to achieve important religious goals at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Chapter Five reexamines the political career of millionaire streetcar monopolist Tom L. Johnson and explores the ways the single tax inspired his efforts as mayor of Cleveland to municipalize public service monopolies in the city. As mayor, Johnson worked to reveal the public's stake not only in land values, but also in the enormous value of public franchises, which rarely depreciated and tended to increase without any effort by the owner. The single tax and municipal ownership of public utilities required a larger degree of local autonomy than most U.S. cities enjoyed in 1900. In his efforts to secure these reforms, Johnson and other progressive reformers throughout the country also fought for measures designed to increase the governing power of cities vis-à-vis their state legislatures. Such measures included the initiative, referendum, and municipal home rule—the authority of city government to levy taxes and pass legislation without interference from state lawmakers. Single taxers so dominated the direct legislation movement in the United States that opposition to the initiative leaned heavily on arguments against land value taxation.

George disliked the idea of establishing colonies to “test” the single tax. He feared that the limited nature of such experiments might cause them to fail and thus detract from the public reputation and acceptance of his philosophy. Despite his warning, George's followers set up more than a dozen single tax communities in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Chapter Six explores the early histories of two such communities, established at Fairhope, Alabama and Arden, Delaware. Both communities empowered the local government to assess and collect the full value of land to finance public works and cover all other state and local taxes charged to the residents. Both communities also experienced difficulty carrying out this plan. Although designed to

demonstrate the justice and practicability of the single tax, neither community came close to the collection of the full value of land. The colony leaders faced precisely the sort of difficulties in calculating and collecting land rent that single tax critics had predicted. On the other hand, the colonies' ability to provide free and discounted public services to its residents demonstrated one of the many benefits of deriving local revenue from land rent anticipated by George's supporters. Additionally, both Fairhope and Arden inspired social developments unpredicted by either side.

The Conclusion reviews the dissertation's findings and discusses an area in need of further research: the relationship between the decline of the single tax movement and the rise of the federal income tax. Although Henry George opposed *all* forms of taxation save that of a "single" tax on the value of land, many of his followers, including Pennsylvania Congressman Warren Worth Bailey supported and helped draft the Revenue Act of 1916, which, as the historian Elliot Brownlee has argued "transformed the experimental income tax into the primary instrument of federal taxation..."⁶² What accounts for Congressman Bailey and other single taxers support for the federal income tax? More importantly how did their involvement inform the contours of this critical piece of legislation in the history of the nation's tax system? These are a few of the questions posed in the conclusion to guide future research on the impact of George's ideas in the Progressive Era and thereafter.

The history of the single tax provides a unique lens through which to study and understand the changing social, economic, and political conditions facing Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. The tremendous popularity and reach of the single tax

⁶² W. Elliot Brownlee, "Wilson and Financing the Modern State: The Revenue Act of 1916," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 129:2 (1985), 173.

into seemingly disparate movements such as the Social Gospel, labor politics, and local efforts to municipalize public services testifies to the importance of land in the discussions concerning how to best protect democracy and secure equal opportunities for all citizens. This dissertation considers the ways reformers in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era drew on George's ideas to affect meaningful reform.

In the pages which follow, I present an intellectual biography of the single tax—a social history of a political idea. The virtues of such an approach include the flexibility to trace the lives of a man, Henry George, *and* his idea, the single tax. I show how the life of the single tax—as many great ideas often do—transcended the physical and temporal existence of its originator. This approach also allows me to demonstrate the historical continuity and change embodied in the single tax. While the single tax built on long-standing political ideas including natural rights philosophy it also reflected the spirit of turn-of-the-century Americans—a people struggling to understand the sources of vast inequalities and the paradox that industrial progress seemed to deepen poverty. Moreover, as the wealth-poverty conundrum continues to plague social progress, I submit that the simple force and beauty of George's idea will draw to it those who seek to explain and resolve this paradox. In advancing the single tax, George built a bridge for understanding the chaos of economic inequality in modern society that others will traverse to find solutions in succeeding generations.



Henry George, 1897. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

I.

Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, and the Origins of the Single Tax

Henry George often described formative experiences in his life and intellectual evolution in spiritual terms. He classified his “aha” moments as “visions.” One such vision occurred on an afternoon in early 1870 while he was riding his horse in the Oakland foothills that overlook San Francisco Bay. While resting, George struck up a conversation with a passing coachman and asked him what land was worth in the area. “I don’t know exactly, but there is a man who will sell some land for a thousand dollars an acre,” the man replied. Shocked by the exorbitant price, George had an epiphany: “Like a flash it came upon me that there was the reason of advancing poverty with advancing wealth. With the growth of population, land grows in value, and the men who work it must pay more for the privilege. I turned back, amidst quiet thought, to the perception that came to me and has been with me ever since.”¹

Following this conversation, George began working on his first book, a compact version of *Progress and Poverty* called *Our Land and Land Policy*. Published in 1871, the tract explored the connections between federal and state land policies, the price of land, and the welfare of landless workers. For reasons not entirely clear, *Our Land and Land Policy* generated little public attention. Still, George remained committed to the study of the relationship between the value of land and the economic welfare of ordinary

¹ Henry George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George* (New York: Doubleday and McClure Company, 1900), 210. Henry George also discusses this experience in Book II, Chapter V of *The Science of the Political Economy*, Reprint (New York: Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, 1992), 163.

laborers. Eight years later, he completed *Progress and Poverty*. During his lifetime, the book became an international best seller, which, by the close of the nineteenth century, likely outsold every other book except the Bible.²

Progress and Poverty represents the culmination of George's intellectual development; his ideas changed very little after its publication in 1879. Years of careful observation and self-instruction revealed to George the causes of acute inequality of wealth and poverty amidst advancing economic prosperity. The most formative years of his intellectual evolution occurred while George struggled to support a family working as a type-setter and newspaper journalist in California throughout the tumultuous decades of the 1860s and 1870s. As a result, *Progress and Poverty* tells a local story significantly influenced by the changing social, political, and economic landscape of California.

This chapter explores the events, experiences, and ideas that inspired and informed George's writing of *Progress and Poverty*. It also looks at the book's reception in the press and among academic economists and shows how *Progress and Poverty* helped change the course of economic thought and discussion in the United States. In challenging the classical economic theories about the causes of poverty and low wages, *Progress and Poverty* helped transform the perception of political economy as a "dismal science" and renewed interest in the study of the laws and processes that govern economic activity.

Henry George was born September 2, 1839, the second of ten children and the eldest son of Richard and Catherine George. Richard worked as a clerk at the Philadelphia Customs House, and the family lived in a two-story brick house on Tenth

² Jacob Oser, *Henry George* (Twayne Publishers, 1974), 68.

Street, a short walk from the historic Pennsylvania State House. George attended public school until the age of twelve, when he enrolled at the Episcopal Academy run by Dr. George E. Hare. He quit the Academy and formal schooling a year later, reportedly telling his father that he desired to “go out into the world,” to work and help support the family. Over the next three years, George worked odd jobs while learning to set type. And although he never returned to school, George remained committed to his education. He read voraciously and frequently attended lectures at the Franklin Institute, established in 1824 to promote the study of science and mechanical arts. At the age of 16, George’s desire to see the world led him to accept a job as a ship hand aboard the *Hindoo*, a massive sea vessel docked in New York City and bound for Australia and India. On April 1, 1855 George left Philadelphia for New York and began his first great adventure.³

The fifteen month voyage on the *Hindoo* proved transformative. Besides his first extended trip away from his parents, the sea adventure provided George with the opportunity to keep a daily journal in which he recorded his first glimpse of abject poverty alongside remarkable wealth. On December 3, 1855, George chronicled the horrific scene that unfolded as the *Hindoo* traveled down the Hooghly River and into Calcutta harbor. “As we approached the city, the banks on both sides were lined with handsome country residences of the wealthy English,” George observed,

The river which takes a sudden bend was crowded with ships of all nations, and above nothing could be seen but a forest of masts. . . . One feature which is peculiar to Calcutta was the number of dead bodies floating down in all stages of decomposition, covered by crows who were actively engaged in picking them to

³ The information presented in this section comes from several biographies of George, including Henry Rose, *Henry George: A Biographical, Anecdotal, and Critical Sketch* (London: William Reeves, 1888), 13-15; George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George*, 1-20; George Raymond Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George, with an introduction by John Dewey* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1933), 20-24; Anna George de Mille, *Henry George: Citizen of the World*, ed. Don C. Shoemaker (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1950), 7-10; and, Barker, *Henry George*, 4-15.

pieces. The first one I saw filled me with horror and disgust, but like the natives, you soon cease to pay any attention to them.⁴

The evidence of such inequality in the human condition that George observed in India weighed heavier on his conscience as he aged and especially after he witnessed it in his own country.

Shortly after he returned home from sea in June 1856, George accepted a job setting type for the Philadelphia-based publishing house, King and Baird. He also, as one of George's biographers has noted, formed the "Lawrence Literary Society," with a group of friends to discuss a variety of topics including "poetry, economics, and Mormonism."⁵ When King and Baird closed in the aftermath of the Panic of 1857, the 18-year old George was ready for a new and more permanent adventure. On December 22, 1857, he packed his bags, kissed his parents good-bye, and set sail for San Francisco as a steward on the *Shubrick*. Like many other young men of his generation, George headed west in search of gold.

A Golden Adventure: California in the 1860s

When George stepped off the *Shubrick* at San Francisco harbor on May 27, 1858, he entered a state in the midst of vast demographic, economic, and legal transformation fueled in large measure by the discovery of gold and the cessation of the Mexican-American War in 1848. A month before the United States and Mexico signed the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, James Marshall discovered gold at John Sutter's mill, located on the American River in El Dorado County. When news of the discovery reached the public, settlers from around the world flooded into California in search of the precious

⁴ Barker, *Henry George*, 23.

⁵ Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George*, 27.

metal. The non-Indian population of California jumped from 14,000 in 1848 to nearly 224,000 in 1852.⁶ This sudden influx of people proved deadly to the state's non-white population; California lost almost as many people as it gained during the same period. According to historians Robert Hine and John Mack Faragher, "the Indian population, estimated at 150,000 in 1848, had fallen to only 30,000 by 1860: 120,000 lives lost in just twelve years, a record of brutality without parallel in the history of the United States."⁷ In addition to the spread of disease, the state's newcomers committed atrocious acts of violence against the Indian population of California, who received little protection from the federal government.

The state's newcomers also assaulted and discriminated against *Californios*—descendants of Spanish colonists who controlled vast portions of the state's most fertile land.⁸ Although the United States agreed to protect the rights and claims of *Californios* as part of the nation's treaty with Mexico, the federal government lacked the resources—and the resolve, perhaps—to do so. Upon entering the state, prospectors formed associations to divide mining claims and expel California's non-white population, which they ironically referred to as "foreigners." As Richard White has pointed out, many of these so-called "foreigners" had lived in California their entire lives, and based on the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, were technically American citizens. In addition to committing acts of violence, miners passed and upheld discriminatory laws such as the Foreign Miners' Tax of 1850, charging non-white prospectors a monthly fee of \$16.00 to

⁶ White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own," 189.

⁷ Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A new interpretative history* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 249-250.

⁸ While historian Paul W. Gates claims that Mexican land claims totaled between 13 and 14 million acres, Stephanie Pincetl argues that the figure is actually closer to 9 million. See Paul W. Gates, ed., *Land and Law in California: Essays on Land Policies* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1991), 186 and Stephanie Pincetl, *Transforming California: A Political History of Land Use and Development* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 5.

mine in the state.⁹ Although the federal government stationed troops in California to protect the property claims of *Californios*, many soldiers deserted to become miners.¹⁰ In 1851, Congress formed a special commission to arbitrate land disputes between *Californios* and the various settlers who squatted on their lands. Litigation proved both costly and time intensive. According to historian Joshua Paddison, the average case—of which there were 800 in the mid-1850s alone—lasted over 17 years. Although the courts usually ruled in favor of the *Californios*, many went bankrupt during the process and were forced to sell their lands to cover the cost of the litigation.¹¹

The gold rush revolutionized California's economy. While not the first gold rush in the country—Georgia's took place in 1829—the California gold rush shattered all previous mining records. According to Hine and Faragher, the federal government reported that in 1848 and 1849 prospectors removed 76 tons of gold—more than twice the total ever recorded—from mines in California and the Sierra Nevada. New businesses sprouted up all over the state to keep pace with the miners' demand for food and supplies. "Into the port of San Francisco in 1849," Hine and Faragher write, "came dozens of foreign ships loaded with Chilean wheat, Mexican coffee and cocoa, Australian potatoes, Chinese sugar and rice, Alaskan coal, fish, and even ice."¹² Investment poured in from all around the country and world to finance the construction of transportation networks and mining operations.

⁹ White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own," 238.

¹⁰ According to John R. Umbeck, "As a result of the gold discovery, the United States military force in California was reduced by desertions to about 600 men." See Umbeck, *A Theory of Property Rights With an Application to the California Gold Rush* (Ames, IA: The Iowa State University Press, 1981), 4.

¹¹ Joshua Paddison, "Capturing California," *California History* 81:3/4 (2003), 129.

¹² Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 240-241.

The economic activity generated by the discovery of gold further demonstrated the need for a transcontinental railway line to connect the nation's western market to the rest of the country. The same year Congress passed the Homestead Act—1862—it also approved the Pacific Railway Bill, authorizing the Union Pacific and Central Pacific to build a continuous railway line along the 42nd parallel. The Union Pacific built west from Nebraska and the Central Pacific built east from California; the two lines met at Promontory, Utah, in May 1869. The original bill gave the two companies a 400-foot right-of-way over alternating sections of the public domain, within 10 miles of the track for each mile they laid. It also authorized the federal government to loan, at six percent interest for 30-years, from \$16,000 per ground mile to \$48,000 per mountainous mile constructed. In 1864, Congress passed a new bill that doubled the size of the land grants and allowed the companies to issue bonds to help finance construction.¹³ Between the two companies, the federal government gave away over 26 million acres of public land to support railway construction.¹⁴

Despite the generous grants of land and loans from the federal government, the Central and Union Pacific faced difficulty attracting enough private investment to finance the construction of the transcontinental line. To supplement its federal loans, both companies sold stock and bonds, using as collateral everything from tracks and locomotive cars to land grants. The system of financing railroad construction invited fraud. Perhaps the most famous of the railroad investment scandals involved the *Crédit Mobilier*, a construction company created by Union Pacific executive Thomas Durant and company stockholders in 1864. Durant structured the company to shield a select group of

¹³ *Ibid.*, 281-282.

¹⁴ White, *"It's None of My Misfortune and All of Your Own,"* 146. The Union Pacific received 19.1 million acres and the Central Pacific received 7.3 million acres.

investors from the risks involved in railroad financing through secret contracts and fraudulent bookkeeping. When the press exposed the company's tactics in late 1869, the public learned of the involvement of dozens of elected officials including President Ulysses S. Grant. The Crédit Mobilier scandal tainted voters' perception of the railroad industry and remained a significant issue in the next four presidential elections.¹⁵

For nearly seven years, the Union Pacific and Central Pacific competed in a race to lay track and secure government loans. The Central Pacific, led by Collis P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins, Leland Stanford, and Charles Crocker, known collectively as the "Big Four"—a nickname, which, as Hine and Faragher note, they earned not from their wealth and power but from their "collective bulk" of 860 pounds—earned a slight lead over its competitor by hiring tens of thousands of Chinese laborers.¹⁶ Although Chinese laborers proved productive, their presence in California and other western states generated racial tension. In 1867, two years before the completion of the transcontinental line, Chinese workers composed between 80 and 90 percent of the Central Pacific labor force. By 1880, the number of Chinese people living in California totaled 75,132.¹⁷ In 1882, Congress passed the first Chinese Exclusion Act, barring the immigration of Chinese laborers to America for 10 years; it was the first time the federal government regulated immigration based on race.¹⁸

George became aware of the various changes to the cultural and economic landscape of California shortly after he arrived in San Francisco. He spent his first year in various mining camps along the west coast and in 1859 settled in San Francisco where

¹⁵ Ibid., 248, 249.

¹⁶ Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 283.

¹⁷ White, "It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own," 187.

¹⁸ *Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882*, 22 Stat. 58 (May 6, 1882)

he found work as a compositor. He lived for a while at the What Cheer House, a temperance hotel for men that boasted a library of two or three thousand books. According to Barker, George spent many afternoons and evenings reading about California history and politics.¹⁹ While working as a compositor, George occasionally submitted an article or letter that ended up in print. In 1861, he met and married Annie Corsina Fox. The following year they welcomed their first son, Henry George, Jr.

George's employment throughout the 1860s proved sporadic and low-paying. The young couple often struggled to keep food on the table. Circumstances became so bad following the birth of their second child in January 1865 that George resorted to begging. He recorded the height of his desperation in his diary:

I walked along the street and made up my mind to get money from the first man whose appearance might indicate that he had it to give. I stopped a man—a stranger—and told him I wanted \$5. He asked what I wanted it for. I told him that my wife was confined and that I had nothing to give her to eat. He gave me the money. If he had not, I think that I was desperate enough to have killed him.²⁰

The experience, as Barker and other biographers have noted, seems to have motivated George to abandon type-setting and become a writer. Shortly after this incident, George penned an essay titled “The Use of Time,” in which he expressed his determination to “acquire facility and elegance in the expression of my thoughts by writing essays or other matters which I will preserve for future comparison.”²¹ The career change proved rewarding. Throughout the late 1860s, George worked as a reporter and continued to expand his knowledge of politics and economics. In 1868, one of his essays, “What the Railroad Will Bring Us,” appeared as the lead article in the *Overland Monthly*, and,

¹⁹ Barker, *Henry George*, 43, 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

according to historian William F. Deverell, became “one of the most brilliant articles ever written about western railroading.”²²

More than anything else he had produced up until that time, “What the Railroad Will Bring Us,” foreshadowed George’s interest in the distribution of wealth and economic resources and demonstrated the evolution of his thought on the issue that remained at the forefront of his mind: the association of progress with poverty. While many of his contemporaries celebrated the technological and economic development that the transcontinental railroad symbolized, George speculated that the benefits of this impressive feat would not be shared equally, writing

The truth is that the completion of the railroad and the great consequent increase of business and population will not be a benefit to all of us, but only to a portion. Those who have lands, mines, established businesses, special abilities of certain kinds, will become richer for it and find increased opportunity; those who have only their own labor will become poorer, and find it harder to get ahead—first because it will take more capital to buy land or to get into business; and second, because as competition reduces the wages of labor, this capital will be harder for them to obtain.²³

The increased trade and economic activity associated with the completion of the railroad, George observed, would also cause an increase in the value of California real estate. And while those with land and homes welcomed this increase, as it would translate into higher profits, those without these advantages would find it more difficult and costly to secure a homestead at all. Many would be forced to compete against one another for low-paying wage work.

Since the Civil War, as the number of wage workers dramatically increased in America, attitudes towards the virtues of “free labor” began to change. Before the war,

²² William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 20.

²³ Henry George, “What the Railroad Will Bring Us,” *The Overland Monthly and Outwest Magazine* 1 (Oct., 1868), 6.

Republicans and abolitionists touted the benefits of the free labor economy of the North in response to the growth of slavery in the South. Throughout the antebellum period, free labor was associated with social mobility and economic independence. Rather than the accumulation of wealth, the historian Eric Foner writes, "...“free labor” meant labor with economic choices, with the opportunity to quit the wage-earning class. A man who remained all his life dependent on wages for his livelihood appeared almost as unfree as the southern slave.”²⁴ Wage work was a temporary phase in an individual’s career trajectory.

In the decades following the Civil War, however, the idea of “free labor” changed. Rather than protect the dignity of labor, as legal historian William E. Forbath and others have noted, throughout the 1880s, judges and policymakers appeared more concerned with protecting an individual worker’s freedom to contract—to sell their labor at any price and under any circumstances.²⁵ For the millions of wage earners stuck in low-paid manufacturing jobs, “free labor” became a misnomer. Workers and their advocates began employing the term “wage slavery” to more accurately describe their economic station.

In the year following the publication of his article on the transcontinental railroad, George continued his study of the forces shaping the labor market. He turned to a contemporary issue—the Chinese in California—to better understand and demonstrate the economic law that regulated wages. In an article published on May 1, 1869 in several dailies, including *The New York Tribune*, George contemplated the reasons some

²⁴ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 16-17.

²⁵ William E. Forbath, “The Ambiguities of Free Labor: Labor and Law in the Gilded Age,” *Wisconsin Law Review* (1985): 767-816. See also Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

American businesses preferred Chinese labor over that of whites. “The great characteristics of the Chinese as laborers are patience and economy: the first makes them efficient laborers, the second cheap,” George continued:

They will live, and live well, according to their notions, where an American or Englishman would starve...Reduce wages to the starvation point of our mechanics, and the Chinaman will not merely be able to work for less, but to live better than at home, and to save money from his earnings. And thus in every case in which Chinese comes into fair competition with white labor, the whites must either retire from the field or come down to the Chinese standard of living.²⁶

George reasoned that competition among laborers must always drive the rate of wages to the lowest amount capable of sustaining life. Chinese immigration favored the interests of capital over those of labor.

Much of George’s article is tainted with racial bias. In addition to a low “standard of comfort,” George argued that the Chinese also possessed low moral standards, writing that “They practice all the unnamable vices of the East, and are as cruel as they are cowardly. Infanticide is common among them; so is abduction and assassination.” In a later passage, George noted, “The Chinese seem to be incapable of understanding our religion; but still less are they capable of understanding our political institutions.”

George opposed the calls by some reformers to allow the Chinese to become citizens. He wrote:

To confer the franchise upon them would be to put the balance of power on the Pacific in the hands of a people who have no conception of the trust involved, and who would have no wish to use it rightly, if they had: would be to give so many additional votes to employers of Chinese, or put them up for sale by the Chinese head centers in San Francisco.²⁷

²⁶ Henry George, “The Chinese in California” in Kenneth C. Wenzer, ed., *Henry George: Collected Journalistic Writings, Volume I: The Early Years, 1860-1879* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 160.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

George believed that the Chinese in California lacked the virtues necessary to exercise citizenship and that their loyalty resided with their employers, not the United States.

To garner support for his analysis of the effects of Chinese immigration, George recruited the opinion of one of the world's most well-respected economists and the author of the current doctrine of wages accepted throughout most of the academic world—John Stuart Mill. George sent Mill a copy of the *Tribune* article and requested feedback on its conclusions. George printed a copy of Mill's response in the *Oakland Transcript*, where he was working as an editor. While he agreed with George's economic analysis, Mill pushed back against George's racial assumptions. "Concerning the purely economic view of the subject, I entirely agree with you; and it could be hardly better stated and argued than it is in your article in the *New York Tribune*," Mill wrote to George on October 23, 1869, from Avignon, France. "But there is much also to be said on the other side," he continued, "Is it justifiable to assume that the character and habits of the Chinese are unsusceptible of improvement?... If every Chinese child were compulsorily brought under your school system, or under a still more effective one, if possible, and kept under it for a sufficient number of years, would not the Chinese population be in time raised to the level of the American?"²⁸

Based on the commentary he submitted in the *Transcript* along with Mill's letter, George appeared unmoved by Mill's challenge. To Mill's suggestion regarding the education of Chinese children, George responded, "There exists in San Francisco, and everywhere else that the Chinese are found, a perfect miniature China—and it is in this thoroughly Chinese atmosphere that the Chinese children would be brought up, and to

²⁸ "John Stuart Mill on the Chinese Immigration," in Wenzer, *Collected Journalistic Writings, Volume I*, 174.

which they would return even if educated. We fear, that Mr. Mill's question must be answered in the negative."²⁹ Mill was not the only prominent voice to challenge George's racial assumptions about the Chinese. Many years later, in 1893, the single-tax advocate William Lloyd Garrison [II], son of the famous abolitionist, would criticize George and other single taxers for their failure to speak out against the Geary Act, which extended Chinese exclusion for another 10 years. As Garrison wrote to George:

The men and women who were drawn to your great truth by its universality and its brotherly love for all mankind are beginning to measure such professions with the defense of such a flagrant contraction as the Geary Act. ...I deprecate as much as you can any distraction from the point we are so united in urging, but it would be treason to liberty to be dumb on such an issue as this, which is as fundamental and comprehensive as the Single Tax itself.³⁰

Garrison reminded George that the single tax represented more than a mere fiscal reform; it embodied the principles of equality, justice, and "brotherly love" that appealed to all kinds of reformers, including those primarily concerned with the nation's moral character.

George's description of and attitude towards Chinese workers presents a troublesome exception to his otherwise progressive views toward race issues. George's letters and diaries present no indication that he had many personal encounters with Chinese people in California or elsewhere. While running for mayor of New York City in 1886, George welcomed the support and participation of workers from all races and ethnic backgrounds. "[W]e aim at equal rights for all men," George declared in one of

²⁹ Ibid., 177.

³⁰ Garrison to George, December 4, 1893, Henry George papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, I:a, Box 8, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

his campaign speeches.³¹ Furthermore, in *Progress and Poverty* and in many other writings, George refuted the idea that poverty resulted from a lack of mental capacity or innate character traits. Instead, he argued that poverty was a symptom of social injustice and the failure of society to recognize and adhere to natural laws. All this suggests that George believed that differences in human condition and character largely resulted from environmental rather than biological variances. Why then he considered the Chinese incapable of improvement and naturally immoral presents a conundrum.

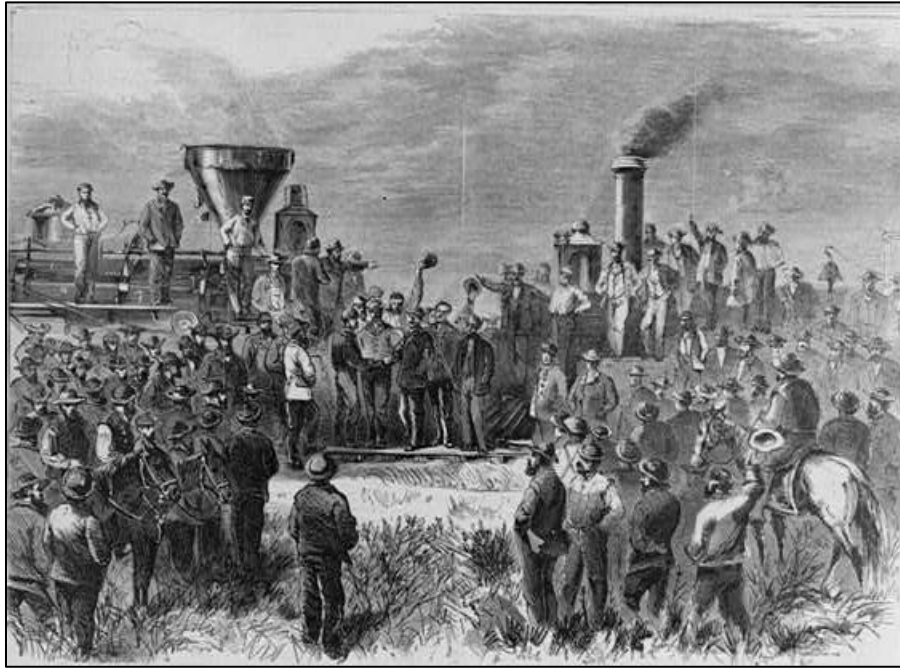
While George's stance towards Chinese immigration failed to change, his economic view of wages continued to evolve. In 1869 George believed the rate of wages largely depended on competition and the size of the workforce. By 1877, when he began to write *Progress and Poverty*, he no longer held this view. George now believed that wages depended in larger measure on the value of land than the size of the workforce. This change in view was very likely a result of his personal observations of California's changing economic landscape.

The Golden Spike: California Conditions Circa 1870

On May 10, 1869, in the little town of Promontory, Utah, Central Pacific executive Leland Stanford hammered in the ceremonial "Golden Spike" linking his line to that of the Union Pacific and thus completing the first transcontinental railroad. Widely celebrated and reported on throughout the country, the event, as one observer recalled, symbolized "an end of the isolation of the Western coast" and "opened an era of

³¹ Louis F. Post and Fred C. Leubuscher, *Henry George's 1886 Mayoral Campaign: An Account of the George-Hewitt Campaign in the New York Municipal Election of 1886*, Reprint (Westport, CT: Hyperion Press, Inc. 1976), 25.

prosperity and advancement for both East and West.”³² The completion of the cross-continental railway was one of the most significant events of the century, but for the majority of California’s working class population, as predicted by George and many others, the railroad failed to significantly improve their lives.



Completion of the Pacific Railroad. Photographed by Savage & Ottinger, Salt Lake City. Originally Published in *Harper's Weekly* (June 5, 1869), 356. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

By 1870, the population of California reached over half a million. San Francisco, with nearly 150,000 residents, represented the tenth largest city in America. With the growth of population and business, real estate values skyrocketed, and California land became further concentrated into the hands of a few individuals and corporations. The 1870 Census revealed that the wealthiest one percent of white adult males over age 20 owned 27.6 percent of the state’s real estate. Similarly, as historian Stephanie Pincetl has pointed out, the 1870-71 annual report of the California Board of Agriculture noted that

³² Bernetta Alphin Atkinson, “The Driving of the Golden Spike” *Overland Monthly* LXIX (Mar., 1917), 254.

in 11 counties, 100 individuals owned a total of 5,465,206 acres, averaging 54,642 acres per person. By contrast, the 1870 Census also reported that in seven counties of Northern California, the poorest 50 percent of men aged 45 owned between 0 and 1.3 percent of the total real estate. As historian Robert A. Burchell has explained, census officials considered men aged 45 closest to “the apex of their working lives.”³³

In *Our Land and Land Policy*, published a year after his 1870 “vision” in the Oakland foothills, George contemplated the reasons for and the effects of the concentration of land ownership in California. George cited statistics from the Commissioner of the General Land Office indicating the extraordinary rate at which the nation’s public domain was shrinking. He criticized the nation’s land policies, including the Homestead Act of 1862, Pacific Railway Bill, and other land grants awarded by the federal government to private individuals and corporations. George’s analysis of the distribution of land and the failure of federal land policies to benefit the individual settler proved accurate. At the time that George published his critique, the nation was coming up on the ten-year anniversary of the original Homestead Act.

Passed in 1862, the Homestead Act granted individuals and their families 160 acres of public land in exchange for a small filing fee and five years of residence. After six months, homesteaders had the option to purchase the land outright for \$1.25 an acre. At the time of its passage, Congressional Republicans and other supporters celebrated the Act as “the final realization” of the Jeffersonian vision of a nation of small farmers. Others, including newspaper editor Horace Greeley, believed the Act would help reduce unemployment and increase wages by draining off some of the excess labor found in the

³³ Pincetl, *Transforming California*, 7; White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*,” 287; Robert A. Burchell, “Opportunity and the Frontier: Wealth-Holding in Twenty-six Northern California Counties, 1848-1880,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 52 (April 1987), 182.

East onto Western lands. Unfortunately, as historian Richard White and many others have pointed out, “the Homestead Act never came remotely close to achieving the grandiose expectations of its advocates.”³⁴

The main problem with the Homestead Act was that it represented only one of many avenues by which individuals could secure large sections of the public domain. Furthermore, Congress failed to provide the resources necessary to enforce the most democratic aspects of the Act—those designed to make it easier for workers and their families to secure a homestead. Not only did public land offices continue to sell land after its passage, but in 1862, White has pointed out, “a thriving market in scrip allowed speculators to buy it at less than the minimum price of \$1.25 an acre.” Since the early days of the republic, the federal government issued land scrip to repay debts and reward soldiers for their military service; according to White, “Land scrip was the nineteenth-century equivalent to food stamps.”³⁵ Few recipients, however, actually used the scrip to purchase a homestead and instead sold it to speculators.

The goal of the Homestead Act to provide cheap land to actual settlers was further undermined by fraud. Speculators hired individuals to apply for a homestead, set up a tiny shack, pay the purchase price, and then sign it over to them. These so-called “Dummy” homestead entries became so common, as Hine and Faragher write, “that they were standing jokes in late nineteenth-century America.” According to historian Fred Shannon, half of all homestead entries between 1862 and 1900 were fake.³⁶

The massive grants to railroads also served to weaken the integrity of the Homestead Act by retarding settlement. Under the railway grants, railroad corporations

³⁴ White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*,” 143.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 145, 140.

³⁶ Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 335.

received 20 odd-numbered sections of land along their route for each mile of track they built. (The even-numbered sections were reserved for homesteads) In some places, the policy worked as Congress planned, by facilitating settlement and trade. However, most railroads were extremely slow in choosing their routes and laying track, closing off large portions of public land to settlers. “By various estimates,” White writes, “the railroads received from 7 percent to 10 percent of all the land in the United States, but they restricted settlement, for varying amounts of time, on nearly 30 percent of the land.”³⁷ By the time President Franklin D. Roosevelt ended the Homestead program in 1935, railroads had received approximately 183 million acres of the public domain or, as Hine and Faragher have noted, an area larger than the size of Texas.³⁸

George held Congress responsible for squandering away millions of acres of the public’s land through such measures as the Homestead Act. “Since the day when Esau sold his birthright for a mess of pottage we may search history in vain for any parallel to such concessions,” he wrote. According to the Federal Land Office, George noted, as of June 30, 1870, nearly 1.4 billion acres of the public domain remained unclaimed. While enormous, George predicted that “unless there is a radical change in our land policy” by 1890, all of the habitable parts of this land will have passed into private hands. Although his condemnations of federal and state land policies were neither new nor unique, the ideas George presented in *Our Land and Land Policy* demonstrated his recognition of the connections between access to land and the welfare of ordinary wage-earners. They also present an alternative interpretation of the event most closely associated with the

³⁷ White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*,” 146, 147.

³⁸ Hine and Faragher, *The American West*, 335.

historian Frederick Jackson Turner—the “closing” of the frontier—and what should be done about it.³⁹

In *Our Land and Land Policy* George also considered the injurious effects of the public domain’s disappearance on individual workers and to the national character. While George had previously hinted at the connection between wages and land values in “What the Railroad Will Bring Us,” now George claimed that an inverse ratio existed between the value of land and labor, arguing that an increase in the price of land led automatically to a decrease in the real wages of landless laborers. As he explained, “The value of land is the power which its ownership gives to appropriate the product of labour, and, as a sequence, where rents (the share of the landowner) are high, wages (the share of the labourer) are low. And thus we see it all over the world, in the countries where land is high, wages are low, and where land is low, wages are high.”⁴⁰ As land becomes monopolized, land becomes scarce, and land values rise. As a result, those without access to land of their own must pay more for the privilege to work and to live as tenants of landowners. While he devoted just a paragraph to this finding in *Our Land and Land Policy*, he expanded on the relationship between wages and land values in *Progress and Poverty* to debunk Mill’s economic theory on wages and to justify his proposal to socialize land rent. To Mill, the rate of wages depended on the size of the workforce and the amount of funds employers set aside to pay for labor.

On the topic of the relationship between the supply of public land and the nation’s character, George echoed the thoughts of many writers who came before and preempted those who came after him, including Turner. Similar to Turner who believed American

³⁹ Henry George, *Our Land and Land Policy: Speeches, Lectures, and Miscellaneous Writings*, ed., Kenneth Wenzler (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1999), 14.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

exceptionalism stemmed from its large supply of land, George wrote, “All that we are proud of in the American character, all that makes our condition and institutions better than those of the older countries, we may trace to the fact that land has been cheap in the United States.” He would expand on this idea in *Progress and Poverty*, adding that the existence of a vast public domain helped make America “exceptional” among other nations, writing:

The general intelligence, the general comfort, the active invention, the power of adaptation and assimilation, the free, independent spirit, the energy and hopefulness that have marked our people, are not causes, but results—they have sprung from unfenced land. This public domain has been the transmuting force which has turned the thriftless, unambitious European peasant into the self-reliant Western farmer; it has given a consciousness of freedom even to the dweller in crowded cities, and has been a well-spring of hope even to those who have never thought of taking refuge upon it. The child of the people, as he grows to manhood in Europe, finds all the best seats at the banquet of life marked “taken,” and must struggle with his fellows for the crumbs that fall, without one chance in a thousand of forcing or sneaking his way to a seat. In America, whatever his condition, there has always been the consciousness that the public domain lay behind him...⁴¹

Given the importance George and many others attached to the public domain as the source of Americans’ “independence, elasticity and ambition,” the prospect of its disappearance generated a great deal of concern. This, above all, motivated George to find a solution to counteract the tendency of land to become monopolized.

In 1870, George was still working out the details of the single tax – “the remedy” as he called it in *Progress and Poverty*. Thus, George’s recommendations for “What Our Land Policy Should Be” in *Our Land and Land Policy* seem incomplete. Rather than prohibit private property in land, George proposed the amendment of federal land policies to prevent the transfer of the public domain to anyone except “actual settlers” and only in limited quantities. As discussed in chapter three of this dissertation, George’s

⁴¹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 390.

recommendations in *Our Land and Land Policy* proved remarkably similar to those proffered by antebellum land reformers Horace Greeley and George Henry Evans who supported a three-pronged land policy that restricted the sale of the public domain, limited the size of individual holdings, and proposed that the federal government make the public domain free to actual settlers as opposed to speculators.⁴²

Also in 1870, the investment house run by Jay Cooke agreed to assume responsibility for the financing of the Northern Pacific, the nation's second transcontinental railway line. At the time, Cooke enjoyed a sterling reputation as both a savvy banker and Patriotic American. During the Civil War, Cooke netted a fortune by selling more than \$500 million in war bonds to support the defense of the Union. To complete construction of the Northern Pacific, Cooke needed to sell \$100 million in bonds. Cooke relied on his reputation among investors in the U.S. and abroad and the bonds sold well, at first. By 1872, however, Cooke found it harder to find willing buyers. Railroad construction proved slow and difficult due to the route's more mountainous terrain and the conflicts that arose between railway workers and the Sioux Indians, who lived in the area zoned for railway development. Furthermore, a monetary crisis in the European bond market made it more difficult for Cooke to attract foreign investors. In an act of desperation, Cooke poured large amounts of his own company's money into the road and on September 18, 1873, Cooke & Co., declared bankruptcy.⁴³

⁴² "Vote Yourself a Farm," *True Workingman*, (January 24, 1844) in John R. Commons, ed. et. al., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society, Vol. VII* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1910), 307.

⁴³ For more on Jay Cooke and the origins of the Panic of 1873, see: Christopher P. Munden, "Jay Cooke: Banks, Railroads, and the Panic of 1873," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 11 (May 2011): 3-5; Richard White, "Information, Markets, and Corruption in the Gilded Age," *Journal of American History* 90 (June 2003): 14-43; and, White, "*It's None of My Misfortune and All of Your Own*," 249-250.

The collapse of Cooke's banking house triggered a string of bankruptcies around the country. The decision in 1873 by Congress to stop minting silver and suspend specie payments also exacerbated the financial panic. Investment came to an abrupt halt. In 1875, the Bank of California closed. The state found itself in the midst of a severe economic crisis. Tensions were especially high in San Francisco, where unemployment reached 20 to 25 percent.⁴⁴ In 1876, an Irish-American nativist named Denis Kearney launched the Workingmen's Party of California. The party lobbied for laws to curb the power of the railroad monopoly and to control Chinese immigrants, whom Kearney blamed for increasing unemployment, low wages, and cutthroat competition among laborers. Kearney and his Workingmen's Party persuaded the legislature to call a Constitutional Convention, which was held from March 1878 to 1879.

The Central Pacific received the brunt of anti-railroad sentiment levied by Kearney and other critics. Shortly after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the Central Pacific had lobbied for additional land grants to construct feeder lines. On June 23, 1870, the corporation absorbed the Western Pacific Railroad and in the early 1880s, formed a subsidiary company called the Southern Pacific to manage and operate its southern routes. Within a decade, the Central Pacific and Southern Pacific controlled 85 percent of California's transportation mileage. As historian George Mowry has pointed out, this included railways, ferry service, river and ocean shipping lines, and urban transit ways.⁴⁵ Kearney and others also attacked the Central Pacific for the

⁴⁴ Deverell, *Railroad Crossing*, 38.

⁴⁵ George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 10. It is worth noting here that Robert Orsi has recently claimed that historians have tended to "grossly exaggerate" the size of the Southern Pacific's land holdings. See, Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 70.

importation of Chinese “coolies”—a racial slur levied at Asian workers who many regarded as hired slaves. The Working Men’s Party held public meetings every week at a vacant space near City Hall in San Francisco. Kearney opened each of these so-called “sand lot” meetings with the cry “the Chinese must go!” Throughout the summer of 1877, violent riots often ensued from these meetings.⁴⁶

Toward the end of 1877, Kearney and the Working Men’s Party sought George’s help in their efforts to call a Constitutional Convention. At the time, George served as the State Inspector of Gas Meters—a sinecure he received in return for his support of Governor William S. Irwin’s campaign. The position provided him ample time to write and pursue other activities. In 1877, George helped establish the San Francisco Public Library and served as its first secretary. While no friend to either the Chinese or the Central Pacific, George also disliked Kearney, who, according to Barker, he “detested as a labor boss and a demagogue and a misleader of the working people.” Nonetheless, the Working Men’s Party nominated George to serve as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. The party later revoked his nomination when George refused to appear on the same platform as Kearney. Still, George stayed in the race as a nominee of the Democratic Party. He lost.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For more on Kearney and the Working Men’s Party, see: Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gates: Race, politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 92-108 and, Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 113-137.

⁴⁷ Barker, *Henry George*, 244. See also, Anna George de Mille, “Henry George: The ‘Progress and Poverty’ Period,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 2 (July 1943), 552.



A large mob in Denver, Colorado beating and destroying the property of Chinese on October 31, 1880. Originally printed in *Frank's Illustrated Newspaper*, 51 (November 21, 1880), 189. Illustration courtesy of the Library of Congress.

While delegates met to revise the California Constitution, George worked on his manuscript, submitted articles to local newspapers, and delivered speeches on the nation's land policies. With the anti-railroad and anti-Chinese immigration sentiment running high, George's previous works received increasing public attention, and he received invitations to speak to a variety of groups. Earlier in the year, the regents of the University of California had invited George to lecture on "The Study of Political Economy." At the time, the University lacked a chair in the subject and, according to his biographers, there was "talk" that George might fill it.⁴⁸ He did not. Given George's

⁴⁸ George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George*, 274; Barker, *Henry George*, 240-241; and Cord, *Henry George: Dreamer or Realist?*, 26-27.

lukewarm feelings toward the professional study of political economy, it is not hard to see why.

While the lecture failed to earn him an academic position, it demonstrated George's belief that natural and universal laws governed economic activity—a central component of his philosophy—and his desire to re-inject life into the stale discipline of political economy. In the lecture, delivered March 9, 1877 and published three years later in *Popular Science Monthly*, George suggested that one reason for the lack of interest in political economy stemmed from the way its practitioners used the discipline to derail legislative attempts to improve the condition of the poor. As he explained:

The name of political economy has been constantly invoked against every effort of the working classes to increase their wages or decrease their hours of labour. The impious doctrine always preached by oppressors to oppressed—the blasphemous dogma that the Creator has condemned one portion of his creatures to lives of toil and want, while he had intended another portion to enjoy “all the fruits of the earth and the fullness thereof”—has been preached to the working classes in the name of political economy, just as the “cursed-be-Ham” clergymen used to preach the divine sanction of slavery in the name of Christianity.⁴⁹

George believed that the interests of academic economists were yoked to the wealthy and thus maintained doctrines that helped protect the private fortunes and power of this class.

In this same lecture, George also suggested that society inflated the value of academic institutions, which instead of teaching their students how to think for themselves, tended to fill their heads with useless facts. As he claimed:

All this array of professors, all this paraphernalia of learning cannot educate a man. They can but help him to educate himself. Here you may obtain the tools; but they will be useful only to him who can use them. A monkey with a microscope, a mule packing a library, are fit emblems of the men—and, unfortunately, they are plenty—who pass through the whole educational machinery, and come out but learned fools, crammed with knowledge which they cannot use—all the more pitiable, all the more contemptible, all the more in the

⁴⁹ Henry George, “The Study of Political Economy” in *Our Land and Land Policy: Speeches, Lectures, and Miscellaneous*, 98.

way of real progress, because they pass, with themselves and others, as educated men.⁵⁰

George, who attended school only to the age 14, believed that the study of political economy should be open to anyone capable of observing and analyzing the world around them. He hoped to prove this point with the publication of *Progress and Poverty*.

According to a note in his personal journal, Henry George started writing *Progress and Poverty* on September 18, 1877. National events of the preceding months no doubt influenced his decision to embark on such a treatise at that time. The summer of 1877 witnessed a wave of bloody labor strikes and uprisings that required, for the first time since the Presidency of Andrew Jackson, the use of federal troops to restore order. The strikes began on July 14 after several railway companies simultaneously announced wage cuts. Over the next 45 days, workers in more than six cities protested the cuts by refusing to load freight and blocking all traffic on the railway lines. When the local militia failed to remove strikers, the Governors of several states including West Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania asked President Rutherford B. Hayes to send federal troops.⁵¹

Although more than 500 pages in length, the project took George only two years to finish, and when he had, he sent a copy to his father with the following message:

It is with a deep feeling of gratitude to Our Father in Heaven that I send you a printed copy of this book. I am grateful that I have been able to live to write it, and that you have been able to live to see it. ... It will not be recognized at first—may be not for some time—but it will ultimately be considered a great book—[it] will be published in both hemispheres and [will] be translated into different languages. This I know, though neither of us may ever see it here.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 104-105.

⁵¹ Painter, *Standing at Armageddon*, 15.

⁵² Henry George to Richard George, September 15, 1879 in Kenneth C. Wenzer, ed., *An Anthology of Henry George's Thought. Volume I* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 241.

George recognized the timeliness of his study and correctly predicted its success. Within a year of its publication in 1880 by New York-based firm D. Appleton & Co., *Progress and Poverty* appeared in Great Britain where, as the next chapter shows, it enjoyed a wide reception. By 1890, *Progress and Poverty* had been translated into German, Swedish, Norwegian, French, Dutch, and Italian. In 1893, Spanish and Portuguese editions appeared, and by 1910, *Progress and Poverty* was also translated into Bulgarian, Yiddish, and Chinese.⁵³ Within George's lifetime, the book became an international best-seller.

Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry Into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth. The Remedy

Progress and Poverty is organized into 10 sections or “books” with an introduction and conclusion. Its structure guides the reader through George's own process of economic discovery. *Progress and Poverty* opens with George's statement of the main problem he intends to solve—the association of progress with poverty—proceeds to an exploration of current economic doctrine and its failure to accurately account for acute inequality of wealth, and concludes with his presentation and justification of the one “true remedy”—the abolition of private property in land through the taxation of land values.

The search for the “law which associates poverty with progress” motivated George's economic analysis in *Progress and Poverty*. The appearance of extravagant luxury and wealth next to dire poverty, as he witnessed in India and again in California, convinced George that the phenomenon was universal, caused by something in the institutions and laws common to modern industrial nations. As George noted,

⁵³ Barker, *Henry George*, 319, 423-4, 531, 596, 627.

This fact—the great fact that poverty and all its concomitants show themselves in communities just as they develop into the conditions toward which material progress tends—proves that the social difficulties existing wherever a certain stage of progress has been reached do not arise from local circumstances, but are in some way or another, *engendered by progress itself*.⁵⁴

In his search for the cause of such vast inequality—“the greatest enigma of our times,” as he described it—George also believed he would reveal the reasons for industrial panic and recurring depressions.

Once he established the overarching purpose of *Progress and Poverty*, George explored the ways current economic theory addressed the causes of poverty and acute inequality of wealth. He began with the wage-fund doctrine. In the section titled “The Current Doctrine of Wages—Its Insufficiency,” George asked: “*Why, in spite of increase in productive power, do wages tend to a minimum which will give but a bare living?*”⁵⁵ In contrast to Mill who claimed that wages are paid from a fixed supply of capital, which never rises above the minimum amount necessary to sustain the life and health of the workforce, George argued “*That wages, instead of being drawn from capital, are in reality drawn from the product of labor for which they are paid.*”⁵⁶ In other words, wages derived from the wealth that labor helped produce, not an advance of capital.

George’s definition of capital proved essential to the justification of his theory of wages. Unlike Mill who defined capital as “accumulated stock of the produce of labour” used to “maintain the labourers” in the process of producing wealth,⁵⁷ George argued that capital is merely another form of wealth—“wealth devoted to procuring more wealth” or

⁵⁴ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 7-8. Emphasis added.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 17. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 23. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁷ Mill, *Principles of the Political Economy. Volume I*, 67.

“*wealth in the course of exchange.*”⁵⁸ Thus, buildings, factories, tools and other materials Mill classified as capital, George classified as wealth used for the purpose of creating more wealth.

George’s definition of wealth helped justify his claim that wages ultimately stemmed from the production of wealth, not a pre-existing fund of capital. To George, wealth consisted of “natural products that have been secured, moved, combined, separated, or in other ways modified by human exertion, so as to fit them for the gratification of human desires.” Or, put another way, wealth embodied the useful and desirable products that resulted from the combination of labor with nature. The self-employed laborer, George explained, received wages in the form of the wealth he or she produced through the application of his or her exertion to nature. The laborer employed by someone other than him or herself similarly received wages in the form of the final product he or she helped create. As George pointed out, “The man who works for another for stipulated wages in money works under a contract of exchange. He also creates his wages as he renders his labor, but he does not get them except at stated times, in stated amounts, and in a different form. In performing the labor he is advancing in exchange; when he gets his wages the exchange is completed.”⁵⁹ Thus, the difference between the wages of the self-employed and those who labor for others lies not in origin but in form; both received wages in return for the performance of labor and from the final product of that performance.

Given that wages spring from production, George reasoned that something other than a fixed supply of capital accounted for the failure of wages to keep pace with the

⁵⁸ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 37, 48. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

increased production of wealth. He turned next to the Malthusian theory of population and showed how it also failed to explain why the wealthiest and most productive countries contained the largest populations of the working poor. In his refutation of Malthusianism, George cited Ireland and the Great Famine, which he blamed not on the inability of nature to keep pace with the increase of population, but on the injustices inherent in the political institutions of Great Britain, which had continued to export food while vast amounts of its population teetered on the brink of starvation. As George wrote:

Even during the famine, grain and meat and butter and cheese were carted for exportation along roads lined with the starving and past trenches into which the dead were piled. For these exports of food, or at least for a great part of them, there was no return. So far as the people of Ireland were concerned, the food thus exported might as well have been burned up or thrown into the sea, or never produced. It went not as an exchange, but as a tribute—to pay the rent of absentee landlords; a levy wrung from producers by those who in no wise contributed to production.⁶⁰

The famine in Ireland resulted not from the failure of nature to produce enough food to sustain the population but from the mal-distribution of resources—“I assert that the injustice of society, not the niggardliness of nature, is the cause of the want and misery which the current theory attributes to over-population.”⁶¹ In his description of the Irish famine, George hinted at the reason that wages failed to keep pace with production and for the increase in poverty amidst plenty: rent. Rather than consume the food their labor helped produce, the farmers of Ireland, George argued, used it as payment for the use of the land upon which they lived and worked. In the next section of *Progress and Poverty*, George revealed the role that rent played in the distribution of wealth.

In his discussion of rent, George, like Ricardo, referred not to the fees one pays to lease an apartment or machinery but the concept used in economics to refer to the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 125.

⁶¹ Ibid., 141.

value created by the mere action of owning something valuable. According to George, rent represented “the share in the wealth produced which the exclusive right to the use of natural capabilities gives to the owner.” Furthermore, George pointed out that rent was unearned in the sense that it was not the creation of labor; “Rent, in short, is the price of monopoly, arising from the reduction to individual ownership of natural elements which human exertion can neither produce nor increase.”⁶² George also agreed with Ricardo’s conclusion that land only gained value when, as a result of increased population and demand for goods and services, land of a lesser quality was brought into use. Rent arose in part from the increased effort needed to produce the same amount of goods or services on less fertile land.

George departed from Ricardo—and the works of all other economists before him—in the large role he assigned to rent in the distribution of resources and, especially, in the determination of wages. As he argued, “The reason why, in spite of the increase of productive power, wages constantly tend to a minimum which will give but a bare living, is that, with the increase in productive power, rent tends to even greater increase, thus producing a constant tendency to the forcing down of wages.”⁶³ Economic growth depends in part on an increase of population and demand for goods and services. As the population increases, so does the demand and competition for the use of land and natural resources. As a community grows and develops, land in the area becomes more expensive allowing landowners to extract more from the wages of those who work or live upon their land. But if land were available to anyone who desired it, to any laborer who wanted to farm it and any capitalist who wanted to build a factory upon it, George

⁶² Ibid., 166, 167.

⁶³ Ibid., 282.

reasoned that rent would disappear. Without a corresponding increase in rent, wages would increase in proportion to the increase in productive output.

Through his analysis of the role of rent in the distribution process, George believed he had found the reason wages tended to a minimum and the cause for advancing poverty alongside advancing of wealth. As he declared, “The reason why, in spite of the increase of productive power, wages constantly tend to a minimum which will give but a bare living, is that, with the increase in productive power, rent tends to even greater increase, thus producing a constant tendency to the forcing down of wages.”⁶⁴ Rent absorbed the entire increase that labor otherwise would have received from the increase in production. George further explained that, “Land being necessary to, and being reduced to private ownership, every increase in the productive power of labor but increases rent—the price labor must pay for the opportunity to utilize its powers; and thus all the advantages gained by the march of progress go to the owners of land, and wages do not increase.”⁶⁵ Even though labor helped create the increase in rent, workers received none of the benefits and actually experienced a net decrease in wages as a result of having to pay more for the privilege of living and working on land that was privately owned. The root of the problem, then, the reason landowners could charge more for the use of their land, resulted from the treatment of this natural and essential resource as the exclusive property of individuals.

The privatization of land not only accounted for low wages and acute inequality of wealth, but also the reoccurrence of financial panic and industrial depressions. George argued that as production increases and population advances, land becomes more

⁶⁴ Ibid., 282.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 283.

valuable. Investors lend in higher amounts to landowners based on the belief that land values will continue to rise. When production levels off, and land values stop rising, investors recall loans and stop lending. The result is financial panic followed by industrial depression. As George explained:

Given a progressive community, in which population is increasing and one improvement succeeds another, and land must constantly increase in value. This steady increase naturally leads to speculation in which future increase is anticipated, and land values are carried beyond the point at which, under the existing conditions of production, their accustomed returns would be left to labor and capital. Production, therefore, begins to stop.⁶⁶

This view that land speculation ultimately caused industrial panic and depression contrasted with the causes George's contemporaries attributed to such economic disruptions. Economists and financial experts instead postulated that the combination of overproduction and under-consumption caused the panic and ensuing depression of 1873. They also claimed that the government's decisions to demonetize silver and suspend specie payments that same year caused a retraction of currency, which in turn, exacerbated the panic.⁶⁷

According to historians William Cronon and Paul Wallace Gates, George correctly noted that land speculation preceded, and in some cases, caused financial panic. As Cronon has pointed out, prior to the panic of 1837, the nation witnessed its "most intense" period of land speculation with Chicago at the center of the activity. "Believing Chicago was about to become the terminus of a major canal," Cronon writes, "land agents and speculators flooded into town, buying and selling not only the empty lots

⁶⁶ Ibid., 264.

⁶⁷ For more on the various causes of the Panic of 1873 see, Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization. Volume Three, 1865-1918*, reprint (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), 15-17 and Carroll D. Wright, *The First Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, March 1886. Industrial Depressions* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 60-61.

along its ill-marked streets, but also the surrounding grasslands which the Indians had recently abandoned...Speculators dreamed of what the land might someday be, and gambled immense sums on their faith in a rising market.”⁶⁸ When the speculative craze settled and banks called in loans, the Chicago real estate market collapsed.⁶⁹ And, as Gates has pointed out, a nearly identical phenomenon occurred in the 1850s during a decade of increased western settlement and railroad construction. Prior to the financial panic of 1857, speculators purchased some 65,000,000 acres of public domain in the expectation that land values would rise. When the land bubble burst, the nation fell into a deep depression, with the western states hardest hit.⁷⁰

Given that private property in land represented the primary cause of industrial depression and acute inequality of wealth, George believed that making the land the common property of the people provided the only permanent and “true” remedy to these evils. As George explained:

Poverty deepens as wealth increases, and wages are forced down while productive power grows, because land, which is the source of all wealth and the field of all labor, is monopolized. To extirpate poverty, to make wages what justice commands they should be, the full earnings of the laborer, we must therefore substitute for the individual ownership of land a common ownership.⁷¹

No other reform, from greater education of workers to labor unions, would prevent the monopolization and speculation that occurs as a result of an increase in the value of land. “We must make land common property,” George argued.⁷²

⁶⁸ Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*, 29-30.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁷⁰ Paul Wallace Gates, “The Role of the Land Speculator in Western Development,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 66 (July, 1942), 327.

⁷¹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 328.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Prior to an explanation of the method by which he proposed to make land common, George analyzed the injustice of private property in land. He posed the question: “what constitutes the rightful basis of property?” He drew upon the writing and ideas of several generations of theorists, including John Locke, who famously declared “Though the earth, and all inferior creatures, be common to all men, yet every man has a *property* in this own *person*: this no body has any right to but himself. The *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his.”⁷³ George concluded that the fruits of human exertion provided the *only* legitimate source of private property. Given this, private property in land, not being the product of labor, failed to represent a legitimate source of private property. As he declared:

There can rightfully be no exclusive possession and enjoyment of anything not the production of labor, and the recognition of private property in land is wrong. For the right to the produce of labor cannot be enjoyed without the right to the free use of the opportunities offered by nature, and to admit the right of property in these is to deny the right of property in the produce of labor. *When non-producers can claim as rent a portion of the wealth created by producers, the right of the producers to the fruit of their labor is to that extent denied.*⁷⁴

According to George, productive labor *requires* access to nature. If, each person possesses a natural and inalienable right to the products of their exertion, then they must also enjoy a natural and inalienable right to the use of land. When through private ownership this right to land is infringed upon, humans’ most basic right to the products of the labor is also denied.

George recognized and highlighted the historical precedence of his claim of the injustice of private property in land. He also understood that private property in land existed in part due to the lack of a reasonable method for abolishing the institution

⁷³ Locke, *Two Treatises of Civil Government*, 216.

⁷⁴ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 336. Emphasis added.

without also infringing upon individual rights and liberty or expanding the role of government. George desired neither. His desire to restore individuals' natural right to the earth without destroying individual liberty underlay his proposal to tax land values rather than confiscate land titles. "*It is not necessary to confiscate land; it is only necessary to confiscate rent,*" George claimed and toward that end, he proposed what eventually became known as the "single tax:"

What I, therefore, propose, as the simple yet sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earnings of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wishes it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals, and taste, and intelligence, purify government and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is—to *appropriate rent by taxation*. In this way, the State may become the universal landlord without calling herself so, and without assuming a single new function.⁷⁵

Given that government already enjoys the power to tax, George pointed out that no new machinery or expansion of government authority was needed. Additionally, he noted that since state and local principalities already assess and tax land values, the infrastructure to carry out his proposal already existed.

George overestimated the ease with which a government might collect the full rental value of land within its jurisdiction. As discussed in chapter six, in 1894 and 1900, George's supporters established two "single tax" colonies in Fairhope, Alabama and Arden, Delaware respectively. Both communities empowered the local government to assess and collect the full value of land to finance public works and cover all other state and local taxes charged to the residents. Both communities experienced difficulty carrying out this plan. The main obstacle preventing Fairhope and Arden from the collection of the full rental value of land resided in the difficulties of assessing the value of land separate from improvements and taxing it in full. Although designed to

⁷⁵ Ibid., 405-406.

demonstrate the justice and practicability of the single tax, neither community came close to the collection of the full value of land. In defense, it should be pointed out that George opposed the settlement of single tax colonies in part due to the fact that he intended the single tax to apply at the federal level.

As part of his proposal to socialize land values through taxation, George urged the abolition of all other taxes currently levied on imported goods, buildings, machinery, etc. Unlike a tax on land values, George argued that these taxes discouraged economic growth and violated the canons of taxation outlined by Smith and other classical economic theorists. Taxes on the value of land, he argued, cannot check production or be shifted onto the consumer. Furthermore, a tax on land values contained the certainty and equality required of all “good” taxes. As he explained, “The tax upon land values is, therefore, the most just and equal of all taxes. It falls only upon those who receive from society a peculiar and valuable benefit, and upon them in proportion to the benefit they receive. It is the taking by the community, for the use of the community, of that value which is the creation of the community.”⁷⁶ A tax on land values falls upon the class of people who benefit most from the institution of private property—land owners—in proportion to the size of that benefit—rent. While most economists accepted George’s proposition that a tax on land values cannot be shifted, they took issue with his claim of its certainty and equality. As discussed in the next section, many critics pointed out that a tax on land values and nothing else discriminates against landowners, whose property, they claimed, deserved as much protection as the property of another. In essence, the single tax violated the rule of uniformity in taxation.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 421.

In addition to its certainty and equality, George believed that a single tax on land values would provide all of the necessary revenue to support the functions of the federal government and more. George described the various uses for this revenue:

...we could establish public baths, museums, libraries, gardens, lecture rooms, music and dancing halls, theaters, universities, technical schools, shooting galleries, play grounds, gymnasiums, etc. Heat and light, and motive power, as well as water, might be conducted through our streets at public expense; our roads be lined with fruit trees; discoverers and investors rewarded, scientific investigations supported; and in a thousand ways the public revenues made to foster efforts for the public.⁷⁷

With the revenue collected from a tax on land values, governing bodies at the local, state, and national level could finance various public works and projects and even operate, free of charge, various public services including transportation, lighting, and water delivery. In all these ways, George continued, “We should reach the ideal of the socialist, but not through government repression.”⁷⁸

The benefit to the individual of taxing land values proved equally rewarding. Such a tax, George claimed, would incentivize landowners to improve or sell their underutilized property, thereby increasing the availability of the supply of land while also lowering its cost. Laborers would find the real value of their wages increased and also experience less competition for jobs. With more land available at cheaper prices, George reasoned, some laborers would trade factory work for the life of an independent farmer. A decrease in the supply of laborers would require employers to offer higher wages.

In contrast to many critics, George believed that farmers would realize the greatest benefit from a single tax on land values. The value of land in agricultural districts, as George pointed out, paled in comparison to the value of land in densely

⁷⁷ Ibid., 456.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

populated urban centers. Furthermore, the farmer would benefit from the lifting of the taxes on the building and machinery needed to support his trade.

George concluded *Progress and Poverty* with an essay on the “Problem of Individual Life” and a prediction: “The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it; suffer for it; if need be, die for it. This is the power of Truth.”⁷⁹ In his analysis of the causes of industrial depressions, inequality of wealth, and advancing poverty, George believed he had stumbled upon a central truth of human life—that true progress springs not from the improvement of human nature, but from the improvement of human society. “The advances in which civilization consists are not secured in the constitution of man,” he wrote, “but in the constitution of society.”⁸⁰ The truth was that in the modern industrial world, the welfare of the individual was inextricably linked to the welfare of the community.

The Reception of Progress and Poverty

While *Progress and Poverty* provoked a wide range of reactions, critics shared several common opinions about the contribution of the book and its author. Reviewers, both admirers and critics, appreciated the book’s optimism, the author’s humanitarian mission, and the passion with which he wrote. E.R. Taylor, who wrote a positive review in the *Californian*, praised “the human sympathy which runs as a stream through the book from the beginning to end—the deep feeling for those who suffer; the desire to lift them up, and to see dissipated and destroyed the dreadful poverty and distress that

⁷⁹ Ibid., 555.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 562.

enshrines society as a pall.”⁸¹ While ultimately unconvinced by his reasoning, the editors of *The Nation* similarly applauded the noble cause to which George devoted his study. “Although we have to consider Mr. George’s positions essentially unsound,” they noted, “we find many admirable passages, and a notable spirit of candor pervading his work.”⁸² George’s critics accused him of committing many blunders; none, however, accused him of insincerity.

Opponents and supporters of George’s ideas also credited the book’s positive contribution to the study and discussion of political economy. In his refutation of Malthusianism and the wage-fund doctrine, many commentators argued, *Progress and Poverty* helped relieve the discipline of its dreariness and in so doing, renewed public interest in economic issues. “Before I state my objections to Mr. George’s theory,” Ely wrote in the *Christian Advocate*, “I must first acknowledge the valuable service which his writings have rendered to economic science and humanity.” George, he continued,

has helped to awaken an interest in economic questions never before felt, and has stimulated thousands to inquire what can be done to ameliorate the condition of mankind. We may or may not agree with him that is morally right for the community to appropriate the rent of land, but certainly we are not called upon to blame him because he thinks it right, and endeavors to show others that it is right. Perhaps the greatest service to all which Mr. George has rendered is to be found in the discussion of right and wrong in economic affairs and institutions which he has provoked.⁸³

Ely also credited the increased interest in economic questions exhibited by religious reformers to the publication of *Progress and Poverty*. “It occurs to me, first of all, to say,” Ely began his article in *The Christian Advocate*, “that a discussion of this sort in a religious newspaper shows forcibly the need of the study of political economy by

⁸¹ E.R. Taylor, “Progress and Poverty,” *The Californian* 1 (Feb., 1880), 187.

⁸² “Progress and Poverty—I,” *The Nation* 31 (Aug., 12, 1880), 118.

⁸³ Richard T. Ely, “The Single Tax,” *Christian Advocate* 65 (Dec., 25, 1890), 856.

Christian people, and especially the clergy.”⁸⁴ As chapter four discusses in more detail, many of George’s most devoted followers heralded from religious circles. Father Edward McGlynn of New York and Rev. Stewart Headlam of England both supported the single tax to achieve specific religious goals such as a larger role for organized religion in secular efforts to address pressing social concerns.

The infusion of moral questions into political economic discussions and the renewed interest in the discipline as a result of this development hinged upon the clarity and accessibility of George’s writing style. *Progress and Poverty*, as George Sarson noted in the London-based *Modern Review*, is “unusually easy reading” and the writing “is worthy at once of a poet and a man of science, full of observant detail, and chastened, honest emotion, which we may suppose are due to the writer’s original artisanship...”⁸⁵ Although *Progress and Poverty* tackled complex economic theories, it appealed to a wide audience of people who, like the author, possessed little formal education.

The acceptance of George’s ideas and conclusions depended, unsurprisingly, on the philosophical leanings of the reviewer. Strict classical economists, including Walker and William Graham Sumner, opposed George’s analysis of the problem as well as his ultimate solution, claiming that it rested on faulty logic and false notions of human behavior. Although neo-classical economists such as Seligman and Ely rejected the single tax as economic policy, many found aspects of George’s analysis both useful and ultimately sound. In particular, both economists agreed with George’s assumption that government action and legislative policy, if well directed, could help reduce poverty, unemployment, and the frequency of financial panic. Socialists, while appreciative of

⁸⁴ Ibid., 856.

⁸⁵ George Sarson, “Progress and Poverty,” *The Modern Review* 4 (Jan., 1883), 61.

George's denunciation of private ownership of land, resented his refusal to extend his critique to private property in capital as well.

The Views of Conservative Economists

General Francis Amasa Walker (1840-1897) published one of the first extended economic critiques of George's ideas in *Land and Its Rent*. At the time of its publication in 1883, Walker served as the president of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and was well-known for his work on behalf of the U.S. Bureau of Statistics and for his service in the Union Army. From 1886 to 1892, Walker served as the first president of the American Economic Association, founded in 1885, as historian Lewis H. Haney writes, "to replace the speculative economics of the day with a body of thought based upon historical and statistical investigation."⁸⁶ Many of the founding members of the AEA, including Clark and Seligman, were proponents of the German Historical School of economics which doubted the universality of economic theories and claimed history provided the best guide to understand economic law and processes.

Although an adherent of Malthusianism, Walker criticized other classical economic theories including, Mill's wage-fund doctrine, and supported limited governmental interference to protect workers. Given this, economic historian Joseph Dorfman and others classify Walker as a revisionist. In contrast to Mill's assertion that employers paid wages from a pre-determined fund, Walker, like George, believed that the rate of compensation workers received stemmed from the value of the final product they helped produce. "Under perfect competition," Walker claimed, "the laborer would become the residual claimant upon the product of industry, the amount to be deducted on

⁸⁶ Haney, *History of Economic Thought*, 615.

account of rent, interest, and business profits being subject upon this condition, inure directly to the benefit of the laborer.”⁸⁷ In other words, Walker believed that in a healthy economy, wages increased in proportion to an increase in the value of the final product.

Walker’s belief that wages rose in tandem with production informed his attack on George’s notion that rent absorbed most of the gain of increased production. Instead, Walker argued that as production increased, so did the demand for labor. And while sometimes increased productivity also led to increased demand for land, this was not always the case. As he explained,

It is not only true that an increased production of wealth *may* involve an enhanced demand for labor as well as for land, but it is also incontestably true that the increased production of wealth rarely if ever causes an increased demand for land without a corresponding demand for labor, while, on the contrary, an increased production of wealth may cause an enormous increase in the demand for labor without enhancing the demand for the products of the soil in any degree whatsoever.⁸⁸

Since increased production always resulted in an increased demand for labor, George’s claim that rent always absorbed the entire gain in wages resulting from increased production, proved false. Instead Walker attributed low wages and the perpetuation of poverty to the intemperance and bad habits of workers.⁸⁹

William Graham Sumner (1840-1910), the former Episcopalian minister who held the first professorship in sociology at Yale, proved equally critical of George’s conclusions regarding the causes of low wages and increased poverty. As a firm believer in laissez-faire, Sumner opposed most government intervention into economic affairs, especially on behalf of the poor. He did, however, share George’s disdain for non-producers, those individuals who live off the labor and production of others. Unlike

⁸⁷ Francis A. Walker, *Land and Its Rent* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1891, orig. 1883), iv.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 170. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ Francis A. Walker, “The Causes of Poverty,” *Century Illustrated Magazine* LV (Dec., 1897), 210-216.

George, who singled out land monopolists as the worst offenders, Sumner attacked paupers.

In *What the Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (1883) Sumner argued that if society chooses to support paupers, it also should strip them of their rights to participate in the political system. Sumner defined a pauper as someone “whose producing powers have fallen positively below his necessary consumption; who cannot, therefore, pay his way.” Paupers, he believed, should be denied political rights. As Sumner explained, “A man who is present as a consumer, yet who does not contribute either by hand, labor, or capital to the work of society, is a burden. On no sound political theory ought such a person to share in the political power of the state. Society must support him. It accepts the burden, but he must be cancelled from the ranks of the rulers likewise.”⁹⁰ Sumner resented society’s support for paupers at the expense of hard-working individuals and feared that in its continued provision of relief of these people, governments contributed to the growth of the pauper class.

Although Sumner does not name George directly, he attacks “humanitarians, philanthropists, and reformers” for inventing “new theories of property” to explain the causes of poverty and justify society’s continued support of the poor. According to Sumner,

They see wealth and poverty side by side. They note great inequality of social position and social chances. They eagerly set about the attempt to account for what they see, and to devise schemes for remedying what they do not like. In their eagerness to recommend the less fortunate classes to pity and consideration they forget all about the rights of other classes; they gloss over all the faults of the classes in question, and they exaggerate their misfortunes and their virtues.⁹¹

⁹⁰ William Graham Sumner, *What the Social Classes Owe Each Other* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1883), 20.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

Sumner viewed attempts to abolish poverty or improve the condition of the poor as futile. He believed that the evolutionary principles of natural selection that ensured the survival and adaptation of species applied to social classes as well as to animals. Furthermore, in contrast to George's indictment of the nation's land policies, Sumner argued that the poor and property-less lived more comfortably in the United States than anywhere else in the world due to the large public domain and ease at which an individual can acquire land.⁹²

The Views of Liberal Economists

Whereas Walker and Sumner focused their attacks on George's analysis and aim—the abolition of poverty—Ely, Seligman, and other economists known for their more liberal view toward the role of government in economic affairs, directed their criticism towards his “remedy,” which by 1887 had become known as the single tax. The term, as previously discussed, represents a direct translation of *impôt unique* proposed by the French Physiocrats. The New York-based lawyer Thomas G. Shearman first suggested that George and his supporters adopt the name single tax to describe the movement to replace all taxes with one single tax on the full value of land for clarity and political expediency. Up until that time, the press generally referred George's followers as “Henry George men,” and “Georgeites.” During the 1886 mayoral campaign, George and his supporters were sometimes called the “Land and Labor Party.”⁹³

Although imperfect, George accepted the term but expressed concerns. Namely, he feared that “single tax” captured only the fiscal or economic aspect of his ideas and program for change, rather than its potential to establish a new and more just social order.

⁹² William Graham Sumner, *Earth-Hunger and Other Essays*, ed. Albert Galloway Keller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1913), 63-64.

⁹³ Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 109-111.

“The term single tax does not really express all that a perfect name would convey. It only suggests the fiscal side of our aims,” he explained, “Our proper name, if it would not seem too high flown, would be “freedom men,” or liberty men,” or “natural order men,” for it is on establishing liberty, on removing restrictions, on giving natural order full play, and not on any mere fiscal change that we base our hopes of social reconstruction.”⁹⁴

Furthermore, George pointed out that his proposal to abolish all other taxes on capital and other goods and services was equally important as his plan to levy a certain type of tax on land values.

Still, he preferred the term single tax to “land tax,” as it was sometimes called, because he considered that name misleading. George proposed to tax land values, not land; this distinction was central to the justification of his proposal. A land tax fell on all land, whereas the single tax only reached land with value irrespective of personal improvements. A land tax would penalize those who owned more land without taking into account how much the land was worth. Under a land tax, the rural farmer would most likely pay more than the urban landowner simply because he or she owned a larger size plot of land.

Ely, who earned his PhD in economics in 1879 from Heidelberg University in Germany, was the first of many critics to advance what became known as the “inelasticity argument,” against the single tax.⁹⁵ While Ely recognized that “taxes on land are among the oldest; if not the oldest sources of revenue,” he viewed them as inadequate to finance the projects and services required of modern governments. As he

⁹⁴ George, “Commentary on the Term “Single Tax,” in *An Anthology of George’s Thought. Volume I*, 50.

⁹⁵ Steven B. Cord and Robert V. Andelson, “Ely: A Liberal Economist Defends Landlordism,” in *Critics of Henry George: A Centennial Appraisal of Their Strictures on Progress and Poverty*, ed. Robert V. Andelson (London: Associated University Press, 1979), 321.

explained in *Elements of Land Economics* (1924), “The single tax has serious defects... In the first place, it is clear that the expenses of government have increased so rapidly in recent years that the single tax will not yield enough revenue to meet those expenses. It is estimated that barely 60 percent of the normal governmental expenses could be paid by taxing all the net income from land.”⁹⁶ Furthermore, Ely pointed out that under the single tax, the revenue collected in any given year would depend entirely on the value of land. In some years, the single tax might collect more than the government needed and in other years, less. The inelasticity of the single tax would be most dangerous in times of war or other crises when the government needed to quickly increase revenue. To counter the inelasticity argument, single taxers argued that over time, government would raise an amount generally equal to what it had spent since land values depended in large measure on the proximity of land to public works and improvements.⁹⁷

Seligman, who taught political economy at Columbia College, also noted several deficiencies in the single tax as a funding mechanism. Like Ely, Seligman (1861-1939) pursued graduate work in Europe, studying in Paris, Berlin, and Heidelberg. Upon his return to the United States, Seligman became interested in issues of taxation and public finance. Seligman became a leading proponent of progressive taxation and opposed the single tax in part because it failed to consider the principle of “ability to pay,” which he considered the ideal basis for taxation. As he explained in a debate on the Single Tax held September 5, 1890 in Saratoga, New York under the auspices the American Social Science Association, “Ability to pay is the ideal basis of taxation. It lies instinctively and unconsciously at the bottom of all our endeavors at reform. When we say that indirect

⁹⁶ Richard T. Ely and Edward W. Morehouse, *Elements of Land Economics* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1924), 323. Ely had advanced the inelasticity prior to the publication of this text.

⁹⁷ Cord and Andelson, “Ely: A Liberal Economist Defends Landlordism,” 321.

taxes are, on the whole, unfair to the laborers, we mean that they are less able to pay the same tax than the wealthier portion of the community. Their ability is less.”⁹⁸

George, on the other hand, considered ability to pay a profoundly unjust method for levying taxes. At the same Saratoga debate, George responded to Seligman’s remarks:

To [single taxers] it is as unjust and absurd to charge men with taxation in proportion to their ability to pay as it would be to charge them for postage-stamps in proportion to their ability to pay. If men get rich dishonestly, it is no remedy to tax them more. If they get rich honestly, it is a gross outrage. No one ought to be forced to pay more than another because he is more industrious or more talented, or has more foresight, or any other personal quality.⁹⁹

Aside from the values earned from the exclusive ownership of natural resources, George considered all other forms of wealth and income legitimate sources of private property and therefore illegitimate sources for taxation. In further rejecting the principle of ability to pay, George insisted, against accusations of unfairness, that the landowner of a lot with a mansion ought to pay the same in taxes as the neighboring landowner with nothing but a small hut on his land given that the land upon which the mansion and hut stood was equally valuable.

Additionally, Seligman believed George erred in drawing a distinction between land values and other kinds of wealth, which also required the aid of society to produce. As he explained, “Mr. George bases his defense of private property in commodities other than land on the labor theory. Yet individual labor, it may be said, has never by itself produced anything in civilized society...Nothing is wholly the result of unaided individual labor.” Seligman further argued that “the difference between property in land and property in other things is from the standpoint of individual *versus* social effort

⁹⁸ “Remarks of Professor Seligman,” *Journal of Social Science* 27 (Oct., 1890), 96.

⁹⁹ “Remarks of Henry George,” *Journal of Social Science* 27 (Oct., 1890), 81.

simply one of degree, not of kind.”¹⁰⁰ Given that society contributed to the private profits of other types of property in addition to land, Seligman deemed it unjust to single out landowners for taxation—“the State has plainly no right to tax this particular small class of present owners to the exclusion of all others”—especially since George, as discussed in the next chapter, rejected calls for the compensation of landowners.¹⁰¹

Socialists, while similarly appreciative of *Progress and Poverty* for helping to awaken the social conscience to the problems of poverty and wealth inequality, attacked the single tax as too conservative. As the next two chapters discuss in greater detail, many socialists initially supported George’s efforts to abolish private property in land until he refused to lend his name to their attempts at the nationalization of capital. For the five to six years following the publication of *Progress of Poverty*, however, single taxers and socialists worked in alliance, helping to promote public debate on social and economic issues.

Shortly after the publication of *Progress and Poverty*, George embarked on the first of five tours of the British Isles. There, he encountered a public far more receptive to his ideas. In particular, the budding British socialist movement picked up on George’s analysis of land rent and incorporated it into its own program for vast social change. As the next few chapters demonstrate, socialists represented but one of many reform-minded groups which derived meaning and inspiration for their own causes in the pages of *Progress and Poverty*.

¹⁰⁰ Edwin R.A. Seligman, *Essays in Taxation*, 10th ed. (New York: Macmillan Company, 1895), 70-71.

¹⁰¹ “Address of Professor Edwin R.A. Seligman, of Columbia College, New York,” *Journal of Social Science* 27 (Oct., 1890), 37.

II.

Land Reform, Socialism, and the Single Tax in the British Isles

Struggling to find a publisher for his recently completed manuscript, Henry George spent the summer of 1879 in the San Francisco printing office of his old partner, William Hinton, where he produced five hundred copies of an author's edition of *Progress and Poverty*.¹ George sent them to publishers, magazine editors, and other influential individuals whom he believed might be sympathetic to his views. In addition to British statesmen William Gladstone and Joseph Chamberlain, George sent a copy to Patrick Ford, the New York-based, Catholic editor of the most widely distributed Irish-American newspaper of the time, *The Irish World and Industrial Liberator*.²

George's timing was superb. That year, Ford filled the pages of his paper with reports from Ireland of an impending potato failure, which threatened to produce widespread suffering comparable to the Great Potato Famine of 1845. Ford used *The Irish World* to organize the collection of aid – and also to challenge the system of landlordism that he blamed for the plight of tens of thousands of Irish farmers. On this front, Ford found in George an important ally. In late 1881, Ford dispatched George to Ireland as a reporter for the *Irish World*. In this and four subsequent visits to the British Isles, George helped ignite a popular land reform movement that permeated every level of British politics by the beginning of World War I.

¹ Barker, *Henry George*, 313.

² Edward T. O'Donnell, "'Though Not an Irishman:' Henry George and the American Irish" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 56:4 (Oct. 1997), 410.

Prior to George's arrival in Ireland, the London-based publishing house Kegan, Paul, Trench & Company produced a British edition of *Progress and Poverty*. It was the firm's most successful financial decision.³ The book sold more than 100,000 copies in four years and became the highest selling economic text in the United Kingdom.⁴ George's ideas appealed not only to Irish farmers, but also to industrial workers and a growing cadre of middle class reformers concerned by rising unemployment, crime, and wealth inequality in Great Britain, particularly in the nation's growing urban centers.

While the issue of land ownership had long dominated British politics, George helped redefine the question and reveal its connection to other pressing concerns. Unlike land reformers before him, George purposefully and effectively connected the system of land ownership to unemployment, poverty, and wealth inequality. In doing so, he unintentionally encouraged many to advocate for the nationalization of *all* factors of production. "Little as Henry George intended []," wrote British socialist and founding member of the Fabian Society Sidney Webb, "there can be no doubt it was the enormous circulation of his 'Progress and Poverty,' which gave the touch which caused all the seething influences to crystallize into a popular socialist movement."⁵ The publication of *Progress and Poverty* in England in 1881 fueled calls for land reform throughout the country, helping jumpstart the modern British Socialist movement.

British socialism in the 1880s and 1890s looked different than the coinciding movements in Germany, France, and other parts of Europe. Compared to the socialism that existed in those other countries, British socialism focused more heavily on the

³ Jones, *Henry George and British Socialism*, 78.

⁴ Silagi, *Henry George and Europe*, 38.

⁵ Sidney Webb, "Socialism in England" *Publications of the American Economic Association* 4 (Apr., 1889), 88.

nationalization of land than of other sources of production; it also possessed a distinctly religious flavor. George's influence helps explain both components. Individuals who called themselves "Christian Socialists" participated in large numbers in land reform and socialist organizations throughout the 1880s and 1890s. As chapter four demonstrates in greater detail, George's unique blend of Christian principles and natural rights theory especially appealed to religious audiences and their leaders. Specifically, his insistence that poverty could be abolished through political action resonated with the evolving beliefs and practices of the Anglican clergy.

Beginning in the 1850s, some Anglican clergymen began to preach a new theology that emphasized the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and treated the Church as a "social entity" through which all individuals "could find union with Christ in communion with one another."⁶ This emphasis led to a reconceptualization of Heaven and Hell. Rather than the otherworldly places of eternal reward or punishment, historian Cheryl Walsh has explained, ministers spoke of Heaven and Hell as social conditions "visited upon the society—'the nation'—rather than the individual."⁷ Religious audiences took George literally when he referred to private property in land as the greatest "social evil," which prevented the realization of God's Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. George's popularity and tours helped revive the dormant Christian Socialist movement in Great Britain.

Most historians who study land reform and socialism in Great Britain at the end of the nineteenth century recognize George's influence. While they sometimes disagree over the extent of his impact—Peter d'A. Jones, for example, argues that "George's work

⁶ Cheryl Walsh, "The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England" *The Journal of British Studies* 34 (Jul., 1995), 366.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

provided the greatest single stimulus to social reform thinking in the ‘eighties,’ whereas labor historian John Saville believed his contribution is “largely exaggerated”—most note the comparatively larger “splash” his ideas created in Great Britain than in his country of origin.⁸ George’s ideas enjoyed more immediate, intense, and widespread popularity in the British Isles than in the United States due to the timing of their propagation, their Christian character, and their resonance with a British intellectual tradition that held private property in land violated natural law.

George’s ideas also played a key role in the “intellectual convergence” of liberalism and socialism that produced the related theories of social democracy and progressivism, which dominated European politics at the end of the nineteenth century. The intellectuals and reformers who contributed to this convergence, or, what historian James T. Kloppenberg has described as a “via media in philosophy” also “created an identifiable body of ideas with certain distinguishing characteristics” that informed social and political reform. These characteristics included a preference for gradual reform rooted in experience-based knowledge and a “commitment to extend the democratic principle of equality from the civil and political spheres to the entire society and economy.”⁹ Many supported the single tax because it reflected these elements.

Despite the greater reception of George’s ideas in Great Britain, the single tax failed to win implementation at the national level. It came close in 1909 when the House of Commons passed David Lloyd George’s so-called “People’s Budget,” which included taxes on income derived from land and called for national and uniform valuation of land that separated site value and improvements. The government had not conducted a

⁸ Jones, *Henry George and British Socialism*, 121; John Saville, “Henry George and the British Labor Movement” *Science & Society* 24 (Fall, 1960), 321; and, Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 70.

⁹ Kloppenberg, *Uncertain Victory*, 3, 5-6.

national valuation of land since 1688.¹⁰ The bill provoked the House of Lords to break a two century-old Parliamentary tradition and veto it. World War I began before Parliament's single taxers, or "land values men" as they were called in Britain, recovered from the Budget's defeat, but later they earned another significant victory: two years after the House of Lords' veto, Prime Minister Henry Asquith, with the help of King George V, helped pass the Parliamentary Act of 1911, which significantly curtailed the power of the House of Lords and stripped it of the ability to reject money bills approved by the House of Commons. The history of the single tax movement in Great Britain proves that even in defeat, powerful ideas shape history.

The Proliferation of Slums: The Conditions in Great Britain Circa 1880

Henry George's arrival in Ireland in December 1881 coincided with several events that produced a British public more passionately committed to land reform than perhaps at any other time in the nation's history. A very small minority owned or controlled the majority of British wealth and land. According to the Domesday survey of 1873, fewer than 7,000 individuals owned more than four-fifths of the land in Britain; 44 held estates composed of 100,000 acres or more.¹¹ The agricultural depression of the 1870s wrought havoc on British economic and social life. Unable to find work, hundreds of thousands of rural workers migrated to the nation's urban centers. Between 1871 and 1881 the urban population of England and Wales jumped from 14 million to 17.6

¹⁰ "The Taxation of Land Values" *The Westminster Review* 164 (Nov. 1905), 493.

¹¹ Geoffrey Lee, *The People's Budget: An Edwardian Tragedy* (London: The Henry George Foundation, 1996), 7.

million.¹² The sharp increase in population created a host of problems. British cities struggled to contain including unemployment, overcrowding, disease, and prostitution.

Graphic first-hand reports of the living conditions of the urban working classes flooded the British press. The so-called practice of “slumming,” in which members of the middle and upper classes implanted themselves into the surroundings of the abject poor, became a sort of right-of-passage for aspiring social reformers in the 1880s. Young church leaders were among the earliest and most frequent practitioners of this kind of journalism, giving birth to the term “slum priest.” The term belies the seriousness with which these reports were received. Following the publication of *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* in 1883 by Rev. Andrew Mearns, secretary of the London Congregational Union, the British government formed a Royal Commission dedicated to the study of the housing of the working classes. Given Mearns’ vivid descriptions of their living quarters it is not hard to see why the Government started with this issue. Consider the following passage from *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* titled “The condition in which they live:”

Few who will read these pages have any conception of what these pestilential human rookeries are, where tens of thousands are crowded together amidst horrors which call to mind what we have heard of the middle passage of the slave ship. To get into them, you have to penetrate courts reeking with poisonous and malodorous gases arising from accumulations of sewage and refuse beneath your feet; courts, many of them which the sun never penetrates, which are never visited by a breath of fresh air, and which rarely know the virtues of a drop of cleansing water. You have to ascend rotten staircases, which threaten to give way beneath every step, and which in some places, have already broken down, leaving gaps that imperil the limbs of the lives of the unwary. You have to grope your way along dark and filthy passages swarming with vermin. Then, if you are not driven back by the intolerable stench, you may gain admittance to the dens in which

¹² Donald Read, *England 1868-1914: The Age of Urban Democracy* (London: Longman Group Limited, 1979), 15.

these thousands of beings who belong, as much as you, to the race for whom Christ died, herd together.¹³

The Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes issued its first report in 1885. Several of the Commission's recommendations concerned issues of land policy and one in particular suggested taxing land at its selling value to encourage development and increase competition in the rental market. Such a tax, the Commission figured, might help reduce land speculation and the cost of housing. "At present," the Commissioners reported,

land available for building in the neighborhood of our populous centers, though its capital value is very great, is probably producing a small yearly return until it is let for building. The owners of the land are rated, not in relation to the real value but to the actual annual income. They can thus afford to keep their land out of the market, and to part with only small quantities, so as to raise the price beyond the natural monopoly price which the land would command by its advantages of position.¹⁴

While Parliament chose not to act upon this particular recommendation, the notion of taxing the value of undeveloped land appealed to city governments, which recognized its potential to increase city revenue and spur development. Within a decade of the Commission's report and largely as a result of George's British tours, this reform became one of the most widely supported and actively pursued by urban leaders throughout Great Britain.

Besides timing, George's ideas appealed to British audiences because they echoed more than a century of British political thought that asserted private property in land violated man's natural rights. For centuries, British reformers had located the cause of periodic social and economic disturbances in the system of land ownership and advocated

¹³ Andrew Mearns, *Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (London: James Clark & Co., 1883), 7-8.

¹⁴ John Fletcher Moulton, *The Taxation of Ground Rents* (London: United Committee for the Taxation of Ground Rents and Values, 1899), 10.

practical proposals designed to “restore” man’s natural right to use and prosper from the soil.¹⁵ Some advanced plans strikingly similar to the single tax. In fact, late nineteenth-century supporters of the single tax in England were sometimes referred to as “neo-Spenceans,” after Thomas Spence (1750-1815), a Newcastle school teacher and one of the earliest proponents of land nationalization.¹⁶

Spence also was an early proponent of communism. On November 8, 1775, he delivered a lecture before the Newcastle Philosophical Society titled “The Constitution of a Perfect Commonwealth.” In it, he proposed to make land, rent, and the value of improvements to land the common property of the community through a system of centrally-planned parishes. As he explained:

The land, with all that appertains to it, is in every parish made the property of the corporation or parish, with as ample power to let, repair, or alter all, or any part thereof, as a lord of the manor enjoys over his lands, houses, etc., but the power of alienating the least morsel, in any manner from the parish, either at this time or any time hereafter, is denied. . . Thus are there no more for other landlords, in the whole country than the parishes; and each of them is sovereign landlord in his own territories.¹⁷

Spence argued that if the inhabitants pooled all of the rent earned from parish land and improvements into a common treasury, “no tolls or taxes of any kind” would be needed to support local government and finance public services.¹⁸ Unlike George, Spence made no distinction between economic rent—the market value of land—and rent collected from the use of capital, including buildings and machinery. Spence’s plan was not well received. The Newcastle Philosophical Society expelled him, and the English

¹⁵ The use of this term to refer to the desire to make land common became an important part of the British land nationalization movement at the end of the nineteenth century and will be explored further below.

¹⁶ Frederick Verinder, *Land for the Landless: Spence and “Spence’s Plan” (1775) with a Neo-Spencean Appendix (1896)* (London: William Reeves and the English Land Restoration League, 1896).

¹⁷ C.B. Fillebrown, *The Principles of Natural Taxation: Showing the Origin and Progress of Plans for the Payment of All Public Expenses from Economic Rent* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1917), 244.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

government tried to suppress the propagation of his ideas, which it did rather effectively until the early 1830s, when they were “revived” by supporters of Robert Owen.¹⁹

George’s ideas even more closely resembled those advanced by Scotland’s William Ogilvie (1736-1817) in his 1782 work, *An Essay on the Right of Property in Land*.²⁰ Ogilvie, a professor of humanity and philosophy at Kings College, Aberdeen, observed and set out to resolve the conflict between man’s natural right to land and his right to more than an equal share based on the application of his labor. Both rights, Ogilvie argued, are natural and necessary for the welfare and progress of society. As he explained:

That every man has a right to an equal share of the soil, in its original state, may be admitted to be a maxim of natural law. It is also a maxim of natural law, that every one, by whose labour any portion of the soil has been rendered more fertile, has a right to the additional produce of that fertility, or to the value of it, and may transmit this right to other men. On the first of these maxims, depends the freedom and prosperity of the lower ranks. On the second, the perfection of the art of agriculture, and the improvement of the common stock, and wealth of the community.²¹

Prior attempts to reconcile these two rights, he argued, resulted in the suppression of one over the other to the detriment of the entire community.

Ogilvie believed society could preserve both rights through the application of special taxes on land values. He recognized three types of land value: original, accessory or improved, and contingent. Ogilvie defined original value as the natural price of uncultivated land whereas accessory or improved referred to the value resulting from improvements and cultivation. Contingent value represented the wealth that a parcel of

¹⁹ Anton Menger, *The Right to The Whole Produce of Labour: The Origin and Development of the Theory of Labour’s Claim to the Whole Product of Industry*, trans. M.E. Tanner (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1899), 149.

²⁰ The full title reads *An Essay on the Right of Property in Land with Respect to Its Foundation in the Law of Nature, Its Present Establishment by the Municipal Laws of Europe and the Regulations by Which it Might Be Rendered More Beneficial to the Lower Ranks of Mankind*.

²¹ William Ogilvie, *An Essay on the Right of Property in Land* (London: J. Walter, 1872), 17-18.

land might fetch in the future, based on the growth of the surrounding community and improvements. He also explained that contingent value often arose when an individual received “an exclusive right to make these improvements.”²² While individuals possessed a “full right” to the improved value of land, he or she enjoyed only a limited right to the other two types of values, which, Ogilvie asserted should be taxed and returned to the community.

Ogilvie’s desire to tax land values led some of George’s contemporaries to refer to him as the original author of the single tax.²³ The title doesn’t quite fit. Unlike his predecessor, George viewed the *entire* value of land as the rightful property of mankind. What Ogilvie called “improved value” was, to George, merely wealth derived from capital, or interest, in which the community had no rightful stake. Additionally, George viewed the value of land in an uncultivated state—“original value” to Ogilvie—as “site value” or the value added by virtue of location and natural fertility. Following Ricardo, George believed that land possessed no monetary value prior to the appearance of civilization. Land value, or economic rent, only arose after the creation of a market for land. “Wherever land has an exchange value, there is rent in the economic meaning of the term,” George wrote, “Until its ownership will confer some advantage, land has no value.”²⁴ Thus, Ogilvie’s “contingent value” to George, represented the “price of monopoly,” that is, the value derived from the practice of making land private property.²⁵

More than George, Ogilvie’s program resembled that of the Land Tenure Reform Association established by John Stuart Mill in 1871. Similarly to the Scottish professor,

²² *Ibid.*, 21.

²³ J. Morrison Davidson, *Concerning Four Precursors to Henry George and the Single Tax* (London: Labour Leader Publishing Department, 1899), 13.

²⁴ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 166.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

Mill wanted to strike a balance between the protection of man's natural and common right to land and the right to property he believed he had legally obtained. To that end, he proposed the taxation of the *increased* value of land, exclusive of improvements, or, what his father, James Mill originally called the "unearned increment" of land value. In justifying such a tax, Mill explained:

The [Land Tenure Reform] Society is of the opinion that in allowing the land to become private property, the State ought to have reserved to itself this accession of income, and that lapse of time does not extinguish this right, whatever claim to compensation it may establish in favour of the landowners. The land is the original inheritance of all mankind... The Society do not propose to disturb the landowners in their past acquisitions. But they assert the right of the State to all such accessions of income in the future.²⁶

To arrive at the increased land value, Mill called for the valuation of all the land in the country followed by a "registration" of all subsequent improvements made by the landowner, exempt from taxation. After allowing some time for rent to accrue, a new valuation would be conducted and a tax levied on the entire increase—the unearned increment.²⁷

Although they supported different methods, Spence, Ogilvie, Mill, and George shared the belief that landowners *owed* something to those without land and to society which had protected and promoted their private acquisitions. Thomas Paine clearly expressed this idea in his 1796 pamphlet, *Agrarian Justice* in which he called for the creation of a national fund from which to provide young adults a one-time payment to help them "begin the world" and something akin to Social Security for the elderly.²⁸ Paine proposed a graduated tax on the value of land at death—"the moment it will be the

²⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Programme of the Land Tenure Reform Association* (London: Longman's Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1871), 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁸ Paine, "Agrarian Justice," 323

least troublesome and the most effectual”—when it passed from one owner to the next to furnish this fund.²⁹ Like Ogilvie, Mill, and George, Paine believed that land represented the most ideal tax base because its monopolization created poverty and inequality in economic opportunity in society by denying many a portion of the land—the natural inheritance of all mankind—while hoarding the wealth derived from it and created by the community.

George attracted wider support for the movement to abolish private property in land than earlier theorists, in part because he more effectively communicated the concept of economic rent and connected it to urban poverty and wealth inequality. He also used the concept (as discussed in chapter one) to deconstruct the classical wage fund theory and prove that low wages stemmed from the monopolization of land. The wage fund doctrine postulated that wages fluctuated in relation to the number of laborers and a fixed supply of capital from which all wages were drawn. Accordingly, attempts to set a minimum wage or bargain for higher wages proved futile. As Mill explained in volume one of his *Principles of the Political Economy* first published in 1848, “Wages (meaning, of course, the general rate) cannot rise, but by an increase of the aggregate funds employed in hiring labourers, or a diminution in the number of competitors; nor fall, except either by a diminution of the funds devoted to paying labour, or by an increase in the number of labourers to be paid.”³⁰

Unlike Mill, George believed that wages were drawn primarily from production, not a fixed supply of capital. “Production is always the mother of wages. Without production, wages would not and could not be,” he wrote, “It is from the produce of

²⁹ Ibid., 335.

³⁰ Mill, *Principles of the Political Economy*, 421.

labor, not from the advances of capital that wages come.”³¹ But if production supplied wages, “Why,” George asked “in spite of increase in productive power, do wages tend to a minimum which will give but a bare living?” The law of rent supplied the answer. “The reason why, in spite of the increase of productive power wages constantly tend to a minimum which will give but a bare living,” he wrote, “is that, with increase in productive power, rent tends to even greater increase, thus producing a constant tendency to the forcing down of wages.”³² Wages, George believed, were determined by subtracting rent—the price laborers and capitalists pay to use, work, and live upon land—from the final product.

Through his formula, George also attacked the increasingly popular belief in an inherent conflict between labor and capital that alleged “interest is the robbery of industry.”³³ Many socialists who agreed with George’s statement that landlords robbed the community of the economic rent that it created also wondered how he failed to recognize that capitalists similarly robbed workers of the surplus value they created. “When George stated that all which was not wages was rent,” prominent British Socialist and founder of the Social Democratic Federation Henry Mayers Hyndman wrote, “it seemed incredible that any one should fail to inquire who then takes profit and interest.”³⁴ To George, interest played no role in the determination of wages and, unlike rent, occurred naturally. Interest, he explained in *Progress and Poverty*, “springs from the power of increase which the reproductive forces of nature, and the in effect analogous

³¹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 56.

³² *Ibid.*, 282.

³³ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁴ Henry Mayers Hyndman, *The Record of an Adventurous Life* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1911), 281.

capacity for exchange, give to capital.”³⁵ For example, he continued, “If I plant and care for a tree until it comes to maturity, I receive, in its fruit, interest upon the capital I have thus accumulated—that is, the labor I have expended.”³⁶ In contrast, no part of rent contained a reward for the expenditure of labor; “...only that part is rent which constitutes the consideration for the use of land,” George explained.³⁷ Thus, unlike socialists who opposed private property in capital *and* land, George only considered individual control of land a violation of natural principles.

From his first trip to Ireland in late 1881 until well after his death in 1897, George’s ideas exerted extraordinary influence in British politics, helping to spur not only a popular land reform movement but also modern British socialism. British reformers adapted George’s ideas to fit their particular history and political goals. Irish nationalists and those who sympathized with the Irish cause used George’s ideas to attack landlordism, British oppression, and garner support for political independence. During his first visit to the British Isles, George helped channel “anti-landlord” sentiment into a broader attack of private property in land and into an organized movement to nationalize land in Great Britain. The evolution of the land nationalization movement throughout the 1880s and 1890s helps illustrate and define the impact of George’s ideas on British reformers and their attitudes toward land reform at the end of the nineteenth century.

The Irish Land War: ‘Bringing the Question Home to Irishmen’

When George stepped off the ocean liner that had carried him across the Atlantic Ocean to Ireland, he entered a country at war. *Habeus Corpus* had been suspended. The

³⁵ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 188.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

jails housed more five hundred political prisoners, including Charles Stewart Parnell, one of Ireland's most prominent members of Parliament. Forty-thousand troops and military personnel patrolled the cities and countryside of Ireland to maintain order and prevent disturbance.

Although Patrick Ford, editor of the *Irish World* disagreed with Henry George's stances on interest and free trade, he recognized the potential of *Progress and Poverty* and its author to generate support among American audiences for the Irish cause, which he described as the "battle for the emancipation of humanity from the slavery of Dis[in]heritance."³⁸ Ford believed that the situation in Ireland illustrated the ill-effects of depriving a large portion of the population control over the land upon which they lived and worked. Ninety percent of the Irish population depended on agriculture for subsistence; 20 percent worked as tenant farmers at the will of one of the country's 20,000 landlords. Seven hundred and fifty landlords owned half of Ireland, 14 with estates over 50,000 acres each. In contrast, only 150,000 tenant farmers owned enough land to subsist upon without other means of employment.³⁹

After three consecutive wet winters, the value of the potato crop—the main source of food and income for the majority of the Irish population—fell from 12.5 million pounds in 1876 to just over 3.3 million pounds in 1879.⁴⁰ Evictions began immediately. In the five years prior to 1878, 2,500 tenants faced eviction. In 1878 that number rose to 4,670 and in 1879 reached 6,239. In 1880, the worst year of the crisis,

³⁸ Patrick Ford, "Henry George in London" *The Irish World* 13 (September 16, 1882), 4.

³⁹ Norman Dunbar Palmer, *The Irish Land League Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1940), 9-10.

⁴⁰ Roy Douglas, *Land, People, & Politics: A History of the Land Question in the United Kingdom, 1878-1952* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976) 25.

landlords expelled nearly 10,500 tenants.⁴¹ Farmers did not accept these evictions lightly and some resorted to violence. In his widely read account of the crisis in Ireland, philanthropist James H. Tuke stressed the importance of land to Irish farmers for English readers. He wrote:

Take away from the tenant his little holding and nothing is left to him but the workhouse... They are like shipwrecked sailors on a plank in the ocean; deprive them of the few inches by which they “hold on” and you deprive them of life. Deprive an Irishman of the few feet of land by which he “holds on” and you deprive him of all that makes life possible.⁴²

Desperation fueled organization. In December 1879, Fenian activist Michael Davitt established the Irish Land League to provide aid and political direction to Irish farmers. By the end of the winter of 1879-1880, the League collected and distributed £50,000 of relief to farmers.⁴³

In addition to the provision of charity, the Land League defended tenants facing eviction, lobbied landlords to lower rents, and campaigned for land reforms that would allow every tenant farmer to become the owner of the land he tilled—a proposal known as peasant proprietorship.⁴⁴ Its methods proved revolutionary. United by the motto “The Land for the People,” the League pressured landlords to halt evictions and reduce farm rents through a powerful blend of “economic and social ostracism.”⁴⁵ The name for this practice derived from Captain Boycott, the eponymously named land agent who faced

⁴¹ Ibid., 76-77.

⁴² James H. Tuke, *Irish Distress and Its Remedies: The Land Question. A Visit to Donnegal and Connaught in the Spring of 1880* (London: W. Ridgway, 1880), 95.

⁴³ Palmer, *The Irish Land League Crisis*, 99.

⁴⁴ Charles Stewart Parnell, “The Irish Land Question” *The North American Review* 130 (Apr., 1880), 395.

⁴⁵ O’Donnell, ““Though not an Irishman,”” 411.

financial ruin after League members effectively denied him field and household labor for firing his workers and refusing to reduce the rent of his tenants during the famine years.⁴⁶

While some landlords yielded to the League's pressure, many did not. Violence raged, and the three-year struggle that followed the 1879 potato failure begat the brutal and bloody Irish Land War. As one writer close to the crisis recalled, "Murders became of everyday occurrence, cattle were shockingly maimed, the farmer who replaced an evicted tenant was lucky if he escaped with his life."⁴⁷ Parliament deployed troops to contested areas to maintain order and protect landowners' property. In February 1881 it suspended *habeas corpus* and in March of that same year, passed the Irish Coercion Act allowing officers to arrest and imprison without trial, persons suspected of crime or conspiracy. By October 1881, British officials had arrested over a thousand League members including Davitt and Parnell, who also served as the League's president. Four days after Parnell's arrest on October 13, 1881 the Land League issued a "No Rent Manifesto," instructing Irish tenants to cease all rent payments until the government revoked the Coercion Act and released its victims from jail.

Despite Parliament's efforts to contain the Land League, it generated considerable support abroad. From January to March 1880, Parnell conducted a 16,000-mile U.S. tour to raise money and support for the Irish cause. He spoke in 62 cities, including Washington, D.C. where on February 2, 1880, he addressed a joint session of Congress on the objectives and activity of the Irish Land League.⁴⁸ An American Land League formed in May 1880; by the following year, its leaders had established more than 1,500

⁴⁶ Barker, *Henry George*, 344. See also Brennan, "The Great Work: The Land League Grown Too Strong to be Trifled With" *The Irish World* 11 (Dec. 4, 1880), 4.

⁴⁷ John Howard Parnell, *Charles Stewart Parnell: A Memoir* (New York: Henry Hold & Co., 1914), 187.

⁴⁸ Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1966), 103.

branches and by 1882, collected over half a million dollars for Irish relief.⁴⁹ The private charity collected and distributed by the American and Irish Land Leagues helped prevent the starvation of more than a half a million Irish farmers.⁵⁰

Support for the Irish cause in the U.S. largely depended on the ability of American and Irish Land League Leaders to connect Irish distress to issues facing landless laborers in the U.S. To do this, historian Eric Foner has explained, they needed to overcome “the alienation” that traditionally existed between Irish immigrants and native-born Protestant reformers.⁵¹ Together, Ford and George helped bridge this division. In addition to Ford’s personal connection to the Irish crisis—he immigrated with his parents to Boston from Galway, Ireland to escape the potato famine of 1845—he understood the power of the press to incite social action as a result of his experiences working on William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* in the 1850s and the *South Carolina Leader*, a paper dedicated to the protection and promotion of the rights of blacks after the Civil War.⁵² Throughout the Land War, the *Irish World* published firsthand accounts and updates from Davitt on the activities of the Irish Land League. He also established the “Spread the Light” fund and raised more than \$7,600 to finance the distribution of the *Irish World* throughout Ireland.⁵³

Although George, American-born and Protestant, lacked the same level of intimacy to the Irish cause as Ford, he forged important associations to it through his marriage to Annie Corsina Fox, who was raised by her mother’s Irish-Catholic family in

⁴⁹ Eric Foner, “Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish-America” in *Politics and Ideology in the Age of Civil War* ed. Foner (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 156.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 101.

⁵¹ Foner, “Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism in the Gilded Age,” 179.

⁵² James P. Rodechko, “An Irish-American Journalist and Catholicism: Patrick Ford of the *Irish World*” *Church History* 39:4 (Dec. 1970), 524.

⁵³ Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism*, 106.

San Francisco, and mentor James McClatchy. McClatchy, an Irish immigrant and founder of the *Sacramento Bee*, “launched” George as an editorial writer in the summer of 1866 and introduced him to one of the many consequences of America’s backward land policies—perennial battles between squatters and homesteaders in Western territories. In 1879, McClatchy also encouraged George to write “The Irish Land Question” for the *Bee’s* Christmas issue.⁵⁴ The article—later expanded and published in book form by D. Appleton, which also published *Progress and Poverty* in 1880— attracted the attention of key figures in the Irish struggle on both sides of the Atlantic.

In “The Irish Land Question,” George advanced the claim that the situation in Ireland could happen anywhere and that American land laws offered no more protection than those in Ireland. In fact, he argued, “The American system is really worse for the tenant than the Irish system. For with us there is neither sentiment nor custom to check the force of competition or mitigate the natural desires of the landlord to get all he can.”⁵⁵ One custom to which George likely referred included the practice most common in Ulster County Ireland where tenants possessed the right to the value of the improvements they added to a landlord’s property.⁵⁶ George criticized the Irish Land League for its failure to present the crisis as more than a local matter and for championing peasant proprietorship as a solution to the crisis. George found peasant proprietorship inadequate because it promised to benefit only one class of people—farmers—and failed to secure the natural rights of all individuals to the use of land.

⁵⁴ Barker, *Henry George*, 75-76, 691.

⁵⁵ Henry George, *The Irish Land Question: What it Involves and How Alone it Can be Settled* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), 6.

⁵⁶ Douglas, *Land, People, & Politics*, 24.

He also attacked the Irish Land Bill proposed by Prime Minister Gladstone and passed by Parliament in April 1881. As historian Roy Douglas has explained, Gladstone issued the bill as a “conciliatory measure” shortly after the passage of the Coercion Act and to reduce Irish farmer’s need for and dependence on the Land League. It failed on both accounts. Although the bill famously granted the “three Fs”—fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale—long demanded by Irish farmers, it failed to alter the land laws in Ireland that produced landlordism. In theory, fixity of tenure protected tenants from eviction so long as they paid their rent and free sale applied the “Ulster Custom” to all of Ireland. The bill made no attempt to define “fair rent” and instead created special land courts to rule on individual cases brought by tenants. While they waited for their case to be heard, however, the bill expected tenants to continue paying the rent charged by the landlord. Delays and filing fees prevented many tenants from receiving a fair rent when they needed one the most; thus Gladstone’s reform became a meaningless exercise and the tension between landowners and their displaced tenants continued unabated.⁵⁷

To George, the Irish Land Bill, like peasant proprietorship failed to address the root of the crisis in Ireland and distracted farmers from the real fight to overhaul the system of land ownership in Great Britain. “None of these lame and impotent propositions will satisfy the demands of justice or cure the bitter evils now so apparent. The only true and just solution of the problem the only end worth aiming at, is to make *all* the land the common property of *all* the people,” he wrote in *The Irish Land Question*.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Ibid., 32-33.

⁵⁸ George, *The Irish Land Question*, 39.

George spent much of his free time in Ireland speaking at Land League functions to bring to light the need for a more comprehensive land reform program. In his speeches and reports to the *Irish World*, George criticized the Land League for its failure to portray the “land question” in more universal terms and to attract the support of urban workers in addition to rural farmers. A month after his arrival in Ireland, George traveled to London to measure public support in England for the Irish cause. To his dismay, he found “a very gross ignorance of Ireland and all things Irish” which he blamed on the failure of the Irish Land League to educate and court the English public, and specifically, English workers.

He wrote:

That the Land League movement, which is largely analogous to trades union movements for shorter time and higher wages, should have as yet received comparatively little support and sympathy from English working classes is, I think, largely due to the failure to properly present the Irish case, and to the failure on the part of the Land leaders to take more radical ground. The fact is that the Land League movement, up to the present time, has definitely aimed at nothing more than class advantage.⁵⁹

To counteract the League’s neglect George emphasized the connection between land monopoly and other social and economic ills including unemployment, crime, and low wages in his lectures and reports. In a speech entitled “Work and Wages,” delivered in early February 1882, George explained the relationship between landlordism and wage slavery. “Drive the people off the land and they must necessarily be driven into this labor market—must necessarily compete with each other like starving men—like drowning men,” he stated. “They must take ultimately the lowest wages that supports life.”⁶⁰

Landlordism, the result of private property in land, George argued, forced both urban and

⁵⁹ Henry George, “A Visit to London. The Irish Question as Seen Through English Spectacles” *The Irish World* 12 (Jan. 21, 1882), 1.

⁶⁰ “Work and Wages. Henry George Bringing the Question Home to Irishmen” *The Irish World* 12 (March 25, 1882), 1.

rural workers to compete for low-paying jobs, albeit in a factory or on a farm. Thus, any solution to defeat it needed to benefit all classes of workers.

While some Land League leaders, such as Parnell, ignored George's advice to broaden the focus of the movement, Davitt and a few others became convinced that the American was onto something. George met with Davitt who had studied *Progress and Poverty* while imprisoned at Portland jail from February 1881 to May 1882 for violating his ticket-of-leave when he traveled to America the previous year. During his 15-month sentence, Davitt began working out a new program to revitalize Land League efforts that incorporated George's ideas. The League's activities had significantly decreased as a result of its leaders' imprisonment and improved potato harvests. Furthermore, in the spring of 1882, Parnell announced his intention to strike a deal with Gladstone to effectively kill the League in exchange for his release and the repeal of the Coercion Act. Before this so-called "Kilmainham Treaty" became public, however, on May 6, 1882, a band of Irish terrorists assassinated two high-ranking British governmental officials in Phoenix Park, Dublin, creating a public relations nightmare from which the Land League never recovered.⁶¹ The murders coincided with the release of Davitt, Parnell, and other imprisoned Land Leaguers.

Davitt wasted no time in advertising his new program for Irish relief. Shortly after his release from prison and against Parnell's advice, Davitt chaired two events for Henry George at Manchester and Liverpool on May 21 and 23, 1882. At both events, Davitt denounced peasant proprietorship—"immensely preferable though it be to

⁶¹ For more on the Kilmainham Treaty and the Phoenix Park murders, see F. Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt: Revolutionary, Agitator and Labour Leader* (Boston: Dana Estes, & Co, 1909), 122-127, and Michael Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism Or the Story of the Irish Land League* (London: Harper's & Brothers Publishing, 1904), 346-364.

landlordism”—as an inadequate solution to Irish distress and declared that nothing short of the nationalization of land—ownership and control by the national government of all the land in Great Britain—could bring about a permanent defeat of landlordism in Ireland.⁶² Though George disagreed with the method of land nationalization, he recognized its unique appeal among the British public which had entertained similar proposals over the previous century. More importantly, George appreciated the principle that informed nationalization: the land belonged to the people, in whom God had ordained a natural and equal right to use and benefit from.

Davitt’s personal background helps account for his transition from Irish Nationalist to Land Nationalizer. He was born in 1846 to peasant parents in a small village called Straide, located in the center of Mayo County, Ireland. The people of Straide and its neighboring towns suffered heavily from the failure of the potato crop in 1845. Although Davitt’s family managed to escape eviction, they were forced out of their home in 1852 during the “Great Clearances,” when landlords removed hundreds of thousands of peasants to create massive grazing ranches. His family relocated to Lancashire, England, and pursued factory work. At the age of 11, Davitt lost his arm in an accident while working in a cotton mill.⁶³

Maimed for life and unable to continue factory work, Davitt pursued an alternative career. He attended school and at age 15, began an apprenticeship at the local post-office, where he learned to set type, keep accounts, and eventually became an assistant letter carrier. He also made the acquaintance of local Irish nationalists, the Fenians. In 1865, at the age of 19, he joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood and

⁶² Michael Davitt, “The Land League Proposal: A Statement for Honest and Thoughtful Men” *Earl Gray Pamphlets Collection* (1882), 24.

⁶³ Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt*, 1-9.

served as organizing secretary for Northern England and Scotland until 1870, when he was arrested and found guilty of treason for his involvement in arms trafficking. Davitt served seven years of a fourteen-year sentence to hard labor and was paroled in December 1877. He returned to his birthplace shortly after his release and enjoyed a hero's welcome.⁶⁴

Davitt quickly grew disheartened by what he saw and heard in Mayo County. Little had changed during his 25-year absence. Peasants toiled long hours without security of tenure. Landlordism was still rampant. Although still a Fenian at heart, Davitt came to see the connection between land and all other Irish grievances, including political independence, and pledged himself toward the defeat of landlordism.⁶⁵ As he explained in the introduction to *The Fall of Feudalism*, Davitt's semi-autobiographical, 750-plus-page account of the history of land reform in Ireland, "The struggle for the soil of Ireland involved a combat for every other right of the Irish nation." He continued:

The lordship of the land carried with it the ownership of government. The usurpers of the national claim to the possession of the source of employment, of food, and of social distinction, extended their power over every other privilege and right, and ruled the people only and solely for the security of that which the power of confiscation made the property of those whom England made the rulers of the country.⁶⁶

More than political independence from the British government, Davitt came to realize, the people of Ireland desired freedom from their daily oppressor, the landlord.

Davitt found the opportunity to act upon his newfound commitment to end landlordism after the death of a large landholder in Mayo County named Walter Burke in early 1879. The executor of Burke's will threatened to expel all of the tenants in arrears

⁶⁴ Ibid., 69-70.

⁶⁵ For more on Davitt's transformation see, Ibid., 64-65.

⁶⁶ Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism*, xvi.

unless they quickly repaid their debts. Low crop yields made this impossible for most of Burke's tenants. Davitt helped organize a county-wide demonstration on April 19th to protest the impending evictions. More than 7,000 people attended. Shortly after the meeting, Davitt and other local leaders formed the Land League of Mayo to protest evictions, lobby for lower rents, and campaign for the election of Irish representatives to Parliament who committed themselves to the defeat of landlordism. By the end of the year, a nation-wide Land League formed and absorbed the local chapter.⁶⁷

Davitt's public conversion to land nationalization in 1882 damaged his reputation and relationships with his Irish peers. It also sparked rumors that he had "been seduced" by Henry George, who had allegedly implanted the socialistic idea of land nationalization into his mind. His acquaintance with George especially worried Davitt's supporters on the other side of the Atlantic, where *Progress and Poverty* had not yet produced the same level of enthusiasm or attracted as many supporters as it had in Britain. When Davitt returned to the U.S. in June 1882, in order to raise funds for the continued support of the agitation in Ireland, he found the American public less receptive to the Irish cause. The press blamed Davitt's commitment to the socialist scheme of land nationalization for Americans' dampening support. As *The Boston Republic* argued, "The Irish people are not Communists. Mr. Davitt must know this, and may be told that even his great popularity with our Irish-American population will not avail to lead to the sympathizers with Ireland into the great seething pool of communism, or to make the Irish soil the battle-ground of the socialism of the world."⁶⁸ Benjamin Ricketson Tucker, editor of the Boston-based anarchist journal, *Liberty (Not the Daughter but the Mother of Order)*

⁶⁷ Davitt, *The Fall of Feudalism*, 175-185.

⁶⁸ Quoted in *The Boston Daily Globe* (June 15, 1882), 2.

argued that it would be “better, if need be, that the Land League should die than that George’s monstrous craze should live.”⁶⁹ By the late winter of 1882, the number of active American branches of the Land League had decreased from 900 to 500 amounting to a loss of membership from about 45,000 to 25,000.⁷⁰ Davitt quickly retreated from land nationalization, but to no avail. The Land League was dead.

Throughout the summer and fall of 1882, George became increasingly isolated in Ireland, as Davitt and other members of the Land League kept their distance from him and his ideas.⁷¹ Davitt and Parnell collaborated one last time to form a new body—the National Land League—committed to peasant proprietorship through Parliamentary reform. In exchange for Parnell’s involvement, Davitt reluctantly promised to avoid discussing or affiliating with any movement to nationalize land. In an August 4, 1882 letter to Ford, George expressed his disappointment with the new league writing that “Davitt has let his enemies turn him and swerve him in various ways.” Still, George rightfully held hope that the one-armed Irishman might return again to his side in the fight to abolish private property in land. “But [Davitt] is a noble character,” George wrote, “and by far the best of the lot.”⁷²

George soon found allies outside of Ireland committed to the abolition of private property in land. In August 1882, his notoriety—and book sales—received an unexpected bump when British police officers arrested and briefly imprisoned him twice within the span of three days as a “suspicious stranger” under the Prevention of Crimes Act passed by Parliament shortly after the Phoenix Park murders. The Act ordered the

⁶⁹ “Michael Davitt and his Seducer” *Liberty* 1:23 (June 24, 1882), 2.

⁷⁰ Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism, 1870-1890*, 122-123.

⁷¹ George Jr., *The Life of Henry George*, 388.

⁷² *Ibid.*

arrest of “stranger[s]” found in certain districts or “under suspicious circumstances” and re-enacted the Aliens Removal Act of 1848 which authorized the Secretary of State to order the immediate departure of “unregistered” aliens and to arrest and contain them if they refused.⁷³ On both occasions, George was traveling in Galway, where tensions between landlords, tenants, and government officials remained high. Given that George had been in the country nearly a year, some speculated that the arrests were politically motivated.⁷⁴ Ford hoped George’s imprisonment might jumpstart American support for the Irish cause by highlighting the British government’s continued policy of oppression in Ireland. “Thoughtful Americans,” Ford wrote will reason that “[t]he indignity done to Mr. George’s own person is the verification of his darkest statements and the proof that the worst thing known to the most odious of despotisms are not only possible, but are put in daily practice in that country.”⁷⁵ The British government promptly issued an apology to George and avoided any prolonged or serious international conflict.

While George’s arrests failed to revive American interest in the Irish situation, they contributed to his recognition in England, where sales of *Progress and Poverty* approached 65,000.⁷⁶ In the late fall of 1882, Kegan, Paul, Trench & Co., decided to issue a new, six-penny edition better suited for the mass market.⁷⁷ In the winter of 1882-1883, the British literary press finally decided to review it.

While largely critical, the reviews foreshadowed the nature of the resistance George would meet as the land nationalization movement generated momentum in

⁷³ Alexander George, “Two Coercion Bills Compared” *The National Review* 12 (Sept. 1888), 71, and Andreas Scholtenhardt, *Refugees and Human Rights. Migrant Smuggling: Illegal Migration and Organized Crime in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region* (Liedien, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2003), 52.

⁷⁴ On George’s arrests and the aftermath see Barker, *Henry George*, 386-371.

⁷⁵ “The Arrest of Henry George” *The Irish World* 12 (August 26, 1882), 6.

⁷⁶ George Miller, *On Fairness and Efficiency: The Privitisation of the Public Income During the Past Millennium* (Bristol, UK: The Policy Press, 2000), 368.

⁷⁷ Silagi, *Henry George and Europe*, 38.

England and Scotland. Proponents of classical liberal political economy attacked *Progress and Poverty* for its “false and mischievous” analysis of wages and branded immoral, George’s proposal to confiscate land without compensation. The most alarming aspect of the book, according to the reviewers, was the style with which it was written: passionate, lucid, and accessible to those lacking formal knowledge of economics. As one concerned reviewer remarked:

The style of the book, and the air of philanthropy and righteous indignation with which the crusade against vested interests is preached, make it dangerous reading for those whose convictions on economic subjects are not firmly based; still more for the half-educated and ill-informed, who may be captivated by the prospects of relief and benefit held out to them, but are unable to detect the fallacy of the arguments. In fact, we cannot regard in any other light than as a public mischief the promiscuous circulation in a popular shape of this deleterious compound of anarchical principles and spurious political economy.⁷⁸

But *Progress and Poverty* did not just appeal to the “half-educated and ill-informed;” it also resonated with left-leaning members of the educated middle and upper classes who formed organizations and lobbied politicians to support its proposals. They also financed George’s return visit to the British Isles in December of 1883, by which point, some historians have claimed, Henry George was “the most talked of man next to Gladstone himself.”⁷⁹

George’s name certainly came up in the meetings of the Land Nationalisation Society, which was formed in 1882 by land surveyor turned evolutionary biologist Alfred Russell Wallace. Wallace, who discovered, independently from Charles Darwin, the principle of natural selection, shared many of George’s concerns, which he expressed in *Land Nationalisation: Its Aims and Necessities* published after *Progress and Poverty* but prior to his knowledge of George. Like George, Wallace blamed land monopoly for the

⁷⁸ “Article IX: *Progress and Poverty*” *The Edinburgh Review* 157 (Jan., 1883), 288.

⁷⁹ Lee, *The People’s Budget*, 19.

bulk of social misery including the widening gulf between the rich and poor.

“Unrestricted private property,” Wallace wrote, “gives to the class of landowners despotic power over freedom, the property, the happiness, and even over the lives of their fellow citizens who are not landowners.”⁸⁰ And as an evolutionist, the economist Mason Gaffney has pointed out, Wallace believed land monopoly disrupted the process of natural selection by giving an “artificial advantage” to those who inherited land and acquired large estates with very little, if any personal effort.⁸¹ Unlike George, however, Wallace believed the most practical method for abolishing land monopoly required the government to purchase, with limited compensation, all private landholdings and let them at public auctions to “actual users”—as opposed to speculators.⁸² George rejected the notion that landowners were entitled to compensation and opposed proposals that required an expansion of government.

Despite the differences in their proposed remedies to the problem of land monopoly, Wallace invited George, who he recognized as a “very valuable coadjutor” in the fight to abolish private property in land, to speak at a Land Nationalisation Society meeting at London’s Memorial Hall on September 5, 1882. In terms of George’s British career, the speech was a resounding success. He so captivated members of Wallace’s group that many began meeting separately to discuss *Progress and Poverty* and its author’s ideas more thoroughly. In June 1883, they decided to break away from the Land

⁸⁰ Alfred Russel Wallace, *Land Nationalisation: Its Necessity and Its Aims*, 4th ed. (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Lim., 1909), 229.

⁸¹ Mason Gaffney, “Alfred Wallace’s Campaign to Nationalize Land: How Darwin’s Peer Learned from John Stuart Mill and Became Henry George’s Ally” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 56 (Oct. 1997), 613.

⁸²), Wallace, *Land Nationalisation*, vii.

Nationalisation Society and form the Land Reform Union to “embrace land nationalists of all shades of opinion,” including single taxers.⁸³

George Bernard Shaw, who also attended George’s Memorial Hall lecture purchased a six-penny copy of *Progress and Poverty*, and as a result, he wrote several years later “plunged into a course of economic study, and at a very early stage of it became a Socialist...”⁸⁴ Shaw’s experience was quite common. “When I was thus swept into the Great Socialist revival of 1883,” he recalled, “I found that five-sixths of those who were swept in with me had been converted by Henry George.”⁸⁵ Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, George’s ideas and the interest they produced in social issues pushed dozens of reformers like Shaw toward Socialism. The Land Reform Union organized and financed George’s return to the Great Britain in December 1883.

George’s Second British Tour

More than four thousand people crowded into London’s St. James Hall on the evening of January 9, 1884, to hear Henry George lecture on private property in land. “Men and women of London,” George began after a prolonged welcome from the audience, “you who have heard the ‘Bitter Cry of Outcast London,’ what are you going to do with these men and women and children? If [you] want[] to do anything for these miserable people you must appeal to something greater and higher than charity—you must appeal to justice.”

“Who brought them into this world,” a voice yelled from the crowd.

⁸³ “Supplement to the Christian Socialist: The Land Reform Union” *The Christian Socialist (A Journal for Thoughtful Men)* 1:2 (July 1883), i.

⁸⁴ “George Bernard Shaw’s Tribute to the Work of Henry George” *The Single Tax Review* 4:4 (Spring 1905), 26.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

“God, Almighty, in my opinion,” George replied, “and whom God Almighty brings into the world who dare put out?”⁸⁶

The crowd erupted with cheers.

As George continued what was to become a 90-minute speech, he heard fewer cheers. Rather than focus on the points he usually highlighted—why private property in land was unjust and immoral; how to eliminate private property in land through the taxation of land values; and, the enormous benefits of a single tax on land—George strategically addressed the issue of compensation. Whether to compensate landowners for the loss of property and income when the government acquired their land presented the largest source of disunion within the bubbling movement to nationalize land. It also fostered great debate outside the movement.

Supporters of compensation offered four main arguments in support of their stance. Some believed the Ten Commandments required compensation. “Land Nationalization *minus* compensation is simply wholesale robbery *plus* cant,” opined the editors of the *Pall Mall Gazette*.⁸⁷ For others, including Joseph Hyder of the Land Nationalisation Society, some compensation scheme was necessary “not to compensate for the loss of land (which never has been and never could be private property any more than could the air above it), but for the loss of an income.”⁸⁸ Others pointed out that not all landlords fit the greedy, land-grabbing profile. Some landowners, they argued, were widows and orphans, who depended on the income from rent to survive. Finally, many land nationalizers supported compensation simply as a matter of political expediency.

⁸⁶ “Mr. Henry George on Property in Land” *London Daily News* (January 10, 1884).

⁸⁷ “A Plain Word to Mr. George” *Pall Mall Gazette* (January 10, 1884).

⁸⁸ Joseph Hyder, “The Crux of the Land Question: Compensation to Landlords” *LSE Selected Pamphlets* (1899), 12.

George himself strongly opposed compensation. He compared the abolition of private property in land to the abolition of slavery. “But it was said there were men who had paid money for their land,” George told the crowd at St. James Hall. “One man bought shops or houses, or what they pleased, and another bought land. D[o] [I] propose to take from the one and let the other alone?” He replied in the affirmative:

The purchaser could get not a better title than the vendor had to give. If they stole a slave and he bought him, had he any better right to that slave? If a hundred men bought a slave one after another, did that justify human slavery? There was no justification that could be urged in favour of private property in land that could not be as truly, fully, and logically urged in defense of human slavery.⁸⁹

When someone raised the counterargument that the English government had compensated slave owners when it abolished slavery in the West Indies, George replied that he considered that act of compensation a national crime.

In response to the expediency argument in favor of compensation, George said the movement would be better served in the long-haul if it stood on one side rather than somewhere in the middle. “The masses could understand a clear principle,” he argued, “They could not understand the half way compromise.”⁹⁰ And to counter what became known as the “widow and orphan argument,” George declared that “every widow, from the lady who sat on the throne down to the poorest labourer’s widow” deserved a pension, not as a matter of charity or to compensate for the loss of land rent, but because justice required it. Furthermore, added, the single tax could raise the funds necessary to provide such a pension.⁹¹

Besides compensation, George’s stance toward socialism presented the other main source of disunion within the land nationalization movement in the early 1880s. Land

⁸⁹ “Mr. Henry George on Property in Land” *London Daily News* (January 10, 1884).

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George*, 426. See also Barker, *Henry George*, 397.

reform in general, and the Irish Land War in particular, served as the entry point for many British intellectuals into the world of social reform. Thus, from its earliest stages, the land nationalization movement in England attracted individuals with diverse political views and social agendas. This fact became increasingly apparent to George in his interactions with the Land Reform Union.

The minutes of the Union's inaugural meeting held June 5, 1883 reflect the various impulses that led to its creation. In his opening remarks, Chairman T.F. Walker stated, "The Union would be based on the unity of faith, and not of individual opinion" and "that the cause which led to the calling of the meeting was the continuance of poverty in the midst of the increasing wealth of the world."⁹² J.C. Durant believed the Union should play an educative role and show the public that "there were other forms of slavery besides the negro, and many people in the country were at present immensely worse off than the most wretched negro who ever lived." Continuing with the slavery analogy, another member suggested that the Union "adopt the position taken up by the anti-slavery agitators, and to at once stop the evil from extension."⁹³ The "evil" in this case referred not to the codified practice of making one race the chattel of another, but private property in land. While incongruous, the comparison was not unusual; George frequently argued that the "slavery" suffered by laborers, who, having been driven off land and forced to compete for low wages, was more cruel and unjust than any other forms. The comparison demonstrated the intensity and passion Union members brought to the

⁹² "Supplement to the Christian Socialist: The Land Reform Union" *The Christian Socialist* 1:2 (July 1883), i.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, iii.

movement to abolish private property in land and, also, their longing for a cause of comparable importance to the great anti-slavery crusade of an earlier generation.⁹⁴

The minutes also reveal that despite their refusal to make the taxation of land values the Union's official platform members recognized the need to abolish economic rent. Dr. Clark explained that although the concept of economic rent "was a most difficult thing to get people to understand," it "was simply the price of monopoly; it might depend either on the quality of the soil or its position. Consequently, it was regulated by the unearned value, and everyone must admit that there could be no right to monopolise that."⁹⁵ Rev. Stewart Headlam suggested that although the Land Reform Union "would not bind itself to any scheme," it should insist "that the whole of the "unearned increment" in the land should go to the nation, which did not mean that the whole of England was to be cut out into cornfields and cabbage gardens."⁹⁶ George rarely used the term "unearned increment"—as previously discussed, he viewed the entire value of land, not merely an "increment," as "unearned" wealth. Headlam's statement illustrates the impact of George's popularization of the concept and also that the "land question" was not merely an agricultural problem.

Finally, the minutes reflect the socialist leanings of its members. Chairman Walker ended his introductory statement with the acknowledgement that "in addition to the primary object of the Union, there were many other issues, such as wages and interest, the relations of labour and capital, and the question of population" that needed addressing.⁹⁷ Prior to George's return to Great Britain, on the last day of December

⁹⁴ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 353.

⁹⁵ "Supplement to the Christian Socialist: The Land Reform Union," ii.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, ii.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, i.

1883, two Union members, H.H. Champion and R.P.B. Frost urged him to endorse the program of the newly formed Social Democratic Federation, which called for free compulsory education, disestablishment, adult suffrage, proportional representation, income taxation, the nationalization of land, railways, and all private enterprises involved in money or credit.⁹⁸ While George supported some of these measures—he believed, for instance, that the funds furnished from the single tax could be used to finance a wide variety of public services including free libraries, universities, heating and light, etc.—he opposed all methods for achieving them except the socialization of land rent. George replied to Champion and Frost that socialists could support or oppose him, but that he planned to lecture on the “principles with which his name was identified and no others.”⁹⁹

With that response, Champion and other socialists used the occasion of George’s tour to separate themselves from the American and the land nationalization movement. In the lead editorial of the January 1884 issue of the *Christian Socialist*, titled “Rocks Ahead,” Champion announced George’s upcoming lecture tour and where socialists stood in relation to his theories. While appreciating all of the “enthusiasm for humanity” that George and *Progress and Poverty* had engendered, he wrote, “It is impossible that the mere confiscation of competition rents, which is Mr. George’s practical proposal, can in any way ameliorate the condition of the people.”¹⁰⁰ As he explained, “The landlord is at present a mere appendage of the capitalist. Destroy the monopoly of capital, and the landlords must drop; destroy the landlordism, and capitalism is more firmly entrenched than ever. Monopoly and competition are the causes of poverty.”¹⁰¹ The defeat of

⁹⁸ Webb, “Socialism in England,” 14-15.

⁹⁹ George, Jr., *The Life of Henry George*, 423.

¹⁰⁰ “Rocks Ahead” *The Christian Socialist* 1:8 (January 1884): 114.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

landlordism, while a worthy cause, would be futile without the defeat of capitalism and competition. Champion similarly noted in another piece published in *Justice*, the organ of the Social Democratic Federation, whereas Socialists aimed at destroying competition, “the method of Mr. George would leave that principle in unimpaired authority, and even install it more securely in its seat.”¹⁰² Except, that is, competition in land, which George and the land nationalization movement sought to destroy by making land the common property of all mankind.

In addition to Champion, Social Democratic Federation founder Hyndman also came out against George and land nationalization, which he considered mere “burden shifting.”¹⁰³ In many ways, the relationship between George and Hyndman in the 1880s and 1890s mirrored that which existed between their respective movements. John Stuart Mill’s step-daughter, Helen Taylor, first introduced George and Hyndman at the end of George’s first British tour in 1882. From that moment, Barker noted, each worked “to convert the other to his own way of thinking.”¹⁰⁴ Hyndman invited George and his wife to stay at his London home, where he proceeded to introduce his new acquaintance to the ideas of Karl Marx.

Although George was unfamiliar with the Prussian theorist—an English edition of Marx’s work did not appear until 1887—Marx had already formed an opinion of George. In a letter to German communist Friedrich A. Sorge dated June 20, 1881, Marx lambasted George:

¹⁰² H.H. Champion, “Henry George and the Land Question” *Justice* 1:1 (Jan. 19, 1884), 5.

¹⁰³ W.C. Wright and H. Quelch, *Socialism and the Single tax: A Debate between Mr. W.C. Wright, representing the English Land Restoration League and H. Quelch of the Social Democratic Federation at the Trades Hall, Birmingham on June 29th 1896* (England: Twentieth Century Press, [1896]), 11.

¹⁰⁴ Barker, *Henry George*, 355.

Theoretically the man is utterly backward! He understands nothing about the nature of surplus value and so wanders about in speculations which follow the English model but have now been superseded even among the English, about the different portions of surplus value to which independent existence is attributed—about the relations of profit, rent, interest, etc.¹⁰⁵

Marx defined surplus value as the difference between a worker's wages and the value of goods and services that he or she produced and which the capitalist controlled but did not create. To Marx surplus value accounted for the exploitation of labor. Still, Marx predicted that *Progress and Poverty* might produce some gain for socialism. "George's book, like the sensation it has made with you, is significant because it is a first, if unsuccessful, attempt at emancipation from the orthodox political economy."¹⁰⁶ Hyndman agreed, and despite the American's refusal to endorse socialism, continued, through the *Justice* and the Democratic Federation, to engage George and his followers in public debates.

One particular debate between Hyndman and George, which was published in the *Nineteenth Century* in February 1885, revealed that their ideological differences rested chiefly on the varying degrees of importance each attached to land versus capital. Hyndman opened the discussion by explaining that while he supported the ideal of land nationalization, he considered it useless unless accompanied by the nationalization of capital. As he explained: "Nationalise the land as much as you please, therefore, without giving the producers the collective control over the social machinery, the means of production and distribution as well as of the exchange, and no good will have been done. The land is only *one* of the means of production and under existing conditions is useless

¹⁰⁵ Karl Marx to Friedrich Adolph Sorge, 20 June 1881, trans. Sally Ryan, Marx and Engels Internet Archive, http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1881/letters/81_06_20.htm (accessed June 27, 2012).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

without the others.”¹⁰⁷ In the modern industrial order, Hyndman believed, access to land without capital was meaningless.

George disagreed, and in his defense for socializing rent and not interest, he raised the “safety-valve” argument popular among antebellum American land reformers.¹⁰⁸ As George wrote:

The mass of mankind, even the men of the cities, would not be wholly helpless on the land...But even admitting that man in the present state of society can make no use of land without some capital, the effect of throwing open land to labour would be that those who had some capital would go upon the land, thus at once relieving the competition of wage-earners and increasing the demand for their labour.¹⁰⁹

The view that a vast supply of free land safeguarded American democracy and protected workers from economic exploitation enjoyed a long history of support in the U.S. And while historians usually attribute the source of its popularity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to Frederick Jackson Turner and his famous essay, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), George also used this notion to explain the causes of industrial depression and advancing poverty in America. To George, access to capital without access to land was futile, because land, not capital, supplied the materials necessary for the production of wealth.

Despite George’s refusal to endorse the Socialist program, the land nationalization movement continued to attract many socialists, especially those active in the Fabian Society, which also formed in 1883 and became a powerful ally in the effort to tax urban land values in the 1890s and into the twentieth century. In *The Making of*

¹⁰⁷ Henry George and H.M. Hyndman, “Socialism and Rent-Appropriation: A Dialogue” *Nineteenth Century* 17 (Feb., 1885), 374. Emphasis added.

¹⁰⁸ For more on these reformers and this argument, see Hulliung, *The Social Contract in America*, 76-92; and, William F. Deverell, “To Loosen the Safety Valve: Eastern Workers and Western Lands” *The Western Historical Quarterly* 19 (Aug. 1988): 269-285.

¹⁰⁹ George and Hyndman, “Socialism and Rent-Appropriation,” 376-377.

British Socialism, Mark Bevir explains that historians tend to characterize Fabians as “bureaucratic elitists” more inspired by “utilitarianism and classical political economy” than pure economic socialism. This view derives in part from the Fabians’ rejection of “revolutionary politics” and support of gradual reforms, such as land value taxation. As a result, Bevir argues, historians sometimes overlook “the distinctive theory of socialism” that Fabians contributed to the British movement.¹¹⁰

Fabians, like most British socialists, developed their socialist philosophy from a variety of intellectual sources and in response to the “crisis of faith and especially the collapse of classical economics” at the end of the nineteenth century.¹¹¹ Fabians based their socialism on “liberal rather than Marxist economic theory,” and although Bevir downplays his influence, George provided a wellspring of liberal ideas from which they drew. Specifically, Fabians adopted George’s theory of economic rent and confidence that the existing political institutions and government machinery could be used to achieve meaningful reform. As Edward Pease wrote in *The History of The Fabian Society*:

George recognized that in the Western States political institutions could be moulded to suit the will of the electorate; he believed that the majority desired to seek their own well-being and this could not fail to be also the well-being of the community as a whole. From Henry George I think it may be taken that the early Fabians learned to associate the new gospel with the old political method.¹¹²

Similarly, Fabians supported reforms that worked within the political system; reforms that were “constitutional and peaceful” and “acceptable to the majority of the people and prepared for in the minds of all.”¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 132.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131-132.

¹¹² Edward Pease, ed., *The History of the Fabian Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Fabian Society, 1925), 21.

¹¹³ Webb, “Socialism in England,” 81.

Fabians especially appreciated George's ability to reach and inspire the middle class, whose support they believed was essential to achieve meaningful political and economic reform. Prior to George's fourth British lecture tour in the spring of 1889, Fabian socialist Sidney Webb wrote and asked him to direct his lectures to this audience. "You will find us, as you know, making tremendous progress in a direction which may generally be called socialist," he wrote to George on March 8, 1880, "and on the Land Question in particular, and ordinary Liberal opinion is fast ripening." Webb continued:

What holds things back is the great mass of middle-class, religious, 'respectable,' cautious, and disliking the Radical artisan. These need your instruction most, and you are, of course, just the man who can give it to them without offence or resentment. Your visit will do immense good in stirring up the *bourgeoisie* – especially among the dissenting sects. Pray pay them special attention and remind your committees to bring you in contact with all the ministers round.¹¹⁴

Unlike Hyndman and other socialists who distanced themselves from George as a result of his refusal to support the nationalization of capital in addition to land, Webb and other Fabians recognized his continued potential to direct more moderate audiences toward social and political reform and as such, continued to work with him and his supporters to enact land value taxation. Fabians appreciated that George's method of land nationalization contained elements of continuity and change; it stripped landowners of the value of their land but left their title to land and the improvements upon it untouched.

'Let Glasgow Flourish by Preaching the Word:' Henry George and the Land Nationalization Movement in Scotland

On February 18, 1884, George addressed a large audience at the Glasgow City Hall. "If [I] were a Glasgow man today," he bellowed, "I would not be proud of it." He continued, "Here [you] ha[ve] a great rich city, and here [you] ha[ve] poverty and

¹¹⁴ Webb to George, March 8, 1889 in Norman Mackenzie, ed., *The Letters of Sidney and Beatrice Webb, Volume I: Apprenticeships, 1873-1892* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 125.

destitution that would appall a heathen.” Some in the audience cheered and cried “hear, hear.” George carried on:

Right down these very streets of [y]ours even a stranger could see sights that he could not see among any tribe of savages under anything like normal conditions. ‘Let Glasgow flourish by the preaching of the world’ [is] the great motto of this great proud city. What sort of word was it that [has] been preached? Let [y]our preaching have been what it might, what was [y]our practice. Were these the fruits of the Word—this poverty? To call this a Christian community [is] a slander on Christianity.¹¹⁵

Poverty was not ordained by God, George explained. It was the result of countries ignoring God’s laws and allowing the earth—His gift to all of mankind—to become the private property of individuals. Restore the land of Scotland to the people of Scotland, George instructed, and Glaswegians might once again be proud of their city. Five hundred members of the audience stayed after George’s speech and organized the Scottish Land Restoration League. When George returned to Glasgow a week later, the League presented him with nearly 2,000 signatures of individuals pledged to support the propagation and enactment of the single tax. Similar Leagues formed throughout Scotland and England, launching the second phase of the nationalization crusade known as the Land Restoration Movement.

Unlike the Land Reform Union, the Scottish Land Restoration League articulated a definitive political program with educative and legislative elements. Its members opposed compensation to landlords and avoided using the term “land nationalization” to describe the League’s ultimate goal. The term, as George came to realize during his second British lecture tour, was too heavily associated with Wallace’s Land Nationalisation Society and its method of compensating landowners. Instead, they spoke and wrote about the need to *restore* the rights of the Scottish people to use and benefit

¹¹⁵ “Mr. Henry George in Glasgow,” *The Glasgow Herald* 43 (February 19, 1884).

from the land through land value taxation. An English Land Restoration League formed six weeks after the Scottish League and absorbed the Land Reform Union.

The political program of the Scottish Land Restoration League included two legislative proposals. The first involved the reenactment of the two hundred year-old land tax of four shillings in the pound at the present value of land.¹¹⁶ While the League ultimately favored the implementation of a single tax on the entire value of land to destroy private property in land, it recognized the preference for gradual measures among the British public, and especially of Parliament.¹¹⁷ As League executive John P. M'Laurin explained: "It has taken more than two hundred years to kill the theory of government by divine right, and even yet it is not quite dead. We do not believe that our scheme will take so long, for times are changed, and we move more rapidly now; but the earliest possible time must be a comparatively long period."¹¹⁸ As such, the League promoted a limited form of the single tax.

The second proposal involved local home rule in taxation: "[W]e also demand a measure giving all towns, cities, and boroughs the power to collect all rates from an assessment upon the sitting or rental value of land, exclusive of buildings or improvements and irrespective of use."¹¹⁹ While many local governments in Britain and the United States recognized the potential of land value taxation to raise revenue without discouraging business investment, most lacked the constitutional power to levy tax increases or enact new taxes, typically executed at the state or national levels. As such,

¹¹⁶ Manifesto of the Scottish Land Restoration League, 1884, ILP Collection/16/1884, London School of Economics Archives.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ John P. M'Laurin, *No Compensation to Landholders: A Not Unjust Condition* (Glasgow: The Scottish Land Restoration League, 1884), 6.

¹¹⁹ Manifesto of the Scottish Land Restoration League, 1884.

single taxers participated in large numbers in the movements to secure greater governing power for local governments. Their participation in the home rule movement in Ohio, discussed in a later chapter, helped secure a state constitutional convention in 1912 that significantly increased the powers of local government.

The founders of the Scottish Land Restoration League relied on principles of natural justice to defend their anti-compensation stance. They recognized that although both sides of the compensation debate presented fair and moral arguments those in favor of compensating landowners based their stance in “legality” whereas the League grounded its anti-compensation position in “equity.” And, as M’Laurin explained:

Sometimes legality and equity coincide, and then they are but different names for the same thing; but, where this is not the case, equity is manifestly the superior plea. Legality is the servant, not the equal of equity; but too frequently it is an unfaithful follower...As John Locke says, it is an “Eternal rule to all men, legislators as well as others.”¹²⁰

In other words, man-made law should never trump the universal and interminable principles found in nature.

Of course, not everyone agreed with what constituted “universal” principles, or whether such natural laws existed. The Liberty and Property Defence League--formed in 1883 for the purposes of “resisting Overlegislation, for maintaining Freedom of Contract, and for advocating Individualism as opposed to Socialism, entirely irrespective of Party politics”--opposed the notion that private property in land violated natural law and insisted that no significant difference existed between property in land and property in all other things. “The basis of property is not the securing to each the produce of his labour, for labour produces nothing, but the acknowledgment of claim, which is the only way to

¹²⁰ M’Laurin, *No Compensation to Landholders*, 4.

avoid continual strife,” J.C. Spence wrote in a pamphlet published by the League.¹²¹ One need only to look at “ancient law, modern customs, and ordinary ethical conceptions” to realize this, he added, “In America, Australia and other parts of the world, civilized man stands in possession of vast tracts of unoccupied land. In all of these districts, whether subject to organized law or the occasional exercise of lynch law, priority of claim is recognized as the basis of property. Equity is never thought of.”¹²² As an example of this principle in practice, Spence pointed to “miner’s law” in which he argued that the first claimant to a given area earned the rights to the minerals discovered there. But as George, a former gold rush ‘forty-niner,’ knew firsthand, this was not the case in California where miners based property claims on use, not priority—“no one might take more than he could reasonably use,” he recalled.¹²³ California miners recognized a usufruct right to property in land.

Much of the work done by the English and Scottish Land Restoration Leagues focused on increasing the number of elected representatives at the local and national levels supportive of land value taxation. The formation of the Leagues coincided with the Reform Bill of 1884 and Redistribution Act of 1885, which expanded the size of the electorate and extended voting rights to agricultural laborers.¹²⁴ To that end, both leagues emphasized voter education and public outreach. In 1891, the English Land Restoration League created a special fund to purchase a “Red Van” from which to conduct summer lecture campaigns in the nation’s rural counties. Three objectives guided these tours:

¹²¹ J.C. Spence, *Property in Land: A Defence of Individual Ownership* (London: Liberty and Property Defence League, 1897), 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²³ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 386.

¹²⁴ Mary E. J. Chadwick, “The Role of Redistribution in the Making of the Third Reform Act” *The Historical Journal* 19 (Sep. 1976), 665.

inform agricultural communities on the various aspects of the land question and how land value taxation would benefit them; organize laborers; and, collect information on the social and economic situation of rural England. From 1891 to 1897, the English Land Restoration League held 3,200 meetings as part of the Red Van tours.¹²⁵ The success of the Red Van campaigns relied on the ability of League members to connect local grievances to private property in land and show how land value taxation, by destroying land monopoly and opening up the land, benefitted agricultural and non-agricultural workers alike.

The League often worked with labor unions to organize lectures on topics of specific interest to local workers and their families. In 1891, the Eastern Counties Labour Federation (ECLF) invited the Red Van to Suffolk County where it had 2,500 members. From April 16 to October 20, the Red Van committee and ECLF co-hosted 165 meetings in 156 different locations. Each meeting ended with an invitation for the attendees to join the ECLF “as a means of obtaining better wages, healthier homes and the like,” the League reported, “but also as a *means to make their votes effective with a view to the abolition of landlordism.*”¹²⁶ The ECLF later recorded that its membership increased by more than 4,600 as a result of the Red Van campaign in the summer of 1891.¹²⁷

The publication and distribution of literature factored heavily into the educative campaigns of the English and Scottish Land Restoration Leagues. The English League published a series of pamphlets called “Land Restoration Tracts” from a variety of

¹²⁵ “The Work of the Red Vans” *English Land Restoration League Tracts*, No. 35 (London: Page & Pratt, Limited, Trade Union Printers, n.d.) in [Leaflets] Nos. 1, 2, 6-9, 11, 13, 14, 18-20, 22-23, 25-27, 30-31, 33, 35-37: (with Land Restoration Tracts Nos. 2 and 4, Manifesto, and special report: Among the Suffolk labourers with the “Red Van,” *LSE Selected Pamphlets* (1890).

¹²⁶ English Land Restoration League, *Special Report, 1891: Among the Suffolk Laborers with the “Red Van”* (London: Offices of the English Land Restoration League, 1891), 6, emphasis in the original.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

authors on various aspects of the “land question” including the evolution of landlordism and the history of land value taxation in England. It occasionally printed voter guides, or “Candidate’s Catechisms” before local elections that listed a series of questions “put forward as *suggestions* for the “heckling” of candidates for municipal bodies.”¹²⁸ In 1894, the Scottish Land Restoration League began publishing a monthly periodical called *The Single Tax* to “keep our question and what is being done with it the world wide over well to the front, and to guide the loose ideals abroad on the land question generally.”¹²⁹ The editors especially focused on the progress of local land value taxation proposals and promoted the election of various candidates who supported a national tax on the value of land. Although the Land Restoration movement claimed no party allegiance, it found considerable support within the Liberal Party.

Between 1885 and 1914, Liberal party politics experienced significant change in many ways favorable to the movement to tax land values. Much of this transformation began in 1885 when Gladstone came out in favor of Irish Home Rule and caused the defection of a large number of Liberal Unionists who began voting with Conservatives. After the party’s defeat in the general election of 1886, Liberal leaders elicited outside advice for a new program that promised to “revitalize” the Party.¹³⁰ In 1888, a group of London radicals issued one of the more famous proposals received and endorsed by the Party in which they called for a comprehensive program of municipal reform for the nation’s cities that included a proposal for the taxation of ground rents. Over the next 18 years, the proposal to tax municipal land values gained considerable traction in the

¹²⁸ English Land Restoration League, *A Municipal Candidate’s Catechism*. Land Restoration Tracts, No. 20 in *LSE Pamphlets* (1890).

¹²⁹ “Our Mission” *The Single Tax: The Organ of the Scottish Land Restoration Union* 1:1 (June 1894), 1.

¹³⁰ H.V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1891-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 41.

Liberal Party and by 1906, more than half of the 246 Liberal candidates elected to parliament that year pledged to support a bill to tax land values separate from improvements.¹³¹

The Parliamentary Land Values Campaign

The evolution of the Liberal Party's attitude toward land reform between 1880 and 1910 mirrored, in many ways, the developments within the socialist, land nationalization, and land value taxation movements more generally. Under Prime Minister Gladstone's second administration (1880-1885), the Liberal Party supported piecemeal land reform directed toward resolving the largely agricultural conflict between Irish landlords and tenant farmers. The Irish Land Bill of 1881, discussed previously, and Joseph Chamberlain's so-called "Radical Programme" embodied this approach. In the latter, first published as a series of articles in the *Fortnightly Review* from 1883-1885, Chamberlain outlined a practical program for the Radical wing of the party based on the attitudes of the recently enlarged electorate. Land reform factored heavily into his proposed agenda.

Although, Chamberlain recognized the interest generated in the idea of land nationalization by George and Wallace, he dismissed the proposals of both as too "drastic" and "alarming" to the majority of the British electorate. Instead, he believed the Party should endorse land reform measures designed to increase the number of small landowners – "*The object of all land reform must be the multiplication of landholders*" he wrote.¹³² To that end, he argued for the removal of legal obstacles preventing the sale

¹³¹ Ian Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land: the Land Issue and Party Politics in England, 1906-1914* (Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 2001), 54.

¹³² J. Chamberlain, *The Radical Programme* (London: J.S. Virtue & Company, Ltd, 1885), 54.

and transfer of land and for the general enlargement of state power to regulate the terms of leases and size of landholdings. The genius of reforms aimed at enlarging the size of the landowning class, he pointed out, was that they reduced the need for further government interference in the system of land tenure. As Chamberlain explained:

The greater the number of those who have an interest in the soil, the deeper will be the popular attachment to it. The conflict of interests will disappear, and our land system, instead of being, as it is now, the symbol of strife the embodiment of privileges of the few as opposed to the rights and aspirations of the many will become a guarantee of class concord and harmony.¹³³

In 1885, Chamberlain and much of the Liberal Party still viewed the “land problem” as a largely rural issue involving mainly tenant farmers and landlords.

To Gladstone, the “land problem” could not be separated from the “Irish problem.” On April 16, 1886, a week after he shocked Parliament and many members of his own Party with the Irish Home Rule bill, Gladstone proposed an equally unpopular Land Purchase Bill, which called for large loans to enable the government to purchase agricultural land in Ireland from owners willing to sell for a sum of 20 years’ rent and sell it to tenants through a 49-year annuity. The Liberal Prime Minister justified his land purchase scheme, saying “it would be unfair to leave the newly created Irish legislature to deal with the land question.”¹³⁴ Liberal Unionists and Radicals alike criticized the bill for placing the needs of Irishmen over those of the British laborer. According to historian Graham D. Goodlad, many argued that the bill “would undermine business confidence in Ireland, causing mass immigration into the British labour market and thereby precipitating a fall in the living standards of the British wage-earner.”¹³⁵ The bill failed

¹³³ Ibid., 54.

¹³⁴ Graham D. Goodlad, “The Liberal Party and Gladstone’s Land Purchase Bill of 1886” *The Historical Journal* 32 (Sep. 1989), 628.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 636.

to receive a second reading and probably contributed to the Liberal Party's defeat at the July 1886 general election.

The defection of the more conservative members of the Liberal Party following Gladstone's support for Irish home rule and the Land Purchase Bill provided leadership opportunities for younger and more radical members of the Party. The election of the young Welsh attorney David Lloyd George to Parliament in 1890 in particular proved favorable to the progress of the land value taxation movement. Although born at Manchester in 1863, Lloyd George grew up with his uncle, a shoemaker, in a tiny Wales village called Llyanstumdwyl and from an early age, learned to despise landlords, who, along with church officials, controlled most of the wealth in the Wales countryside.¹³⁶ In Parliament, Lloyd George championed liberal issues of local importance including Welsh disestablishment and temperance. He also supported radical reforms at the national level including most of the measures adopted at the National Liberal Federation meeting at Newcastle in 1891. In addition to a resolution affirming the Party's support of Irish home rule, attendees of the Newcastle meeting also passed an "Omnibus Resolution" that called for three land reforms: the repeal of primogeniture and entail, freedom of sale and transfer of land, and "just taxation" of land values and ground rents.¹³⁷

While the first two reflect the Party's continued commitment to increase the number of small landholders, the third indicates its recognition of the land issue's urban dimension and the continued pressure of local land value taxation advocates within the Liberal Party. City officials' interest in land value taxation derived from the need to

¹³⁶ Kenneth O. Morgan, *The Age of Lloyd George* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1971), 19 and Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert, "David Lloyd George: Land, the Budget, and Social Reform" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 82 (Dec., 1976), 1061.

¹³⁷ "Proceedings of the National Liberal Federation, Newcastle, 1891" in Morgan, *The Age of Lloyd George*, 113.

secure alternative sources of revenue to fund public services without discouraging business investment or overtaxing the poor. In England and Wales, local taxes—rates, as they were called—fell exclusively on land and buildings in use; bare land and unoccupied buildings faced no taxation. Unlike in rural areas, where the landowner usually owned the farm and houses upon his property, the city landowner usually did not own the improvements on his land and instead, rented it to investors on long 99-year leases who financed the construction of buildings. And while the city landowner paid income taxes to the state on the rent he earned from the lease, he escaped local taxation.¹³⁸ The building owner, in contrast, faced the burden of local taxation, which he often shifted to the consumer by raising the rent he charged to occupy or use the building.¹³⁹

Liberals made little progress enacting the reforms of the Newcastle Program while Gladstone continued to lead the Party and prioritized Irish home rule above all other measures. His retirement in 1894 followed by Liberals' resounding defeat in the 1895 election ignited a nearly decade long struggle for Party leadership and unification. The 1895 election also signaled, according to historian Ian Packer, the defeat of Gladstone and Chamberlain's idea that "land reform would deliver rural England into the Liberals' hand."¹⁴⁰ Moving forward, it became apparent that if Liberals continued to emphasize land reform, they needed a more comprehensive vision that addressed the concerns of the Party's urban constituency. By 1890, this element was prepared to support any Party that promised to deliver a local site-value taxation bill.

¹³⁸ Committee of the Land Law Reform Association on Urban Land Taxation and Tenure, *The Ratepayer and the Landowner: A Statement of the Case for the Rating of Ground Values in Towns* (The Land Law Reform Association: London, 1898), 7.

¹³⁹ Bentley B. Gilbert, "David Lloyd George: The Reform of British Land-Holding and the Budget of 1914" *The Historical Journal* 21:1 (1978), 123-124 and Francis Neilson, "The Land Values Movement in Great Britain" *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 18 (Apr. 1959), 234.

¹⁴⁰ Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land*, 25.

Throughout the late-1880s and early 1890s, city councils formed committees stocked with single taxers and Fabians to draft proposals for the power to levy taxes on the value of occupied *and* unoccupied land. In 1902, a United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values representing more than 500 local rating authorities formed for that purpose. That same year, the English Land Restoration League decided to change its name to the English League for the Taxation of Land Values to better represent its immediate goal. The success of these committees largely depended on the ability of their members to demonstrate the need for increased revenue and the lesson popularized by George that land values provided the most ideal base of taxation.

The Land Law Reform Association, whose members included 28 Liberal M.P.s, advanced that message in its 1898 report, *The Ratepayer and the Landowner*.¹⁴¹ Prepared by the Association's Committee on Urban Taxation and Tenure, the report declared the present system of urban rating unjust and inefficient and endorsed measures for a national valuation of land separate from buildings and the levying of rates on urban landowners, regardless of whether the land was in use. The Committee justified its proposals by noting the steep increase in existing rates levied by local authorities—an increase of 105 percent between 1868 and 1895—and the need for greater revenue to meet the demands of a growing urban population. Furthermore, the Committee highlighted the mounting competition for urban land and its increased value:

Not only municipal improvements, but the mere increase of population is largely adding, day by day, to the value of urban land. There is a more active competition for the limited number of specially desirable sites; agricultural land is continually in demand for the more profitable uses of building. The owners wait, and without effort on their part their land is found to grow gradually in value, sometimes two-fold, sometimes three-fold, sometimes even more. No form of property has increased so rapidly in value during recent years as land in towns.

¹⁴¹ Emy, *Liberals, Radicals, and Social Politics, 1892-1914*, 205.

Urban landowners, the Committee urged, should return some of the value created, not by their individual effort, but by the growth of the community and publicly funded improvements. The Committee ended its report with a list of the local rating authorities and town councils that also approved of its resolutions.¹⁴²

Progress on land reform stalled during the Boer War and its aftermath when imperial policy issues dominated Parliamentary debates. By 1905, however, local governments faced even larger deficits and acute housing shortages that demanded immediate attention, which the Liberal Party promised to deliver. Land value taxation factored heavily into the general election of January 1906 in which the Liberal Party picked up a staggering 400 seats. Ninety percent of Liberal candidates elected from Scottish constituencies, and 52 percent of all Liberal candidates elected to Parliament that year, supported the passage of a land value taxation bill.¹⁴³ As a first step toward delivering on their campaign promises, Liberal party leaders began drafting a bill to reform the land valuation process that separated the value of land from improvements. The complexity and novelty of the task stalled progress. When the House of Commons finally passed a Land Values Bill in 1907 and 1908, the House of Lords rejected it.

To get around the Lords' veto, Lloyd George, who became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1908, floated the idea to party leaders of inserting a measure for a national and uniform valuation of land separate from improvements into the Budget along with new taxes on land. The Party, Lloyd George argued, could justify the new taxes on the basis of the looming deficit due to a decline in the returns from existing taxes, increased

¹⁴² Committee of the Land Law Reform Association on Urban Taxation and Tenure, *The Ratepayer and the Landowner: A Statement of the Case for the Rating of Ground Values in Towns* (London: The Land Law Reform Association, 1898), 13, 3, and 6.

¹⁴³ Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land*, 54.

naval construction, and the government's new social reforms including old age pensions and insurance for sickness.¹⁴⁴ It also could present land value taxation as part of its defense of free trade. As historian Bruce K. Murray explains, "Joseph Chamberlain's programme for tariff reform, the Liberals always emphasized, required a tax on the people's bread; and it was by means of such undemocratic taxes, they claimed, that Tariff Reformers intended to provide for the country's finances."¹⁴⁵ In contrast, the land taxes proposed in Lloyd George's Budget, which also included increased death duties and income tax, fell on the well-to-do and could not be shifted to the poor in the form of higher prices or rent.

In truth, the land taxes represented the smallest portion of the Budget's estimated revenue and did not fall upon site values, as urged by urban land value taxation supporters. Instead, the three land duties included a 20 percent levy on the future 'unearned' value of urban land, a half-penny per pound duty on the value of vacant land, minerals, and mineral rights, and a 10 percent reversion duty on the value accruing to the lessor at the termination of a leasehold. Altogether, Lloyd George estimated these taxes would raise £500,000, whereas the other taxes in his budget he estimated would raise 25 million pounds.¹⁴⁶ In fact, as historian David Brinkerhoff Gilbert explains, Lloyd George included the land taxes as "simply a camouflage for land valuation, which was central to everything else he hoped to accomplish in land reform. Without land taxes to justify it, land valuation was simply a piece of administrative law and as such was out of order in

¹⁴⁴ Bruce K. Murray, "The Politics of the 'People's Budget,'" *The Historical Journal* 16:3 (1973), 556.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 558.

¹⁴⁶ David Brinkerhoff Gilbert, "David Lloyd George: Land, the Budget, and Social Reform" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 82 (Dec., 1976), 1063.

the budget.”¹⁴⁷ The taxes, however, failed to mask the Budget’s larger land reform goal and on November 30, 1909, the House of Lords vetoed Lloyd George’s Financial Bill. In response, Prime Minister Asquith dissolved Parliament and called for a general election in January 1910.

Although Liberals maintained control of government, and the Lords eventually accepted Lloyd George’s Budget, the land program achieved mixed results. For one, the national valuation proved both costly and difficult. During the 1913-14 Budget cycle, Lloyd George estimated that it would cost over £2,000,000 to finish the work already started. Additionally, in July 1914 the courts overturned the tax on the value of vacant land and suspended the duties on the future unearned increment and lease reversions.¹⁴⁸ While Lloyd George determined to keep land valuation rating reform at the top of his budgetary priorities after the election, the electorate and many members of his own party became swept up in constitutional reform specifically focused on producing a bill to curb the power of the House of Lords. Additionally, a national coal strike in March 1912 shifted Liberals’ immediate concerns from land to labor and unemployment. The outbreak of World War I followed the national coal strike. While the movement for land value taxation at the local level remained active for several years after the budget fiasco of 1909, it failed to regain momentum in Parliament.¹⁴⁹

The legacy of the single tax in Great Britain achieved mixed results. The publication of *Progress and Poverty* and arrival of Henry George in the British Isles in the early 1880s coincided with significant events and transformations that provided an

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 1063.

¹⁴⁸ Packer, *Lloyd George, Liberalism and the Land*, 64.

¹⁴⁹ For more on the failure of the Parliamentary land value taxation campaign, see Francis Neilson, “The Land Values Movement in Great Britain” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 18 (April 1959), 236-239.

ideal setting for the revival of natural rights-based land reform and ideas that promised to level the economic playing field. George's popularity stemmed from his ability to speak directly to the particular problems facing landless farmers and industrial workers.

Additionally, British intellectuals of all stripes, who were stirred to social reform by the Irish Land War and appallingly visible effects of rapid industrialization in the nation's cities, found in *Progress and Poverty* and the single tax key principles essential to the justification of state intervention in social and economic life. These included the concept of economic rent and the belief that poverty and wealth inequality were preventable and could be mitigated through state action.

While the single tax failed to achieve legislative success the principles that informed it became central components of British socialism and the related movements for land value taxation and land nationalization. They also enjoyed broad support among Liberal and progressive leaders focused on urban development and land reform. Liberal leaders' recognition of the urban dimension of land reform in the 1890s helped unify and revitalize the Party and played a crucial role in its 1906 electoral sweep. In his attempt to abolish private property in land, George achieved several important victories. Probably none was more important than the increased attention given to the "land question" and its recognition as a symptom of social and economic imbalance at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In between George's British tours, the United Labor Party nominated him to represent the interests of more than 150,000 working men and women in the New York City 1886 mayoral election. Although he lost the election, the campaign represented the height of George's political career and popularity in the United States. A key component

of the ULP's success hinged upon a broad coalition of supporters that included socialists. Similar to George's experiences in Britain, the ideological rift between socialist and single taxers eventually became too powerful to overcome. By the summer of 1887, labor activists and social reformers were forced to choose between two separate movements: the single tax and socialism. While both aimed to reduce poverty and empower individual workers, they embraced different methods.

III.

Land Reform and Labor Activism:

Henry George and the 1886 Campaign for Mayor of New York City

The results were in. With 90,296 votes, Democrat Abram Hewitt edged out Henry George, who received 68,110 votes in the 1886 election for mayor of New York City. Despite the defeat, George appeared upbeat as he addressed a crowd of his disappointed supporters just after midnight on November 3rd at the United Labor Party election headquarters on Eighth Street. “I congratulate you tonight on the victory we have won,” he bellowed, “They may bribe, they may count us out, by their vile arts they may defeat what would be an honest verdict of the people; but we have gained what we fought for. Thank God, we have made a beginning. We have demonstrated the political power of labor. Never again—never again, will the politicians look upon a labor movement with contempt.”¹ The speech was more than mere hubris.

The entire nation had closely followed the mayoral contest, viewing it as a central battlefield in the larger war waged by organized labor against the established political parties. That year, more than half a million workers participated in over 1,400 strikes and 140 lockouts throughout the country.² Contemporaries dubbed 1886 “the year of the

¹ Post and Leubuscher, *Henry George's 1886 Mayoral Campaign*, 169.

² Melvin Dubofsky, *Industrialism and the American Worker, 1865-1920* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1975), 34.

great uprising.”³ Organized labor fielded more than 180 candidates in elections at a variety of levels in all but four states; no one generated more enthusiasm than the choice of the United Labor Party (ULP), the political arm of the Central Labor Union, a local trade assembly, for mayor of New York City.⁴ “The candidacy of Mr. Henry George for mayor of New York is the most important political movement of the year,” the editors of the *Atlantic Constitution* opined a month before the election. His nomination “marks the opening of a political struggle, and may be as far-reaching as the sharp roll of musketry that opened the battle of the first Manassas.”⁵ Although George lost the election, he beat the Republican candidate Theodore Roosevelt who placed third. George out-performed every other mayoral candidate ever fielded by organized labor in New York City. According to historian Edward Thomas O’Donnell, no labor candidate before or after George earned more than five percent of the total votes; in 1886 George received 31 percent.⁶

The campaign, as historian Arthur Nicholas Young aptly has described it, was “short, spectacular, and hot.”⁷ Although Hewitt, a wealthy manufacturer, refused George’s repeated requests for a public debate, the two exchanged several letters published in the local and national papers throughout the course of the campaign. George portrayed Hewitt and members of the business class he represented as leeches who

³ Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492 to the Present* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005), 273.

⁴ Robert Weir, “A Fragile Alliance: Henry George and the Knights of Labor” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 56 (Oct., 1997), 422.

⁵ “Mr. Henry George’s Campaign,” *The Atlanta Constitution* (Oct. 8, 1886), 4.

⁶ Edward T. O’Donnell, “Henry George and the ‘New political forces’: Ethnic Nationalism, Labor Radicalism, and Politics in Gilded Age New York City” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1995), 10.

⁷ Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 98.

fattened off the labor of others. Hewitt accused George of waging class warfare, likening his policies to those of Robespierre. Both candidates ignored Roosevelt.⁸

The campaign represented the height of organized labor's efforts to forge an independent political party during the Gilded Age, and George's candidacy helps account for its unparalleled success. Under George's leadership, the ULP bridged the ethnic, racial, class, and ideological differences that so often derailed the political efforts of organized labor. The balance of traditional and radical reform elements in George's political vision appealed to members of the working and middle classes. The religiosity of his message attracted two of the city's most popular and church leaders, Father Edward McGlynn and Reverend Herber Newton. Both played a significant role in the campaign; the participation of Father McGlynn, as the next chapter demonstrates, proved especially controversial, leading to one of the most notable cases of religious dissent in U.S. history.

The campaign affords the opportunity not only to examine one of the most intense political contests involving organized labor during the Gilded Age, but also the reasons for and extent of George's popularity among the working class. This chapter considers the contemporary forces that led to George's nomination and the components of his philosophy that resonated with organized labor and aided CLU political efforts. In contrast to the many historians who have undervalued the significance of George's commitment to make land common, this chapter demonstrates the central role that commitment played throughout the campaign and in attracting the support of the middle and working classes. George's denunciation of private property in land and his proposal

⁸ Edward P. Kohn, "A Necessary Defeat: Theodore Roosevelt and the New York Mayoral Election of 1886," *New York History* 87 (Spring 2006), 204-227.

to shift the burden of city taxes to land values influenced the formation of the ULP platform of 1886. In its selection of George to represent the interests of working men and women in 1886, the ULP built upon a long tradition of political efforts waged jointly by land and labor activists.

1886: The Year of Organized Labor

National interest in the mayoral campaign of 1886 resulted from a variety of sources, not the least of which were the location and actors involved. Outside of Chicago, no other American city rivaled New York in terms of organized labor activity. According to most labor historians, the CLU, a local trade organization, was the most active and successful organization of its kind. The CLU formed during a February 1882 meeting organized by city workers to support the Irish Land League's "No Rent Manifesto." By 1886 the union represented more than 200 labor organizations and nearly 150,000 members.⁹ The CLU planned and executed a majority of the 1,200 strikes and boycotts conducted in New York City in 1886 including the "Great Tie-Up" on March 14, in which more than 16,000 streetcar workers participated in what O'Donnell has called "the largest mass transit strike in the city's history."¹⁰ Perhaps more impressive, the CLU organized the first "Labor Day" parade to honor the country's workers on Monday, September 5, 1882. In 1894, Congress would declare the first Monday in September a federal holiday.

The campaign also garnered national attention, due to the stakes involved in choosing the next leader of the country's most important metropolis. By 1880, no other city in the country rivaled New York in terms of population, wealth, industry, and

⁹ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States. Volume Two*, 33.

¹⁰ O'Donnell, "Henry George and the 'New political forces,'" 401.

culture. It was home to the most millionaires, merchants, and industrial capitalists, who not only ruled the city's economy but also its government. Every mayor elected in New York City since 1872, as O'Donnell has pointed out, had been "a wealthy merchant connected to the city's highest sources of commercial and social power." Most were nominated by Tammany Hall, one of the nation's oldest and most powerful Democratic Party factions.¹¹ Any political challenger from outside the ranks of the business class faced significant obstacles.

Besides boasting the most millionaires, New York also contained the nation's largest concentration of poor and working class residents. In 1879, the Board of Health estimated that 720,000 New Yorkers, roughly 65 percent of the city's total population, lived in tenements—tiny, multi-family dwellings which Jacob A. Riis famously depicted in his 1890 study *How the Other Half Lives* as "nurseries of crime, and of the vices and disorderly courses which lead to crime."¹² Any political challenger who could successfully mobilize this group stood a fair shot at the polls.

The election also came after a series of national clashes involving organized labor, including the Haymarket bombing on May 4, 1886. Three days after nearly 100,000 workers gathered in Chicago on May 1 to rally for a national eight-hour work day, a bomb exploded in Haymarket Square killing seven police officers and four civilians. After a quick and controversial trial, a jury found eight anarchists guilty of conspiracy in connection with the bombing. Seven were sentenced to death; the other to 15 years in prison. Illinois Governor Richard J. Oglesby later reduced two of the death sentences to life in prison. One of those scheduled for execution committed suicide, and

¹¹ Ibid., 203.

¹² Ibid., 253; Jacob A. Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890), 2.

four were hanged the following year. The Haymarket tragedy provoked a wave of anti-leftist sentiment in the United States and contributed to a legal counter-offensive waged against organized labor by state and city forces around the country. Employers formed black lists of unionized workers, mandated their employees take an “iron clad” oath not to organize, and hired Pinkerton detectives to enforce such pledges.¹³

The backlash against organized labor was especially harsh in New York City. Following a series of successful strikes and boycotts during the winter and spring of 1886, on April 20, New York City law enforcement officers launched a massive “legal round up,” which continued until early summer and resulted in the arrests nearly one hundred labor activists on charges of conspiracy.¹⁴ Among those apprehended were five CLU members, arrested for their involvement in the March boycott against George Theiss, an owner of a popular concert saloon on East Fourteenth Street. The boycott began after Theiss refused to pay his musicians union wages. The CLU printed flyers, maintained picket lines, and cut off the music hall’s food and liquor provisions by threatening to boycott Theiss’ suppliers. After several weeks, Theiss agreed to CLU demands that he only hire union men, pay union wages, and reimburse the union \$1,000 for the cost of organizing and maintaining the boycott. During the round up, Theiss sued the CLU for extortion over this last demand. A jury composed solely of individuals who—as mandated by New York State law—owned at least \$250 in real or personal property, found all five defendants guilty. On July 2, they were sentenced to hard labor

¹³ For more on this backlash against organized labor after Haymarket see, Foner, *History of the Labor Movement. Volume Two*, 116-118 and Henry David, *The History of the Haymarket Affair: A Study of the American Social-Revolutionary and Labor Movements*, 3rd ed. (New York: Collier Books, 1936), 178-189.

¹⁴ For more on the state’s use of the conspiracy doctrine to suppress labor activism, see Leon Fink, “Labor, Liberty, and the Law: Trade Unionism and the Problem of the American Constitutional Order,” *The Journal of American History* 74 (Dec., 1987): 904-925 and Forbath, “The Ambiguities of Free Labor,” 767-817.

at Sing-Sing State prison—two for a term of two years and ten months, two for one and one-half years, and the other for three years and eighteen months.¹⁵

The CLU called a joint meeting of its New York and Brooklyn branches on July 11 to consider a political response to the harsh sentences and the state's legal offensive against organized labor. On August 5, more than 400 delegates representing 165 local labor organizations met at New York City's Clarendon Hall, where they appointed a committee to form an independent labor party and select candidates to represent it in the fall election. This committee met on August 19 and floated the name Henry George as a possible candidate in the upcoming mayoral contest.

George did not desire to run for public office. Nor did he believe that he could possibly win the mayoralty when he first heard of his pending nomination. George generally eschewed politics, and in the summer of 1886, he was preoccupied with the promotion of his new book, *Protection or Free Trade*, in which George endeavored to show how free trade better served the interests of domestic labor than protectionism and high tariffs. He fully intended to decline the nomination until he received a request for a private meeting with William M. Ivins, New York City manager and close friend of William Grace, the assumed mayoral nominee of the County Democracy party. At that meeting, George recalled, Ivins told him that he stood no chance of winning the election and offered him a deal: if George declined the nomination the Democratic Party would ensure his election to Congress in 1888. Puzzled, George asked "Why, if I cannot

¹⁵ David Scobey, "Boycotting the Politics Factory: Labor Republicanism and the New York City Mayoral Election 188[6]" *Radical History Review* 28-30 (1984), 300-301; Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States. Volume Two*, 117-118; O'Donnell, "Henry George and the 'New Political Forces,'" 445-462; and, Post and Lebuscher, *Henry George's 1886 Mayoral Campaign*, 1-4.

possibly get the office, do you want me to withdraw?” Ivins replied, “You cannot be elected, but your running will raise hell!”¹⁶

To “raise hell” was exactly what George wanted most out of the election; he prioritized the publicity of his views over political success. To ensure that his candidacy would be taken seriously, George conditioned his acceptance of the ULP nomination with the request that party officials gather at least 30,000 signatures of voters who intended to support him. The ULP collected 34,400. On October 5, 1886, George formally announced his candidacy to a large crowd in a packed Cooper Union Hall. After much debate, the Tammany Hall and the County Democracy—two factions of the New York Democratic Party—decided to join forces and run only one candidate. On October 16, the Democrats nominated Hewitt, a Congressman and member of the manufacturing firm Cooper, Hewitt, & Company.

The choice of George as the candidate for organized labor made “eminently good political sense,” as historian David Scobey and others have pointed out. By 1886 *Progress and Poverty* was the top selling text on political economy; it could be found in nearly every reading room in the assembly halls of the Knights of Labor—the nation’s largest labor organization with over 720,000 paying members.¹⁷ Additionally, George lacked partisan ties, and he was well-known among New Yorkers, and especially among members of the CLU, for his speeches on behalf of the American branch of the Irish Land League. The CLU had hosted a homecoming celebration for George upon his

¹⁶ George Jr., *The Life of Henry George*, 463. The validity of this account, which also appears in “George Replies to Hewitt. Open Letter Contradicting Statements in Published Interviews” *New York Times* (Oct., 18, 1897), 3, has been questioned; as O’Donnell has pointed out, however, there are several reasons to trust its accuracy, the most compelling of which included the fact that in 1897, Ivins was still alive when this story broke and although he denied George’s allegation that he offered him a bribe, he did not deny that the meeting took place. See, O’Donnell, “Henry George and the ‘New political forces,’” fn. 66, 522.

¹⁷ Weir, “A Fragile Alliance,” 423.

return to New York from Ireland in October 1882. At the reception Robert Blissert, then President of the CLU, declared that the working men and women of New York considered *Progress and Poverty* “the holiest Bible they ever received” and credited George for inspiring the first principle of the CLU constitution: “the land of every country is the common inheritance of the people.”¹⁸

Despite the origins of the CLU and the union’s relationship with George, historians have tended to downplay the importance of his ideas about land as a factor that led to his nomination and earned the support of the working classes. Philip S. Foner has argued, for example, that many New York laborers and socialists supported George’s bid for mayor “not on account of his single tax theory, but in spite of it” and that the ULP included a tax on city land values in its 1886 political platform only at “George’s insistence.” He additionally has claimed that the bulk of the platform, which included such measures supporting an eight-hour work day and equal pay for equal work regardless of gender, reflected the interests of labor activists, not land reformers.¹⁹

Some of George’s biographers and historians of the single tax movement have similarly overlooked the prominent role that George’s reputation as a land reformer and his proposal to tax land values played in his nomination and throughout the campaign. Instead, they have tended to focus on the appeal and resonance of his particular brand of labor republicanism, which celebrated the virtue of those who worked for a living over those who lived off the labor of others. Furthermore, many have emphasized that few workers actually grasped the mechanics of George’s land value taxation theory or how it would benefit them. As Young noted, for example, “Many who had little or no

¹⁸ Blissert quoted in Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 93; the CLU platform quoted in O’Donnell, “Henry George and the ‘New Political Forces,’” 273.

¹⁹ Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States. Volume Two*, 120, 122.

comprehension of his theory of social reform and to whom his notions of rent and interest were as unintelligible as Sanskrit, were attracted to [George] by his vivid portrayal of one class of the community living in ease at the expense of the exploited toilers.²⁰ Thomas has similarly insisted that it was George's "producerism" cloaked in Christian morality that most attracted the support of the working classes. As part of his "producerist faith," Thomas explains, George elevated the status of those who contributed to the general stock of wealth through their labor (productive members) and denigrated those who lived off the wealth created by the labor of others (non-productive members).²¹

The work of O'Donnell provides an exception to the tendency of historians to undervalue the significance of land reform in the 1886 campaign. Building on the studies of Young and Thomas, O'Donnell argued that George promoted a kind of "progressive republicanism" that appealed to workers in large part because it denounced private property in land. Like the labor variety fashioned by workers and their advocates during the Civil War and Emancipation eras, progressive republicanism, as O'Donnell explains, focused on curbing the excesses of rapid urbanization and unrestricted capitalism, and carved out an important place for the laborer as a producer of wealth in a well-functioning democratic society.

Progressive republicanism also differed from other types in its direct challenge to the system of private ownership in land and natural resources. As O'Donnell writes:

George took the basic tenets of labor republicanism, validated its claims through scientific inquiry, and then augmented them with novel arguments and unique insights, particularly on the issue of private property, the foundation of liberal capitalism. The result was what one could term a "progressive republicanism," an

²⁰ Young, for example, in *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 103 writes that "

²¹ Thomas, *Alternative America*, 223.

ideological framework that went beyond earlier forms in an attempt to answer what George termed the “riddle of the Sphinx.”²²

Although branded a radical by his opponents, George actually worked within the confines of traditional American political culture. Rather than socialism, George promoted democracy; rather than anarchy, he urged workers to utilize the political system to address their concerns. And, as historian Steven J. Ross has argued, the key to George’s popularity in 1886 lay in his “ability to draw upon traditional American values,” including freedom, independence, and political virtue, “to justify and legitimize radical ends”—the making of a society without involuntary poverty or private property in land.²³ Thus to many historians, George’s powerful and unique producer-based republicanism accounted for his popularity among workers in the 1880s; his theories about land merely represented part of his political economic vision.

The story told in this chapter challenges the conventional view of Henry George’s 1886 campaign. I argue that George’s commitment to land reform directly led to his nomination and also accounts for the broad support he received from the middle and working classes of America’s largest city. Above all, George sought to liberate workers from the chains of wage labor and poverty by granting them access to land. This promise of “landed independence” for all laborers was the core of George’s political vision.²⁴ As

²² O’Donnell, “Henry George and the ‘New political forces,’” 116. For more on the variants of American republicanism throughout the 18th and 19th centuries see O’Donnell, “Henry George and the ‘New political forces,’” 104-125; Daniel T. Rodgers, “Republicanism: The Career of a Concept” *Journal of American History* 79 (June 1992): 11-38; Joyce Appleby, “Republicanism in Old and New Contexts” *The William Mary Quarterly* 43 (Jan., 1986): 20-34; and, Robert E. Shalhope, “Republicanism and Early American Historiography” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (Apr., 1982): 334-356.

²³ Steven J. Ross, “The Culture of Political Economy: Henry George and the American Working Class” *Southern California Quarterly* 65 (Summer 1983), 153.

²⁴ This phrase comes from Jamie L. Bronstein, *Land Reform and Working-Class Experience in Britain and the United States, 1800-1862* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 3 and refers to the desire shared among landless workers in the United States and Great Britain to secure their own piece of land from which they could live and work in the first half of the nineteenth century.

late as 1886, and even in a great industrial center like New York, the sturdy belief in a natural right to the soil and the potential of the nation's vast reservoir of land to provide refuge for unemployed and underpaid eastern workers continued to have great salience for Gilded Age workers.²⁵ George harnessed these ideas in his denunciation of private property in land, which he claimed perpetuated unemployment, low wages, and involuntary poverty. In doing so, George built upon a long tradition of efforts waged jointly by land and labor reformers to secure workers' economic independence and restore republican values through changes to the nation's land policies.

In particular, the ULP and the mayoral campaign of 1886 shared many similarities with the political efforts of New York Workingmen's Party led by agrarian radical Thomas Skidmore in the 1820s and the National Reform movement led by George Henry Evans and Horace Greeley in the 1840s and 1850s. All three efforts sought to secure workers' natural and equal rights to the soil, emphasized the power of land to function as a safety-valve for eastern labor, celebrated those who labored for a living, and denigrated those who exploited the labor of others. George's popularity among workers in 1886 stemmed in part from his reiteration of these principles and suggests that land reform remained a critical component of labor activism in the Gilded Age.

Despite the similarities between George and antebellum land reformers, an important difference remained. Unlike Skidmore, Greeley, and Evans, who viewed the notion of landed independence in largely agrarian terms—that is, they interpreted it to

²⁵ The work of historians William F. Deverell and Mark A. Lause provide two exceptions. In "To Loosen the Safety-Valve: Eastern Workers and Western Lands" *The Western Historical Quarterly* 19 (Aug., 1988): 269-285, Deverell acknowledged the power of the safety-valve theory and argued that the connection between land reform and the growth of trade union activism in the Gilded Age needs further study. Similarly, in "Progress Impoverished: Origin of Henry George's Single Tax," *Historian* 52 (May 1990): 364-372, Lause argues that in their failure to consider the origins of the single tax, historians have tended to view George's 1886 mayoral campaign as "but one of several impressively large but localized and short-lived outbursts of working-class political discontent."

mean that every man, woman, and child would have free access to a portion of the Earth upon which to build a home and farm—George re-envisioned this notion and described it in industrial capitalist terms. To George, landed independence meant freedom from excessive rent payments. Landed independence promised workers unrestricted access to their full wages and not merely the amount left after subtracting rent. In other words, through his mayoral campaign, George modernized the land question and demonstrated that issues of land ownership and distribution involved distinctly urban concerns.

Land Reform and Labor Activism in Antebellum America

Throughout the 19th century, organized labor supported reforms designed to broaden workers' access to land. In response to a rumor that employers intended to lengthen the workday from 10 to 12 hours, a group of New York City mechanics formed the Workingmen's Party of New York in the spring of 1829. Thomas Skidmore, a mechanist and radical agrarian, assumed a position of leadership and used the party to promote his plan to equalize property throughout the state. Earlier in 1829, Skidmore published a tract called *The Rights of Man To Property!*, in which he denounced the unequal distribution of property in society, claimed every individual enjoyed a natural right to possess property, and outlined an extensive legislative program to redistribute land and property.

Skidmore opened *The Rights of Man to Property!* with the declaration that the unequal division of property in society ultimately and everywhere leads to the oppression of one class at the expense of the other. As he explained,

One thing must be obvious to the plainest understanding; that as long as property is unequal; or rather, as long as it is so enormously unequal, as we see it at present, that those who possess it, *will* live on the labor of others, and themselves

perform none, or if any, a very disproportionate share, of that toil which attends them as a condition of their existence, and without the performance of which, they have no *just* right to preserve or retain that existence, even for a single hour.²⁶

Similar to Paine's principle of civilization—that no person born in civilized society ought to be worse off than if they had been born in a state of nature—Skidmore declared that every person in a state of society deserved the same rights that would attend them if they were born in a state of nature. One of these rights was access to property, which he claimed, existed for all mankind—present and future.

Unlike Paine and other writers who adopted the language of natural rights, Skidmore claimed that nature endowed individuals with an inherent right to property of *all* types, not merely property in land. As he claimed,

...that *title* to property exists for all; and for all alike; not because others have been; nor because they have *not* been; not because they had a certain being for a parent, rather than another being; not because they appear later, or earlier, on the stage of life, than others; not because of purchase, of conquest, of preoccupancy, or what not; but BECAUSE THEY ARE: BECAUSE THEY EXIST. I AM; THEREFORE IS PROPERTY MINE...²⁷

In other words, Skidmore rejected the notion that anything—even the application of one's labor—provided a just source of private ownership. In his refusal to equate labor with property, as historian Sean Wilentz has pointed out, Skidmore directly challenged the Lockean notion that labor represented a legitimate source of private property, a notion accepted by most radical writers, including Paine, and Henry George.

Skidmore believed that natural justice required the complete redistribution of property in society. He called for New York State to adopt—by popular vote—a new

²⁶ Thomas Skidmore, *The Rights of Man to Property! Being a proposition to make it equal among the adults of the present generation: and to provide for its equal transmission to every individual of each succeeding generation, on arriving at the age of maturity. Addressed to the citizens of the State of New-York, particularly, and to the People of other States and Nations, generally* (New York: Alexander Ming, Jr., 1829), 3-4.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 357. Emphasis in original.

constitution, under which all private property reverted to state control. Skidmore then called for the state to “order an equal division of all this property” among adult citizens and to prohibit the transfer or sale of this property once distributed. He proposed a term of imprisonment for up to 14 years for any citizen found in violation of this principle. In the case of the death of a spouse, Skidmore believed that half of the property should revert back to the state and the other half to remain with the surviving spouse or family member. “Property being thus continually and equally divided forever,” Skidmore wrote, would every citizen “enjoy in a state of society, substantially, the rights which belong to him in a state of nature.”²⁸

The popular press attacked Skidmore’s plan and the Workingmen’s Party for promoting “agrarianism.” The term “agrarian,” as historian Paul Conkin and others have noted, carried a negative connotation generally associated with forced redistribution of land and restrictions on landholding. The roots of agrarianism stretch back to ancient Greek and Roman land law. In particular, Conkin notes that the Gracchan Law of 133 B.C., which limited the amount of public land any one family could own to 300 acres, embodied the principles of agrarianism.²⁹ In the 1830s, Skidmore’s opponents used agrarianism as an epithet, claiming his plan was not only radically unjust but impractical.

Even those who admired Skidmore’s aim to affect a more equal distribution of property rejected his proposal as ineffective. Fellow labor activist Amos Gilbert described Skidmore’s plan as unjust, because “it would put the non-producer, on the same footing with the producer; it would give to the idler who has nothing, the same

²⁸ Ibid., 144.

²⁹ Paul K. Conkin, *Prophets of Prosperity: America’s First Political Economists* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1980), 224.

dividend with the industrious man, in the same circumstances.”³⁰ Gilbert suggested that instead of aiming to equalize the distribution of property, Skidmore and the Workingmen’s Party should support reforms designed to equalize the opportunities of individuals to acquire it. Toward that end, the Workingmen’s Party voted in December 1829 to distance itself from Skidmore and agrarianism and instead to dedicate their political efforts to the establishment of a system of free public education.

Furious, Skidmore left the Workingmen’s Party but continued to promote his redistribution plan until his death from cholera in 1832. The New York Workingmen’s Party collapsed shortly thereafter. In 1835, many of the men active in the Workingmen’s Party participated in the Locofoco movement, which emerged to block the election of specific Democratic officials deemed unfriendly to labor.³¹ Later the Locofocos reorganized into the Equal Rights Party but disbanded after a poor showing in the 1836 election. Labor activity fell in the aftermath of the Panic of 1837; for nearly seven years, wages, prices, and profits stagnated while unemployment continued to rise.

In March 1844, three printers led by George Henry Evans began meeting to discuss the formation of a new and independent political party to address unemployment and poverty among workers in the city. They called a public meeting at the site of the old Locofoco rallies and launched the National Reform Association. Evans and John Windt restarted publication of the *Working Man’s Advocate*, which they had first begun publishing in October 1829, to serve as the main organ of the New York Workingmen’s

³⁰ Amos Gilbert, “To Thomas Skidmore,” *The Free Enquirer* 4 (Dec., 24, 1831), 71.

³¹ The term Locofoco originated in the aftermath of the October 29, 1835 Democratic convention when a group of labor radicals tried to block the nomination of five Tammany Hall officers. The opposition grew so loud, according to historian Mark Lause that Party officials “resorted to a standard machine practice, turning off the gas and leaving the gathering to dissolve in darkness.” The effort failed as the radicals had brought candles and hundreds of “Lucifer” or “Locofoco” matches to keep the meeting well-lit. See, Mark A. Lause, *Young America: Land, Labor, and the Republican Community* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 13.

Party, and had discontinued in 1836. Before Skidmore's break with the Party, the following quote appeared in the masthead of the *Advocate*: "all children are entitled to equal education; all adults to equal property; and all mankind, to equal privileges."³²

Similar to the Workingmen's Party, the National Reform Association (NRA) focused on achieving a broader distribution of wealth and property in society. Under Evans leadership, however, the party limited its efforts to landed property.

As its first task, the Association set out to study the causes of and solutions to unemployment and low wages. The findings were printed in the *Working Man's Advocate* on July 6, 1844. The report, which informed the NRA's political program, emphasized the potential of the nation's vast reservoir of land to provide relief to labor through a more just and judicious system of its distribution. "Nature is not unjust," the report reads, "The Power who called forth those mechanical forces did not call them forth for our destruction. Our refuge is upon the soil, in all its freshness and fertility—our heritage is on the Public Domain, in all its boundless wealthy and infinite variety."³³ Given this, "the first great object" of the NRA included establishing the right of the people to the public domain, which must be treated as "capital stock" belonging to the people and their posterity.

To protect the public domain and make it more available to workers, the NRA proposed what became known as the "Township Plan," which it adapted from Thomas Jefferson's Rural Plan for Republican Townships. Jefferson's plan had called for the state to subdivide its counties into separate wards of six-square miles each. He called

³² Hulliung, *The Social Contract in America*, 84.

³³ "To The People of the United States," *The Working Man's Advocate* 1 (July 6, 1844), 2.

then for each ward to establish and operate its own schools, militia, police, courts, roads, town hall, and system of poor relief. In that way, he wrote,

Each ward would thus be a small republic within itself, and every man in the state would thus become an acting member of the common government, transacting in person a great portion of its rights and duties, subordinate indeed, yet important and entirely within his competence. The wit of man cannot devise a more solid bases for a free, durable, and well-administered Republic.³⁴

To Jefferson, small, independent towns helped foster virtuous and self-reliant citizens, necessary for the health of the entire nation. Building on Jefferson's vision, the NRA proposed the creation of six-mile townships composed of 40 lots of five acres, and 140 farms and 160 acres. The NRA called for the federal government to carve these townships and farms from the public domain and to give them for free to individual adults without land of their own.

The report not only utilized the language of natural rights but also relied heavily upon the notion that America's special place in the world depended in large measure on the existence and treatment of its vast public domain to justify its reforms and attract followers. "If we were circumstanced like the inhabitants of Europe, there would seem to be little hope of getting the laboring population out of the difficulties, and distress in which they are at present involved," the report explained. Without a large supply of uninhabited land, the report continued, "There [Europe], the laboring classes have no recourse, except to sell the labor of their bodies for whatever price it will bring—live upon that pittance, as long as it will sustain them alive; and when it fails, sink into the grave which is yawning to receive them."³⁵ In contrast, the United States possessed a

³⁴ "Opinions of Thomas Jefferson. Organization of the Township," *The Working Man's Advocate* 1 (July 6, 1844), 4. For more on Jefferson's town planning, see John W. Reys, "Thomas Jefferson's Checkerboard Towns," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 20 (Oct., 1961); 108-114.

³⁵ "To The People of the United States," 2.

seemingly endless supply of rich soil capable of providing for the livelihood of all its citizens and serving as “an outlet” where “our superabundant labor” can find relief.

Although the NRA restricted its redistribution efforts to the public domain, the report echoed Skidmore’s concern for the welfare of future generations and demand that the government stop treating the public domain as a commodity. The report even borrowed some of the same language utilized by Skidmore to make these points. In the conclusion to *The Rights of Man To Property!* Skidmore utilized the metaphor of a dinner table to make his case against the concentration of property:

Those who have gone before us, have been first to sit down to the table, and to enjoy themselves, without interruption, from those who came afterwards; and not content with this enjoyment, they have disposed of the whole dinner, in such a manner, that nine-tenths of the beings that now people this globe, have not wherewith to dine, but upon terms such as these first monopolisers, those to whom they pretend they have conferred their own power as successors, shall choose to dictate.³⁶

The NRA report utilized similar language to denounce the government’s mishandling of the public domain:

We regard the Public Lands as Capital Stock, which belongs, not to us only, but also to posterity. The profits of that stock are ours, the profits only. The moment congress, or any other power, attempts to alienate the stock itself to speculators, that moment do they attempt a cruel, and cowardly, fraud upon posterity, against which, as citizens and as honest men, we enter our most solemn protest. *It is enough for us to eat our own bread—what right have we to sit down and consume the bread of our children?*³⁷

Inherent in this metaphor utilized by both Skidmore and the NRA is the belief that all people—present and future—must draw from the same and finite resources to provide for their sustenance. Those who monopolize these resources and therefore impede on the ability of future generations to survive commit a grave injustice against all humanity.

³⁶ Skidmore, *The Rights of Man To Property!*, 355-356.

³⁷ “To the People of the United States,” 2. Emphasis added.

The appeal of the NRA's message led to the formation of similar land reform groups throughout New York and other states on the eastern seaboard. By September 1845, *the New York Tribune* carried daily reports of the progress of the land reform movement and the paper's editor, Horace Greeley became an active NRA member. In October 1845, the NRA joined forces with the New England Workingmen's Association and began holding annual meetings under the name Industrial Congress. The American followers of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier led by Albert Brisbane also attended these meetings and in the spring of 1846, voted the NRA ticket.³⁸

The NRA followed the method utilized by the Locofocos and mainly relied on petitions and pledges to affect political change. In signing the NRA Constitution, all members agreed "that we will not vote for any man, for any legislative office, who will not pledge himself, in writing, to use all the influence of his station, if elected, to prevent further traffic in the Public Lands of the States and of the United States, and to cause them to be laid out in Farms and Lots for the free and exclusive use of actual settlers."³⁹ To encourage other voters to adopt the same pledge, the NRA issued handbills and conducted petition-drives prior to elections. In one of its more famous election pamphlets, the NRA encouraged citizens to "Vote Yourself a Farm."

Issued in January 1846, the pamphlet outlined the various ways that the NRA's land reform program promised to benefit all types of Americans. The pamphlet opened with the following questions: "Are you an American citizen? Then you are a joint-owner of the public lands. Why not take enough of your property to provide yourself a home? Why not vote yourself a farm? ... Are you tired of slavery—of drudging for others—of

³⁸ Lause, *Young America*, 35.

³⁹ "National Reform Association: Constitution," *The Working Man's Advocate* 1 (April 6, 1844), 1.

poverty and its attendant miseries? Then, Vote yourself a farm.”⁴⁰ By limiting the quantity of land anyone person could hold or inherit, and making the public domain free to actual settlers, the NRA promised to restore individual’s right to land without infringing upon their equally sacred right to enjoy the fruits of their labor. In fact, as the pamphlet explained, these two proposals promised to transform social relations and improve economic opportunity so that no class could live off the labor of others. As a result of these measures, the pamphlet concluded, “Wealth would become a changed social element; it would then consist of the accumulated products of human labor, instead of a hoggish monopoly of the products of God’s labor; and the antagonism of capital and labor would forever cease.”⁴¹

Three months after the publication of “Vote Yourself a Farm,” Representative Richard P. Herrick, a Whig from New York, introduced a homestead bill backed by the NRA but the House voted 56-50 not to print it. Another homestead bill did not appear in Congress until 1848 when New York voters elected Greeley to fill a vacancy in the House of Representatives. On December 13, 1848 Greeley announced his intention to introduce homestead legislation but the House postponed discussion of the bill until after the New Year. When he finally got the chance to introduce his bill on February 27, 1849, according to historian Roy M. Robbins, a Congressman from a western state demanded to know why a New Yorker “should busy himself with the disposition of the public domain” to which Greeley lectured that “he represented more landless men than any other

⁴⁰ “Vote Yourself a Farm” in Commons, *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society*. Vol. VII, 305-6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 306.

member” of Congress.⁴² For Greeley and the National Reformers, the distribution of the public domain affected the lives of all Americans and especially those who labored for others. The promise of the nation’s vast reservoir of land to provide an alternative to wage-labor made the issue especially pertinent to workers in the northeast.

In 1850, Greeley highlighted the universality of the land question in an essay titled “Land Reform.” Following in the intellectual footsteps of Jefferson, Paine, Skidmore, and Evans, Greeley evoked the language of natural rights and emphasized the “safety-valve” feature of the nation’s vast public domain. Greeley showed how the enjoyment and realization of the “inalienable rights” described in the Declaration of Independence hinged upon man’s access to land.

Having a right to Liberty, [man] must have consequently the right to go *somewhere* on earth and do what is essential to his continued existence, not by the purchased permission of some other man, but by virtue of his manhood. . . . In short, the terrestrial Man, possessing the well-known properties of matter as well as of spirit, can only in truth enjoy the rights of ‘Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness,’ by being guaranteed some *place* in which to enjoy them. He who has no clear, inherent right to live *somewhere*, has no right to live at all.⁴³

The right to land preempted all other natural rights. Given that land represented a finite resource, limitations must be placed on the amount that any one individual can hold.

Greeley used the remainder of the essay to highlight the benefits of the NRA proposal to place limits on land ownership, make public land free to actual settlers, and prevent the treatment of land as a commodity. “National Reform is the broad and sure basis whereon all other Reforms may be safely erected,” he claimed:

A single law of Congress, proffering to each landless citizen a patch of the Public Domain—small but sufficient, when faithfully cultivated, for the sustenance of his family, and forbidding further sales of the Public Lands except in limited

⁴² Roy Marvin Robbins, “Horace Greeley: Land Reform and Unemployment, 1837-1862,” *Agricultural History* 7 (Jan., 1933), 31.

⁴³ Horace Greeley, *Hints Toward Reforms* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1850), 312.

quantities to actual settlers, with a suitable provision against future aggregation, would promote immensely the independence, enlightenment, morality, industry, and comfort of our entire laboring population evermore.⁴⁴

In addition to strengthening the individual character of Americans, the NRA land reform proposal also promised to renew and maintain American democracy by reducing unemployment and the pent-up social tension festering in eastern labor markets. As Greeley continued,

It would improve the condition of the laboring class in our cities, not by drawing away all to the new lands of the West, but by so enlarging the stream of emigration thither as to diminish the pressure of competition in the Labor market throughout the country, and enable the hireling to make terms with his employer as to the duration of his daily toil and the amount of his recompense.⁴⁵

The benefits of federal homestead legislation that restricted land holdings and opened the public domain to actual settlers were endless. All of the nation's problems, it appeared to Greeley, would be solved with this simple and effective remedy.

In 1860, Congress finally passed a Homestead Act and President Buchanan vetoed it. Two years later, as war raged between the North and South, President Lincoln signed the Homestead Act into law. Although the Act failed in many aspects as previously discussed, it embodied the core principles for which land and labor activists fought for the previous 20 years: it limited the amount of land any one individual could purchase and restricted purchase of the public domain to actual settlers. These principles continued to motivate the political efforts of labor activists throughout the rest of the nineteenth century. As the nomination and campaign of Henry George for mayor of New York City demonstrates, the belief in a natural right to land and the potential of the public

⁴⁴ Ibid., 317.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

domain to function as a safety valve for eastern labor remained powerful ideas for organizing workers.

George's Appeal among Labor Activists in the Gilded Age

George first attracted the attention of New York City workers as a result of his support of the Irish Land League in 1881 and 1882. With a large Irish immigrant population, the plight of Irish peasants became especially important in New York, where the most active branches of the American Land League flourished. In 1880, roughly 16 percent of the city's population was born in Ireland and at least 35 percent reported one Irish-born parent.⁴⁶ Besides its large Irish population, New York attracted land reformers due to the exorbitant value of land and cost of living throughout the city. During the economic boom of the post-Civil War era, the New York real estate market experienced significant expansion. According to historian Sven Beckert, between 1868 and 1872 more than 11,000 building plans were filed in Manhattan and land values soared. In one extreme case, as Beckert notes, "A lot bought in 1868 by the YMCA at Fourth Avenue and 23rd street for \$75,000 was sold a few months later for \$125,000."⁴⁷ The increase, as George would point out, resulted not from the personal efforts of the lot's owners, but from the high-demand for land in New York City.

Upon George's return to New York from Ireland, where he had served as a correspondent for the *Irish World*, the CLU held a banquet in his honor at Cooper Union. According to O'Donnell, nearly every speaker at the banquet that night credited George and the Irish Land League for the revelation that land monopoly presented the "prime

⁴⁶ O'Donnell, "Henry George and the 'New political forces,'" 136.

⁴⁷ Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 150-151.

source of their oppression.” Robert Blissert, an Irish immigrant tailor declared that “No man has unsheathed a sword in defense of Labor so grand and so beautiful as that which Henry George unsheathed in that book of his.”⁴⁸ The official address of the CLU noted that George’s name “had become a household word to millions” and that his teachings “would yet lead labor out of the house of bondage in which it had so long sojourned.”⁴⁹ Thus, from the beginning of its recognition of George, the CLU valued his ideas about land and what its distribution and treatment as private property revealed about the cause of labor’s troubles and how to relieve them.

In 1883, Congress invited George to testify before the Senate Committee on Education and Labor alongside other experts and representatives from the fields of organized labor and capital at a series of hearings held in 1883. The purpose of the hearings was to consider a broad range of issues affecting the conditions and relations of labor and capital, including the causes of labor strikes and industrial depressions in the United States. The Committee sought recommendations for legislation designed to “promote harmonious relations between capitalists and laborers, and the interests of both, by the improvement of the condition of the industrial classes of the United States.”⁵⁰ The hearings afforded George the opportunity to distinguish his views about labor from those of other witnesses, including Samuel Gompers, then an organizer among the city’s cigar-rollers, and industrialist Jay Gould.

In contrast to Gompers, who primarily blamed capitalists for the degraded condition of labor in the country, George targeted land monopolists. George described

⁴⁸ Ibid., 303.

⁴⁹ “A Reception for Mr. George” *The New York Times* (Oct. 21, 1882), 5.

⁵⁰ John A. Garraty, ed., *Labor and Capital in the Gilded Age: Testimony taken by the Senate Committee upon the Relations between Labor and Capital—1883* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1968), xi.

how unemployment, low wages, industrial depressions, and other labor grievances ultimately stemmed from the treatment of land as private property. As George explained to the Committee,

Ultimately, I believe the whole trouble to come from the fact that the natural field of employment, the primary source of wealth, the land, has been monopolized and labor is shut off from it. . . . Where there is free access to the soil, wages in any employment cannot sink lower than that which, upon an average, a man can make by applying himself to the soil – to those natural opportunities of labor which it affords. When the soil is monopolized and free access to it ceases, then wages may be driven to the lowest point on which the laborer can live.⁵¹

Unable to find or afford decent land of their own, George reasoned, laborers were forced to accept low-paying city jobs. Grant laborers free access to land, he reasoned, and the competition for these jobs would decrease and force employers to pay higher wages.

George admitted that while not all workers desired or would have the start-up capital necessary to become farmers, if given the chance, enough of them would trade factory work for the opportunity to work for themselves and thereby reduce competition and diffuse some of the social economic pressure in the cities. In other words, much like the National Reformers of the antebellum era, George viewed free land as a safety-valve.

To make land more accessible to laborers, George recommended that Congress remove all taxes except those on the value of land, the only legitimate source of taxation. “Our present system of taxation is a discouragement to the production of wealth. We tax a man according to what he has done, according to what he has added to the wealth of the community,” George lectured the Committee. “What we ought to do is tax men according to the natural opportunities which they have and do not use.”⁵² Specifically,

⁵¹ Ibid., 159.

⁵² Ibid., 168.

this meant shifting the burden of taxation off buildings and factories and onto land, especially land that is unimproved or unused.

George's views on unemployment and growing dissatisfaction among the nation's laboring classes—known generally as the “labor question”—differed in significant ways to those proffered by Gompers and Gould, the token spokesmen for organized labor and capital, respectively. To Gompers, the fact that labor and capital existed in two separate worlds and no longer shared similar interests contributed to workers' growing dissatisfaction. Working men and women,” he explained to the Committee, “find that employers are no longer [...] upon the same footing with them that they were on formerly.” Furthermore, Gompers insisted that the existence of labor unions represented the natural outgrowth of modern industrial conditions in which one class (capitalists) exploited and lived off the labor of the other class (workers). As he explained,

Modern industry evolved [trade unions] out of the existing conditions where there are two classes in society, one incessantly striving to obtain the labor of the other class for as little as possible, and to obtain the largest amount or number of hours of labor; and the members of the other class being as individuals utterly helpless in a contest with their employers, naturally resort to combinations to improve their condition, and, in fact, they are forced by the conditions which surround them to organize for self-protection.⁵³

Industrial capitalism, Gompers believed, naturally divided society into two, antagonistic classes—workers and capitalists.

Whereas George also recognized the existence of classes in society, he denied that any inherent tension existed between workers and their employers. Instead, he singled out the class of land monopolists who he claimed lived off the wealth generated by *both* laborers and capitalists. In response to Senator Pugh, who asked whether “labor gets its fair share now?” George responded in the negative, adding “neither do I think that

⁵³ Ibid., 18, 86.

capital, unless it has some monopolistic advantage, gets as much as it ought to get.”⁵⁴

George believed that land monopolists denied both workers and capitalists their full reward in the current industrial order that enabled private land monopoly.

Gould, on the other hand, viewed the existence of class divisions as both natural and unproblematic. He argued that, in general, workers and employers each earned a fair reward for their work and ought to be allowed to “mutually regulate their relations,” without government interference. When New Hampshire Senator Henry Blair asked for Gould’s recommendations for improving the lives of workers, he advised the best policy was for the government to do nothing. “[I]f men are temperate and industrious,” Gould declared, “they are pretty sure of success.” Furthermore, Gould claimed that American society was already a meritocracy. “In this country we have no system of heirlooms or of handing down estates. Every man has to stand here on his own individual merit.”⁵⁵

Unlike George or Gompers, Gould, a member of both the capitalist and land owning classes, had no quarrel with the status quo.

The Campaign

Henry George formally accepted the ULP nomination for mayor of New York City on October 5, 1886, at a packed meeting at Cooper Union Hall. The event was spectacular, with nearly 10,000 in attendance. “Cooper Union Hall could not have held more people than crowded into it last night to witness the tender of the nomination for Mayor to Henry George,” *The New York Times* reported.

The labor element composed the bulk of the gathering...Curiosity evidently had impelled the attendance of many in the hall. The quick eyes of the police and ushers had to some degree separated this class from those whose dress and

⁵⁴ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 47-48.

appearance indicated familiarity with labor halls only. Consequently the better dressed of the gathering and the 200 or so women who came in by the main entrance were massed in the front rows of seats. Back of that, clear to the walls, men were packed as sheep might be in a mammoth freight car.⁵⁶

In front of a large crowd—composed both of laborers and “the better dressed,” as the *Times* deemed it important to point out—ULP executive John McMackin introduced George as the party’s nominee. “We have selected one whose genius has done more to bring lustre to the American name than any other statesman since the days of Washington,” McMackin proclaimed. “We have selected a candidate, that, no matter what are the preferences, what are the predilections of any body of men, unites in one the favor of every working-man.”⁵⁷

George’s acceptance speech highlighted most of the six policies in the ULP platform adopted September 23, 1886. Taken as a whole, the platform follows the logic George used in *Progress and Poverty* to justify his proposal to socialize land values. The first plank declared that “corruptions of government and the impoverishment of labor” resulted from the failure of society to adhere to the “self-evident truths proclaimed by the founders” and permitted “monopolizers to deprive labor of natural opportunities for employment” by shutting off access to land. In the second plank, the ULP argued that “all advantages arising from social growth and improvement belong to society at large” and that the protection of the right of every individual to enjoy “the fruits” of his or her

⁵⁶ “Accepted by Mr. George: Cooper Union Crowded with his Friends,” *The New York Times* (October 6, 1886), 1. See also, “The Henry George Demonstration: Special Dispatch to *The Post*,” *The Washington Post* (October 6, 1886), 2.

⁵⁷ Post and Leubuscher, *Henry George’s 1886 Mayoral Campaign*, 18.

own labor represented the “true purpose” of government.⁵⁸ To George, rent subtracted from the earnings of laborers, thus denying them the full reward of their work.

The third plank most clearly represented the experiences of the CLU with local law enforcement and state officials. In addition to the elimination of the property qualifications for jurors, the plank demanded an end to the practice of police surveillance of and “intermeddling” in the meetings of organized labor. It also recommends greater enforcement of building safety and sanitary inspection laws.

The fourth plank promised a reduction in overcrowding and unemployment through the taxation of land values “irrespective of improvements” and the removal of taxes on buildings:

We declare the crowding of so many of our people into narrow tenements at enormous rents, while half the area of the city is yet unbuilt upon to be a scandalous evil, and to remedy this state of things all taxes on buildings and improvements should be abolished, so that no fine shall be put upon the employment of labor in increasing living accommodations, and that taxes should be levied on land irrespective of improvements, so that those who are now holding land vacant shall be compelled either to build on it themselves, or give up the land to those who will.⁵⁹

The fifth plank detailed the various uses for the increased revenue collected from the above suggested measure, including the financing of projects designed to beautify the city and promote the “health, comfort, education, and recreation of its people.”⁶⁰ The sixth plank called for a Constitutional Convention to empower the city to carry out the land and tax reforms proposed. As chapter five explains in more detail, cities in the late nineteenth century often lacked the governing authority to levy taxes on land values exclusive of improvements. As one of George’s critics pointed out during the campaign,

⁵⁸ Peter Alexander Speek, “The Single Tax and the Labor Movement” (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1915), 67.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 68.

however, the office of the mayor of New York City yielded other powers that would enable him to work towards this reform.

In addition to his promise to work for the release of the Theiss boycotters, the bulk of George's acceptance speech focused on the fourth plank of the ULP platform to shift the burden of taxation in the city onto land values. Using the slavery metaphor, he first described why this reform was needed. "Chattel slavery is dead," George lectured the large crowd, "but there devolves upon us the task of removing industrial slavery:"

Why should there be such abject poverty in this city? There is one great fact that stares in the face anyone who chooses to look at it. The fact is that the vast majority of men and women and children in New York have no legal right to live here at all. Most of us – ninety-nine percent at least – must pay the other one percent by the week or month for the privilege of staying here and working like slaves.⁶¹

George explained that the cost of housing and unemployment in the city would decrease as a result of taxing more land into use. By increasing taxes on vacant land, "we propose to drive out the dog in the manger who is holding from you what he will not use himself," he stated. "We propose in that way to remove this barrier and open the land to the use of labor in putting up buildings for the accommodation of the people of the city."⁶² And from the increased revenue collected from taxes on land values George promised to finance public projects and services that promised to benefit the entire population, such as the operation of streetcars.

In part because the ULP lacked the same financial resources as the Democratic and Republican parties, George conducted an open campaign designed to reach and appeal to the widest possible audience. Unlike his opponents, George delivered most of his campaign speeches outdoors and in public—often from the back of cart-tails—rather

⁶¹ Ibid., 25-26.

⁶² Ibid., 26-27.

than at private events. According to Post and Leubuscher, George delivered more than 100 speeches throughout the campaign and once spoke 11 different times on a single night. The crowds which gathered to hear George and his supporters speak often reached several hundred in number and on at least one occasion, as Post and Leubuscher have claimed, swelled to 8,000 people. (His speeches and campaign events held indoors at lecture halls routinely attracted crowds in the several thousands).

Shortly after his nomination, George's supporters formed an independent newspaper called *The Leader* to serve as the main organ of the campaign. Edited by Louis F. Post, a lawyer and close friend of George, the circulation of the *Leader* jumped from 30,000 its first day of publication to 52,000 by its second. According to historian John R. Commons, the paper became "almost self-supporting."⁶³ George relied largely on donations from labor unions and the various clubs formed to support his nomination to finance the campaign. Some of these donations came from individuals and organizations from outside the city. On the morning after he formally accepted the ULP nomination at Cooper Union Hall, for example, George received a letter notifying him that a recently deceased New Jersey grape farmer named George Hutchins had bequeathed a large portion of the value of his property—nearly \$20,000—to support the distribution of George's books and the promotion of his ideas.⁶⁴

The open nature of his campaign afforded George ample opportunity to speak directly to the concerns of his listeners, outline the specific aspects of his land and tax reform proposals, and answer direct questions from the audience. After a speech to a

⁶³ John R. Commons, et. al., *History of Labour in the United States. Volume II* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), 451.

⁶⁴ "Henry George's Windfall: An Eccentric Farmer Leaves Him \$20,000," *The Boston Daily Globe* (October 7, 1886), 1.

crowd of 2,500 at Chickering Hall on October 22, George answered questions on a variety of topics ranging from what he would do about saloons and slums to the mechanics of his proposal to tax land values in the city. One member of the audience, for example, asked whether “a small piece of land [should] pay as much tax as a larger piece.” George responded that the amount paid in taxes entirely depended on its value. “A small piece of land in Wall Street would pay more than a larger piece of land in 116th Street” he explained. Another inquired about George’s free-trade stance: “Mr. George, in taxing the land would you also take off the taxes from imported goods, and thus take away employment from our laborers.” In his reply to this statement, George employed the same logic he used to defend his anti-tariff stance in *Protection or Free Trade*, stating that “Goods are good things, and the more we have of them in this country the better...The very reason that it seems to you the abolition of the tariff would take away employment is because of the way we treat our land.”⁶⁵ George also pointed out that tariffs hurt laborers by increasing the cost of goods.

A question from a black member of the audience provided George the opportunity to explain how his proposal would promote racial equality. “I do not know of any people who are looked at with more contempt than the negro,” the questioner declared. “I want to ask Mr. George, if he wishes to be supported by the negroes, will it help us when we approach a landlord and he says, no matter how respectable we may be, “I can’t let that to a negro?” George responded:

I think so. If you will notice the men into whose minds these ideas have entered, you will find them rising above all prejudices of nationality, or race, or color, because the bottom principles for which we contend—the whole base of theory—

⁶⁵ Post and Leubuscher, *Henry George’s 1886 Mayoral Campaign*, 88, 87. See also “For and Against Mr. George. His Speech at Chickering Hall—A Labor Defection,” *The New York Times* (October 23, 1886), 3 and, “New York’s Mayoralty,” *Chicago Daily Tribune* (October 23, 1886), 2.

is that we are all the equal creatures of a common God. And as these ideas grow in the mind, so appears the sentiment of the brotherhood of man.⁶⁶

George believed that the people who supported his ideas about land must also support the notion of racial equality. Racial minorities would experience direct economic benefits from the implementation of the single tax and indirect benefits from the promotion of his ideas through his election.

While George's talk of emancipating labor resonated with workers who felt trapped in low-paying jobs, it alarmed his opponents who branded him "un-American," and accused him of waging class warfare. Hewitt warned his supporters that George's candidacy represented an attempt to "organize one class of our citizens against all other classes." "The ideas [George and the ULP] propound are not new," he wrote,

They have even been reduced to practice, for a short time, at long intervals in the history of the world. The horrors of the French Revolution and the atrocities of the Commune offer conclusive proof of the dreadful consequences of doctrines which can only be enforced by revolution and bloodshed, even when reduced to practice by men of good intentions and blameless private life.⁶⁷

While the ULP counted many socialists among its supporters, neither George nor the official party platform in fact endorsed socialism.

George dismissed Hewitt's charges as mere fear mongering—similar to the allegations of "agrarianism" that had been levied against Skidmore by his opponents. In one of several letters to his Democratic opponent printed in the daily papers, George lectured Hewitt, "Your reiterated prognostications of French revolutionary horrors to follow my election can only excite the smiles of intelligent men. Such alarms are always raised by those who profit by abuses that are threatened with reform."⁶⁸ And in response

⁶⁶ Post and Leubuscher, *Henry George's 1886 Mayoral Campaign*, 89.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

to Hewitt's interpretation of his nomination as an attempt by organized labor to wage war between the classes, George wrote that the working class "is in reality not a class, but *the mass*, and that any political movement in which they engage is not that of one class against other classes, but, as an English statesman [William Gladstone] has happily phrased it, a movement of the "masses against the classes.""⁶⁹

George was not above the use of epithets and class stereotypes to discredit Hewitt and malign the wealthy in the city. In a letter dated October 20 George suggested that Hewitt purchased—rather than earned—his political success and that his wealth prevented him from truly understanding the needs and interests of the majority of New Yorkers. "You pass a few weeks or a few months of the year in a splendid home on Lexington Avenue," he wrote, "When not occupying the seat your money has gained you in the Congress of the nation, you can go off on pleasure trips to Europe or enjoy the summer in your comfortable mansion in New Jersey ... But the great majority of your constituents are not millionaires like you."⁷⁰ Only a candidate from the ranks of the working classes, George believed, was fully capable of representing their interests in government. "[C]onsider the daily lives of men to whom have not fallen the happy accidents that have made you rich," he continued, "and you will see that they have reason to "fear the politicians." It is they who suffer by misgovernment and political corruption."⁷¹

In response to George's accusation that he inherited rather than earned his personal wealth, Hewitt chided him for allowing "passion to usurp the place of reason" and claimed that his fortune and social standing represented the culmination of a life

⁶⁹ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 58-59.

⁷¹ Ibid., 59.

devoted to hard work. And in reference to the “happy accidents” that made him rich and bestowed him with his residence on Lexington Ave, Hewitt explained:

The house to which you refer was the last gift of her honored father to Mrs. Hewitt. Little did that pure and noble soul (out of whose name and character I should scorn to make capital for myself suspect that the modest provision which he had made for his only daughter and her six children, out of a large fortune gained by honest industry, during a life prolonged to ninety-three years and consecrated to the public good, would be made the ground of attack upon anyone connected with him by the times of relationship.⁷²

Hewitt skillfully redirected George’s attack on his own wealth and character to one on his father-in-law Peter Cooper, a self-made millionaire and philanthropist, well-respected throughout the city.

As Beckert observed in his study of the New York City bourgeoisie, Peter Cooper represented the “quintessential industrialist of the 1850s.” In contrast to the Andrew Carnegies of the 1880s and 1890s, Cooper and his generation valued “devotion to work” and character more than money. Cooper, invested much of his income toward projects like the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, which, according to Beckert, “symbolized the industrialists’ desire for stewardship of the community,” and served “to educate the city’s working people in natural and social sciences, with a particular weight on practical education.”⁷³ Thus, in evoking his father-in-law, Hewitt tried to distort George’s attack on privilege and political corruption into one on an exemplary American who earned his fortune through hard work and honest business, and more importantly, on one whom invested his wealth back into the community from which he came.

⁷² Ibid., 61, 63.

⁷³ Beckert, *Monied Metropolis*, 74.

Of all the ideas that George's candidacy represented, the most feared and talked about in the press and among city Democrats included his proposal to shift the burden of taxation from buildings and goods onto land values. In several speeches delivered to the Young Men's Democratic Club of New York, which he later published in book form, J. Bleecker Miller, a lawyer, pointed out that if not for *Progress and Poverty*, George would never have become the candidate of any political party. Given this, the people—especially owners of real estate—must believe that if elected, George would do everything in his power to entertain the proposal outlined in his books and speeches. And in contrast to statements published in the press, Miller insisted that the office of the mayor contained the authority to considerably alter the city's system of taxation.

Miller pointed out that as mayor, George would sit on the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, which, he claimed “has the power, practically without limitation, of determining the amount of money to be raised each year by taxation.” Furthermore, he noted that the mayor also appointed members of the Board of Taxes and Assessments, which select Deputy Tax Commissioners in charge of the valuation of real estate for taxation purposes. “We see, therefore,” Bleecker wrote, “that a Mayor of New York, with Mr. George's views, might do much to carry them into effect. Probably in no position in the world, under our present laws, could more be done in this direction.”⁷⁴ As mayor, George could instruct his tax commissioners to value land—including land that is vacant or unimproved—at a higher rate than its current assessment and thereby force landowners to foot a larger share of the city's tax bill.

⁷⁴ J. Bleecker Miller, *Progress and Robbery: An Answer to Henry George, the Demi-Communist* (New York: The Baker & Taylor, Co., 1887), 21, 22.

The Election and its Aftermath

On October 27, 1886, journeyman William McCabe sent a letter sent to every trades-union and organization affiliated with the ULP. In the letter, McCabe, well-known for his organization of the Labor Day parades in 1882 and 1883, called upon all men and women supportive of George's campaign to march together in one final parade to honor the city's workers. "This parade is a prelude to the final parade of labor to the polls," McCabe wrote, "As we march on Saturday, so shall we vote on Tuesday. Then, brothers, show by the numbers in your parade the magnitude of this great political movement for honest city government and the emancipation of those who live by work from the thralldom of those who live by plunder. You can elect Henry George on Saturday night."⁷⁵ On October 30, three days before the election, at least 30,000 New Yorkers heeded McCabe's call. Equipped with homemade banners and torchlights, thousands marched in the pouring rain chanting "George! George! Vote for George!" and "Hi! Ho! The leeches must go!" According to Post and Leubuscher, the parade provided the "first tangible proof to the politicians that they were in danger."⁷⁶

While they did not expect George to win election, newspaper editors around the country similarly noted the significance of the campaign in forcing, for the first time, the established parties to take seriously a political challenge from organized labor. According to the *New York Times*, the unification of the Democratic Party in support of one nominee testified to the strength of George's campaign. "It was the George movement that impelled the Democratic factions, which a year before were more hostile to each other than either was to the other political party, into a coalition to save

⁷⁵ Post and Leubuscher, *Henry George's 1886 Mayoral Campaign*, 152.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 154.

themselves from defeat,” the *Times* reported.⁷⁷ The editors of *Harper’s Weekly* noted the overwhelming interest and enthusiasm generated by George’s candidacy pointing out that the voter registration in New York jumped by 20,000; a number “almost equaling the great registration of a Presidential year.”⁷⁸

George spent the day of the election touring the city in a horse-drawn carriage. When it became clear that Hewitt had secured victory, George returned to the ULP election headquarters and addressed his supporters. He was anything but despondent. “I am a proud and happy man to-night,” he declared,

The future, the future is ours. This is the Bunker Hill. We have been driven back as the Continental troops were from Bunker Hill. If they won no technical victory, they did win a victory that echoed round the world, and still rings. They won a victory that made this Republic a reality, and, thank God, men of New York, we in this fight have won a victory that makes the true Republic of the future certain—certain in our time.⁷⁹

In some ways, George was correct in that while it lost the election, the ULP earned a symbolic victory sure to leave an impression in the minds of elected officials around the country.

Hewitt himself said as much in a post-election interview.

The significant fact standing out as the result of the election is that the 68,000 people who voted for George have deliberately declared that they have grievances which ought to be redressed, and that they have no expectation that the existing parties will give them the relief which they desire. This fact imposes an obligation upon the dominant party in Congress to take up questions of taxation, and make such reforms as will relieve the working classes of the country of unjust burdens, which are a deduction from the earnings of labor.⁸⁰

The election results seemed to have an immediate effect on the actions of elected officials in New York. Within weeks of the election, the district attorney dropped all remaining

⁷⁷ “An Interesting Canvass,” *The New York Times* (Nov., 2, 1886), 4.

⁷⁸ “The City Election in New York,” *Harper’s Weekly* 30 (Nov. 6, 1886), 710.

⁷⁹ Post and Leubuscher, *Henry George’s 1886 Mayoral Campaign*, 170.

⁸⁰ “Hewitt Talks: New York’s Mayor on the Elections,” *The Boston Daily Globe* (Nov. 4, 1886), 1.

charges against the Theiss boycotters. Furthermore, as Commons has pointed out, during the 1887 lawmaking session, the New York State legislature passed several labor-friendly measures including stiffer regulations on tenement houses, the creation of a board of arbitration to mediate disputes between employers and labor unions, and the amendment of a penal code that prohibited employers from coercing employees not to organize or join labor unions.⁸¹

The election also yielded significant results for George and the single tax movement in the United States. In December, George secured a loan of \$1,000 from an acquaintance in London to begin a weekly newspaper.⁸² On January 8, 1887 George published the first issue of *The Standard*. While the McGlynn-Corrigan affair discussed in the next chapter provided most of the content for the first few issues of the *Standard*, it soon became the national organ of the single tax movement with subscriptions coming from all around the country. It also served as the main newsletter of the Anti-Poverty Society co-founded by George and Father McGlynn in April 1887.

The 1886 election also hastened the split between single taxers and socialists in New York and around the country. Following the election, the socialist members of the ULP challenged George's leadership and the dominance of his ideas within the movement. They pointed out that many of the members represented by the ULP desired a more expansive solution to the problems of poverty and unemployment than George was prepared to offer through the single tax. Laurence Gronlund, a lawyer and prominent figure in the Socialist Labor Party formed in 1876, argued this point in a pamphlet published by the New York Labor News, writing that "It is then clear that Henry George

⁸¹ Commons, et. al., *History of Labour in the United States. Vol. II*, 454.

⁸² Barker, *Henry George*, 485.

has not surveyed the whole field, and that his theory for that reasons in entirely too narrow, but he has at all events brought his disciples out on the road that leads to socialism, that is to say to a position where they must come to find it illogical to remain.”⁸³ Gronlund encouraged Socialists in New York and elsewhere to form independent parties and run their own candidates.

George responded to socialists challenges with several articles in *The Standard* that clarified the party’s position and urged socialists to either adhere to its principles or withdraw their membership. A few days prior to the August 1887 ULP convention at Syracuse, New York, George printed an article in the *Standard* that denounced socialism as impractical, “childish,” and un-American. In “The United Labor Party and Socialism,” George wrote,

The truth is that state socialism, with its childish notion of making all capital the property of the state, controlling all production and fixing all prices by means of “general statistician,” “abolishing the wage system” by converting every citizen into a receiver of state wages, and supplanting merchant and storekeeper by government warehouses, is an exotic born of European conditions that cannot take root and flourish in the soil.⁸⁴

Despite sharing the same goal—to reduce poverty and unemployment—single taxers and socialists lacked agreement on method. Socialists were barred from participating in the ULP convention and decided to field their own candidates for the November election. In the end, the split hurt both parties. None of the candidates from the Socialist or Labor parties achieved victory.

Besides socialists, single taxers found themselves confronted by a new enemy in the aftermath of the 1886 election—the Vatican. As a result of Father McGlynn’s

⁸³ Laurence Gronlund, *The Insufficiency of Henry George’s Theory* (New York: New York Labor News Co., 1888), 7.

⁸⁴ Henry George, “The United Labor Party and Socialism,” *The Standard* 2 (Aug., 13, 1887), 1.

involvement in George's campaign, the single tax faced religious scrutiny from the Catholic Church. The next chapter explores the role of the single tax in one of the most famous cases of religious dissent in American history. In doing so, it also considers the spiritual appeal of George's ideas and how religious figures on both sides of the Atlantic utilized the single tax to understand and solve what they considered pressing matters of faith.

IV.

The Single Tax and the Social Gospel

“We are living in the ebb-time of the Christian Church,” Presbyterian minister Charles Augustus Briggs of New York wrote in 1893. “The Church is ruled by dogmaticians, ecclesiastics, and traditionalists,” he continued, “But their day is almost over.”¹ In response to years of declining church attendance and religious enthusiasm, Briggs and other religious leaders in the United States and Great Britain supported reforms to make organized religion more responsive to the changing needs and desires of the masses. The traditional laissez-faire attitude of religious officials toward secular matters, coupled with their preoccupation with individual salvation, had failed to maintain the confidence and interest of the growing numbers of laboring men and women. Turn-of-the-century workers needed political advocates more than spiritual ones.

The rapid pace of industrial and urban expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century brought new social pressures, including acute poverty and unemployment that religious leaders seemed either unequipped or unwilling to address in ways other than the provision of charity. Reformers on both sides of the Atlantic urged Christian officials to modernize religious doctrine and adopt a new social outlook more appropriate for the industrial era. “This is a practical age,” Briggs declared, “The Church

¹ C.A. Briggs, “The Alienation of Church and People,” *Forum* (Nov. 1893), 366.

is judged by its fruits, and if it does not make men holier and happier it is not greatly valued by practical men.”²

The effort to make churches more socially responsive resulted in the social gospel movement in the United States and the Christian socialist revival in Great Britain. Henry George’s ideas exerted a significant influence on two prominent figures in both movements. Throughout his life, George challenged the complacency of organized religion in the face of rampant suffering, and he criticized the tendency of religious leaders to attribute poverty to divine providence or moral depravity. The popularization of his ideas in the 1880s and 1890s pushed some socially-minded churchmen to become more involved in secular affairs and even inspired some of them to seek to alleviate inequality through land reform.

The work of New York City’s Father Edward McGlynn on behalf of the single tax christened him into the world of politics. After encountering George’s work, McGlynn enjoyed a successful, albeit controversial, career as a fervent advocate of social justice and leader of the interdenominational Anti-Poverty Society. For the eccentric Anglican priest Stewart Duckworth Headlam of London, the single tax provided a political method for establishing a Christian social order. The lives and work of Headlam and McGlynn illustrate the ways some Christian reformers mobilized around the single tax to achieve important religious goals at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Contrary to historian Charles Howard Hopkins’ claim that the social gospel was an “indigenous and typically American” movement, it developed in an international context and was influenced by the larger social political dialogue carried on by reformers and intellectuals on both sides of the Atlantic during the Gilded Age and Progressive

² Ibid., 374.

Era.³ The social gospel shared many characteristics with the Christian socialist revival in Great Britain that occurred around the same time. Some historians have even attributed specific characteristics of the social gospel—such as its general indifference toward race issues and weak presence in the southern U.S.—to this transnational influence.⁴ As Paul T. Phillips has noted, “American readers of British publications were apt to concern themselves with the same issues as the British,” who not surprisingly had little to say about the plight of Black Americans.⁵ But they had a lot to say about the nature of poverty, crime, unemployment, and disease that flourished in nearly every major British city at the end of the nineteenth century. As such, both the social gospel and Christian socialist revival were predominately urban-based movements.

Both also grew out of a concern to justify religion to members of the working class, who resented the failure of religious leaders’ to address the issues affecting their quality of life, such as the enforcement of Sabbath laws. In the early 1880s, when the New York City Bakers Union issued a petition to 500 clergymen in Manhattan and Brooklyn, urging them to preach against Sunday labor, only six agreed.⁶ Arthur M. Schlesinger and other historians have attributed the standoffish attitude of organized

³ Charles Howard Hopkins, *The Rise of the Social Gospel in American Protestantism, 1865-1915* (New Haven, C.T.: Yale University Press, 1940), 3, and Ronald C. White and C. Howard Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), xi. For more on the origins of Hopkins’ claim see William R. Hutchison, “The Americanness of the Social Gospel: an Inquiry in Comparative History,” *Church History* 44 (Sep., 1975): 367-381.

⁴ While the Social Gospel movement was strongest in the urban northeast, it did attract Black ministers and churchgoers, especially in Chicago. For more on blacks participation in the Social Gospel movement, see: Terrell Dale Goddard, “The Black Social Gospel in Chicago, 1896-1906: the Ministers of Reverdy C. Ransom and Richard R. Wright, Jr.,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 84 (Summer, 1999): 227-246; Ralph Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform, 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), and, Ronald C. White, Jr., *Liberty and Justice For All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel, 1877-1925* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1990).

⁵ Paul T. Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940* (University Park, P.A.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 62.

⁶ Arthur Meier Schlesinger, “A Critical Period in American Religion, 1875-1900,” *The Massachusetts Historical Society*, Third Series (Oct. 1930-Jun. 1932), 532.

religion toward the working poor to increasing dependence of churches on contributions from the wealthy. Historian James Dombrowski has argued that the pulpits' "vested interest and dependence upon the wealthy ruling class made it inevitably an instrument for promoting the ends of the bourgeois group and explained its failure to take the side of the workers in any of the major industrial disputes in the United States."⁷ Several surveys conducted by concerned religious officials in the late 1880s and early 1890s found that only half of the American population described themselves as "churchgoers," and of the 50 percent who did, only 30 percent regularly attended religious services.⁸

Church attendance was not any higher in England, where the Christian socialist revival evolved out of an attempt to combat growing secularism in society and especially among workers. The initial program of the Guild of St. Matthew, a popular parish organization established by Headlam in 1877, for example, resolved "To get rid, by every possible means, of the existing prejudices, especially on the part of Secularists, against the Church, her sacraments and doctrines, and to endeavor to 'justify God to the people.'"⁹ The focus of the Guild shifted in the early 1880s when Headlam discovered that growing secularism resulted less from workers lack of faith in God, than in the Church of England. To regain the confidence of the people, Headlam pushed the Anglican Church to become more involved in secular matters, especially those which affected the lives of its congregants. To that end, Headlam promoted, among other

⁷ Ibid., 532 and James Dombrowski, *The Early Days of Christian Socialism in America* (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1966), 6.

⁸ Rev. Josiah Strong, *The New Era or The Coming Kingdom* (New York: The Baker & Taylor, Co., 1893), 205-206.

⁹ F.G. Bettany, *Stewart Headlam: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1926), 79.

things, George's single tax, which he believed to be consistent with the "highest" forms of justice and morality.¹⁰

George's contention that "economic law and moral law are essentially one" reinforced the Christian socialist emphasis on the Incarnation of Christ and its corollary, the Immanence of the Divine.¹¹ Drawing largely from the mid-century writings of English theologian Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872) who launched the original Christian socialist movement in 1848, Headlam, McGlynn and other religious leaders advanced the argument that the human manifestation and resurrection of Jesus Christ sanctified the physical world and demonstrated that God was *in* and *of* all things human. Very few issues, if any, they argued were purely religious in nature. As Headlam wrote, "All work for humanity, however much the narrowly religious may sneer about it as secular, is claimed by us as church work [...]"¹² Convincing other church leaders to become more involved in social reform represented a large portion of the work of the Christian socialist and social gospel movements and another area upon which some religious leaders relied on George's ideas.

While many Christian reformers agreed that organized religion needed to become more involved in secular matters, sharp disagreements arose over the extent and nature of this involvement, especially among American Catholics. Most historical studies of the social gospel and Christian socialist revival focus on its largely Protestant contingent and note the relatively minor role played by Catholics.¹³ Father McGlynn presents an

¹⁰ The Fabian Society, *Fabian Tract No. 42: Christian Socialism. A Lecture by the Rev. Stewart D. Headlam* (London: the Fabian Society, July 1899), 13.

¹¹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 560.

¹² Stewart D. Headlam, *The Service of Humanity and other Sermons* (London: John Hodges, 1882), 16.

¹³ See for example, J. Graham Morgan, "The Development of Sociology and the Social Gospel in America," *Sociological Analysis* 30 (Spring 1969): 42-53. On page 48, Morgan writes, "The position of

important exception to this historical point. His work on behalf of George's mayoral campaign and in support of the single tax revolutionized Catholic opinion in the U.S. towards social reform and land policy. His public quarrel with New York's Archbishop Michael Corrigan over his political involvement and ecumenicalism led to his excommunication and revived old fears of a Roman Catholic conspiracy in the U.S. The McGlynn case also prompted heated debates, within and outside the Catholic Church, over the question, perhaps best stated in 1887 by the editors of *The New York Times*, "whether a man can be an adherent of the Catholic Church in full favor, and at the same time an American citizen."¹⁴ For many, the reinstatement of McGlynn to the priesthood in 1892 after a panel of theology professors found nothing contrary to Catholic doctrine in his conduct or speeches answered this question in the affirmative.

The McGlynn-Corrigan affair and the involvement of the St. Stephens pastor in the single tax crusade helped carve a place for the Catholic Church in the social gospel movement. Some historians have even suggested that George's growing popularity in the U.S. and Europe, coupled with the McGlynn controversy prompted Pope Leo XIII to issue the famous 1891 Encyclical "Rerum Novarum," more commonly known by the title "The Condition of Labor," in which he castigated socialism, affirmed that private property in land did *not* violate natural law, and urged laborers to rely on Catholic teaching rather than unions to guide their interactions with employers. Whether or not it was in fact intended to counter George's ideas, many believed that the Encyclical communicated the Pope's desire to see Catholics more involved in political debates and efforts to solve the most pressing social issues of the day.

the Roman Catholics, by far the largest denomination with approaching one third of the total church membership of the United States in 1890, was really outside the Social Gospel movement..."

¹⁴ "Face to Face with Rome," *The New York Times* (January 23, 1887), 8.

In his 1933 biography of Henry George, the economic historian George Raymond Geiger argued that George's role in history transcends that of a fiscal reformer. "George must be appreciated not just as the "single taxer," he claimed, "but as a moral and social philosopher who has attempted to secure an inseparable union of economics and ethics."¹⁵ This chapter builds on Geiger's assertion and illustrates the ways George's ideas mobilized two religious activists, one on each side of the Atlantic, to become more involved in social matters.

This chapter also shows how George's claim that private property in land violated God's law and perpetuated poverty resonated with the changing attitudes of these Christian leaders towards labor and other social and economic issues historically ignored by organized religion. The belief that poverty was not of divine origin and could be eradicated through political action informed by divine principles proved essential to the evolving social outlook of religious leaders in the U.S. and Great Britain. Many churchmen and women supported the single tax because they believed, like George, that private ownership of land presented the greatest obstacle to the realization of God's Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. The lives and work of Headlam and McGlynn illustrate George's impact on Christian thought and action.

The Christian Economics of Henry George

Christianity played a dominant role throughout George's life. Prior to becoming a clerk at the Philadelphia Customs House, George's father, Richard, operated a successful religious publishing house that counted among its clientele the General Episcopal School Union, the Bible Prayer and Book Society, and the Tract Society. All of Richard's

¹⁵ George Raymond Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George* (New York: Macmillan, Co., 1933), 13.

children regularly attended St. Paul's Protestant Episcopal Church, and George enrolled for one year at the Episcopal Academy run by Dr. George E. Hare and located at 12th and Filbert Streets before he quit formal schooling altogether. According to one of George's biographers, the children and their parents gathered for prayers every morning and night around the family Bible, which was enshrined on a pedestal table.¹⁶

Although George never officially belonged to another church after leaving Philadelphia at the age of 18, Christianity remained at the forefront of his thinking: he often described significant moments in his life and his intellectual evolution in deeply spiritual terms. On February 1, 1883, George wrote a candid letter to his wife's friend and pastor, Reverend Father Dawson in which he relayed the spiritual forces that motivated him to write *Progress and Poverty*:

Once, in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call – give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and good, whatever I have done and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true. It was that that impelled me to write *Progress and Poverty*, and that sustained me when else I would have failed. And when I finished the last page, in the dead of night, when I was entirely alone, I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest was in the Master's hands. That is a feeling that has never left me; that is constantly with me. And it has led me up and up. It has made me a better and purer man. It has been my religion, strong and deep though vague – a religion of which I never like to speak, or make any outward manifestation, but yet that I try to follow.¹⁷

Religion, for George sprung internally and served as a powerful and sustaining force throughout his life. In the same letter, George also revealed his ecumenicalism:

Believe this, my dear Father, that if it be God's will I should be a Catholic he will call me to it. But in many different forms and in many different ways men may serve him. [...] Inside of the Catholic Church and out of it inside all denominations and creeds and outside of them all there is work to do. Each in the station to which he has been called, let us do what is set us, and we shall not

¹⁶ Barker, *Henry George*, 9-11.

¹⁷ George to Rev. Father Dawson, February 1, 1883, New York. Henry George Papers, 1840s-1950, Series 1, Box 11, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division.

clash. From various instruments, set to different keys, comes the grand harmony.¹⁸

George believed that religious worship could take many forms.

In his writings and speeches, George expressed two religious beliefs that formed the basis of his political program and demonstrate the fusion of economics and ethics that made his philosophy so appealing to some religious reformers at the turn of the century. The first belief held that the universe is governed by eternal and immutable truths that are just because they are natural and discoverable to all humans, in all times and places. This belief informed his analysis of “The Problem” in the opening pages of *Progress and Poverty* and allowed him to cite examples of deepening poverty alongside advancing wealth in every industrial civilization. “This state of things [poverty amidst increasing wealth], common to communities differing so widely in situation, in political institutions, in fiscal and financial systems, in density of population and in social organization,” as George pointed out, “can hardly be accounted for by local causes.”¹⁹ Rather, the cause was the private monopolization of land.

George’s second religious tenet—that poverty is not divine and is capable of eradication through policies informed by universal truths—directly challenged standard economic and religious explanations at the time. As previously discussed, at the end of the nineteenth century the Malthusian theory that poverty was a *natural* and *necessary* consequence of population growth and a limited food supply still held sway. Versions of this analysis appeared in the writings of the leading American economists of the time including Sumner and Walker. As William Graham Sumner contended, “Certain ills

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 6.

belong to the hardships of human life. They are natural. They are part of the struggle with Nature for existence.”²⁰

The religious version of this argument was that God ordained the existence of poverty. In regards to the poor and unemployed in the United States, Cornell University Professor W.D. Wilson once argued in an article printed in *The Church Review* that while “we sympathize with such people, and feel deeply sorry for them,” their condition is the product of the “facts and laws of God, and of Nature, which are, in fact, God’s laws” and are no more changeable than “the course of the stars or the currents of the ocean.”²¹

George, on the other hand, blamed the existence of poverty on the *failure* of society to follow divine law. As he wrote in *Progress and Poverty*, “The poverty which in the midst of abundance pinches and embrates men, and all the manifold evils which flow from it, spring from a denial of justice. In permitting the monopolization of the opportunities which nature freely offers to all, we have ignored the fundamental law of justice—for, so far as we can see, when we view things upon a large scale, justice seems to be the supreme law of the universe.”²² Furthermore, George argued that in their attribution of poverty to natural law and God’s will, economists and religious leaders contributed to the demise of their respective fields—to the weakening of organized religion and to the perpetuation of economics as the “dismal science.” Both results troubled George who viewed economics and religion as essential to a well-functioning society. A renewed faith in religion—as George had confessed to Father Dawson—and economics represented a significant outcome of his own personal social scientific

²⁰ Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other*, 17, 24.

²¹ W.D. Wilson, “The Labor Question,” *The Church Review* 63 (Oct. 1891), 36.

²² George, *Progress and Poverty*, 545.

investigation. As he explained—gloated, perhaps—in the concluding chapter of *Progress and Poverty*:

...out of this inquiry has come to me something I did not think to find, and a faith that was dead revives. [...] Political Economy has been called the dismal science, and as currently taught, *is* hopeless and despairing. But this, as we have seen, is solely because she has been degraded and shackled; her truths dislocated; her harmonies ignored; the word she would utter gagged in her mouth, and her protest against wrong turned into an indoesment of injustice. Freed, as I have tried to free her—in her own property symmetry, Political Economy is radiant with hope.²³

As previously discussed, George's work was widely read and debated and contributed to the efforts of some to reform and professionalize the study of political economy in the U.S.

In addition to a humanized political economy, George envisioned positive changes to organized religion and its place in society as a result of his inquiry. In particular, he believed that in eradicating involuntary poverty, the single tax also would remove the obstacles preventing the realization of God's Kingdom of Heaven on Earth.

George described the utopian potential of the single tax:

With want destroyed; with greed changed to noble passions; with the fraternity that is born of equality taking the place of the jealousy and fear that now array men against each other; with mental power loosed by conditions that give to the humblest comfort and leisure; and who shall measure the heights to which is the Golden Age of which poets have sung and high-raised seers have told in metaphor! It is the glorious vision which has always haunted man with gleams of fitful splendor. It is what he saw whose eyes at Patmos were closed in a trance. It is the culmination of Christianity—the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl. It is the reign of the Prince of Peace!²⁴

George's zealotry attracted religious reformers who shared his belief that the perfection of society was possible and would ultimately result in a true Christian order.

²³ Ibid., 559.

²⁴ Ibid., 552.

George's appeal among religious reformers at the end of the turn of the twentieth century also stemmed from the fact that his beliefs were neither original nor unique. As was the case with theories about land, George's religious beliefs built upon a rich adversary tradition within Protestantism that challenged conservative views on the causes of poverty and the role of religion in social and economic reform. George's religious ideas echoed those first popularized by Frederick Denison Maurice and the original Christian socialist movement in 1848. The lives of Headlam and McGlynn demonstrate that the combination of this theology with George's particular land reform program resulted in two of the most significant examples of religious-inspired reform in England and the United States. And while in the case of McGlynn, this combination also provoked Rome's condemnation, it ultimately forced the Catholic Church to join the larger debate concerning the role of organized religion in social and economic reform.

Frederick Denison Maurice and the Origins of the Christian Socialist Revival

The effort to make the Church of England more responsive to the needs and desires of the working classes extends at least as far back as 1848, when the Anglican priest Frederick Denison Maurice led an effort to "Christianize" socialists, and "socialize" Christians. He was joined in this effort by clergyman Charles Kingsley (1819-1875) and lawyer John Malcolm Forbes Ludlow (1821-1911). Although this "original" Christian socialist movement was short lived and achieved few practical results, it spread the seeds of a new theology that accepted a larger role for Anglican clergymen in social reform. Specifically, Maurice's interpretation of the Incarnation of Christ and Immanence of the Divine provided the theological basis utilized by later

church reformers, like Stewart Headlam, who achieved greater success in their efforts to modernize Church doctrine.

As did other members of the British bourgeoisie, Maurice feared great social upheaval in the wake of the February 1848 French Revolution and failed effort by a broad working-class coalition known as the Chartists to secure universal suffrage and electoral reform in England. Both events signaled the growing popularity of socialism, which the clergy and other mid-nineteenth century Britons associated with Atheism. Although alarmed by the potential spread of Atheism, Maurice found nothing contrary to Christ's teachings in the theory of socialism. With its emphasis on co-operation, brotherhood, and fellowship, Maurice believed socialism embodied many of the fundamental Christian principles often neglected by Church officials and as a result, lacking in the current social order.

Evangelical notions of innate human depravity and the need for atonement dominated mid-nineteenth century Anglican theology. "In this kind of religion," historian Cheryl Walsh has pointed out, "there was very little encouragement for the development of a social conscience—of a recognition of any kind of responsibility for the welfare of fellow human beings."²⁵ The focus on the spiritual well-being of each individual and his or her potential for salvation left little room in this theology for discussions about social issues or what to do about increasing rates of poverty and unemployment. In fact, as Walsh has noted, "To interfere in the market on behalf of the poor, or even to administer charity on a large scale or in a systematic manner, was thus

²⁵ Walsh, "The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England," 353.

unjustifiable in the context of mainstream evangelical religion.”²⁶ The plight of the poor mattered little to Anglican clergymen who made no attempt to hide their indifference.

In contrast to most of his colleagues, Maurice employed a social view of Christianity and the Church largely derived from the importance he attached to the Incarnation. The human manifestation of God in the person of Jesus Christ, Maurice believed, “entailed a recognition of three crucial principles” vital to Christian doctrine. The first, as Walsh has noted, included the notion that “Christ’s *humanity* sanctified the mortal world” and the second included the idea “that his sacrifice on the cross *redeemed* humankind from original sin.” Finally, the resurrection of Christ, Maurice believed, “heralded the coming of the Kingdom of God *on earth*” and as a result, the formation of a universal brotherhood of man in Christ as “members of his Body.”²⁷

Maurice believed that the Incarnation not only symbolized Christ’s forgiveness of man for the sin of Adam and Eve but also established the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. As he explained in *Theological Essays*, first published in 1853, “I believe that Christ came into this world expressly to reveal the kingdom of Heaven, and to bring us into it.”²⁸ And in contrast to the mystical, otherworldly *place* described by Church leaders, Maurice described the Kingdom of Heaven as the natural *condition* of society as result of the Incarnation. As he explained, “He and His Apostles speak of [Heaven] as the kingdom of righteousness, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost. They present Righteousness, Love, Truth, to us as substantial realities, as the Nature of the Living and Eternal God; manifested in the Only-begotten Son; inherited by all who claim to be made in His

²⁶ Ibid., 352.

²⁷ Ibid., 356.

²⁸ Frederick Denison Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1871), 183.

image.”²⁹ The humanity, sacrifice, and resurrection of Christ established a Divine Order on earth in which all lived in fellowship with one another and in God. If individuals would simply realize and “own the truth” of the Incarnation, Maurice believed, many of the current social problems would solve themselves without the need for significant social restricting.³⁰

Although theologically liberating, Maurice’s belief in the reality of Christ’s kingdom on earth led him to adopt narrow views of socialism and the proper scope of social reform. He defined socialism largely in contrast to individualism, which he attributed to growing secularism and social discord. Maurice appreciated socialists’ emphasis on co-operation and fellowship, and believed these values, as opposed to individualism and competition, ought to fuel social interaction. “Society, [Christian socialists] urged, is not a collection of separate individuals,” historian Gordon Lewis explained, “but a process in which there is a healthy cooperation between people and institutions.”³¹ As a result of these views, the early Christian socialists supported a limited social agenda largely defined by their efforts to expand education and co-operation among the working classes.

They also sought to foster open and rational dialogue between all sections of society and demonstrate that at least some members of the clergy sympathized with the plight of the poor. They believed that much of the current social antagonism resulted from a lack of communication and interaction between the classes. Prior to the so-called

²⁹ Ibid, 183.

³⁰ Walsh, “The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England,” 357.

³¹ Gordon K. Lewis, “The Ideas of the Christian Socialists of 1848,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 4:3 (Sep., 1951), 402.

“monster meeting”³² of the Chartists on April 10, 1848, Maurice issued a placard addressed to the “Workmen of England,” in which he expressed sympathy for their plight and urged them to pursue alternative and more peaceful methods to achieve their goals. He warned that although “almost all men who have heads and hearts” supported their cause, no political reform alone could bring freedom and happiness to the masses unless accompanied by religion. “There will be no true freedom without virtue,” he wrote, “no true science without religion, no true industry without the fear of God, and love to your fellow-citizens.”³³ He signed the placard “A Working Parson.”

The following month, Maurice, Kingsley, and Ludlow increased their efforts to promote social dialogue and began publishing a “penny” journal they titled, *Politics for the People*. In addition to the consideration of pressing political questions including whether to extend suffrage to workingmen, the editors also hoped to use *Politics* to demonstrate the relevancy of religion to these questions. As they explained in the “Prospectus:”

But *Politics for the People* cannot be separated from Religion. [...] The world is governed by God; this is the rich man’s warning; this is the poor man’s comfort; this is the real hope in the consideration of all questions, let them be as hard of solution as they may; this is the pledge that Liberty, Fraternity, Unity, under some conditions or other, are intended for every people under heaven.³⁴

The purpose of the journal reflected their belief that the Church had been too neglectful of political issues and that workers had overlooked the spiritual substance of these questions.

³² At this meeting, the Chartists planned a large procession from Kensington Common to Parliament where they intended to present their petition for universal suffrage and electoral reform.

³³ Charles E. Raven, *Christian Socialism, 1848-1854* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1920), 107.

³⁴ “Prospectus,” *Politics for the People* (May 6, 1848), 1.

Neither the placard nor *Politics* achieved tangible results. The former failed to prevent the “monster meeting” and the journal folded after only two months due to lack of interest. Despite this, both efforts proved historically significant. As historian Charles E. Raven noted in his 1920 study of Christian socialism, Maurice’s message to the working classes represented the “first public act of atonement for a half-century of apostasy, of class-prejudice and political sycophancy” on behalf of the Church of England.³⁵ At the very least, these efforts demonstrated the desire of some Anglican clergymen to see organized religion more involved in helping to solve pressing social questions.

The early Christian socialists experienced more sustained success in their efforts to promote co-operation among laborers. In 1849 Ludlow returned from Paris where he had witnessed with great excitement the progress of *les associations ouvrières* (workers’ associations). He convinced Kingsley and Maurice to help promote the formation of something similar in England. Organized by trade, workers in these associations engaged in a variety of co-operative agreements that included profit sharing and proportional ownership. That fall, the trio formed the Working Tailors’ Association and the following year, with a considerable financial contribution from the wealthy philanthropist Edward Vannisart Neale established the Society for the Promotion of Workingmen’s Associations (SPWA). Within six months, the SPWA helped form eight co-operative associations in a variety of trades throughout England including shoe-and boot-making, building, printing, and banking.³⁶

³⁵ Raven, *Christian Socialism*, 108.

³⁶ Torben Christensen, *Origin and History of Christian Socialism 1848-1854* (Denmark: Universitetsforlaget I Aarhus, 1962), 162, John C. Cort, *Christian Socialism: An Informal History*

Pleased with their progress, Ludlow and Neale wanted to expand the efforts of the SPWA. With his own capital, Neale established a co-operative store in London and with Ludlow, formulated plans for a Central Co-operative Agency to “integrate production and consumption” by functioning “as a depot for the goods produced by the cooperative workshops and in turn as a source of supply for the cooperative store.”³⁷ Although Maurice objected, Neale and Ludlow carried on without him and instigated a series of internal disagreements that ultimately led to the movement’s collapse in 1854.

Maurice’s resistance to Ludlow and Neale’s efforts to expand the SPWA likely resulted from his belief that the Kingdom of Heaven already existed on earth. He opposed efforts designed to significantly alter the nature of that order or man’s place in it. As he explained to Ludlow:

Christian socialism is the assertion of God’s order. Every attempt to bring it forth I honour and desire to assist. Every attempt to hide it under a great machinery, call it Organization of Labour, Central Board, or what you like, I must protest against as hindering the gradual development of what I regard as a divine purpose, as an attempt to create a new constitution of society, when what we want is that the old constitution should exhibit its true function and energies.³⁸

Maurice preferred to maintain a limited presence and support gradual reform; he wanted Christian socialism to function as a beacon of moral energy and education, rather than a source of large-scale organization for structural change.

Christian socialists faced an external crisis when Maurice was removed from his professorship at Kings College, London in 1853 on charges of heterodoxy for the views he expressed in *Theological Essays*. Maurice’s thoughts on Hell and eternal punishment

(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 146-147, and Jeremy Morris, *Frederick Denison Maurice and the Crisis of Christian Authority* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 143-144.

³⁷ Philip N. Backstrom, Jr., “The Practical Side of Christian Socialism in Victorian England,” *Victorian Studies* 4:3 (June 1963), 313.

³⁸ Maurice quoted in Cort, *Christian Socialism: An Informal History*, 147.

most outraged Church authorities. He believed that the Church needed to revise its definition and description of these terms to focus more on the here-and-now, writing, “The state of eternal life and eternal death is not one we can refer only to in the future, or that we can in any wise identify with the future.” He continued, “Every man who knows what it is to have been in a state of sin, knows what it is to have been in a state of death. He cannot connect death with time; he must say that Christ has brought him out of the bonds of eternal death. Throw that idea into the future and you deprive it of its reality, of all its power.”³⁹ Church leaders prevented the application of Christ’s teachings, Maurice believed, when they projected them into the distant future. Men, especially workers, desired lessons to which they could both relate and implement in their daily lives.

Furthermore, Maurice argued that the Evangelical notion that God damned the “unsaved” and unrepentant individuals to Hell undermined the vision of Christ as a tireless soldier in the eternal battle against evil. “And if you take from me the belief that God is always righteous, always maintaining a fight with evil, always seeking to bring His creatures out of it,” he wrote, “you take everything from me, all hope now, all hope in the world to come.”⁴⁰ God did not sentence anyone to eternal punishment; those who lived in Hell, which Maurice defined as the *state* of living without God, did so by choice since the Incarnation bestowed divine love and eternal membership in his His kingdom to every man, woman, and child.

Following his removal from Kings College, Maurice withdrew from the SPWA—which folded in 1855—to focus on the education of the working classes. In 1854, he opened the Workingmen’s College to help “make the workers understand themselves as

³⁹ Maurice, *Theological Essays*, 475.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 476.

spiritual beings belonging to the Divine Order.”⁴¹ Although laborers comprised the student body and members of the clergy the faculty, the Workingmen’s College constituted an early exercise in mutual education. Still active today, it is arguably the most successful practical achievement of the early Christian socialists. It also helped restore Maurice’s reputation among the clergy. In the late 1860s, Maurice began lecturing at Cambridge, and in 1870, he became a full professor at the University’s Trinity College.

The Christian socialist movement and the contributions of its leader have received mixed evaluations from historians. While some believe Maurice deserves the title of prophet, others blame his lofty idealism and conservative politics for the movement’s failure to achieve meaningful social reform. As Gordon Lewis has claimed, for example:

The cardinal weakness of Christian Socialism then, is traceable to its intellectual foundations. [...] It was too preoccupied with the nature of the good it desired, too neglectful of discovering the methods of its realization. It ignored all that was implied in the urgent reality of social antagonisms. [...] It had little sense of the historical movement of the economic process.⁴²

The early Christian socialists lacked the knowledge, practicality, and resolve to affect measurable social change.

In his candid assessment of the movement and its leader’s shortcomings, however, Lewis also highlighted its main achievement. “At bottom,” he continued, Christian socialism represented “an emotional plea for socialism addressed to people whose social position made them but faintly responsive to it. It did little more, therefore, than prick men and women of conscience into that attitude of mind out of which, after painful intellectual effort, a real comprehension of socialist principles could be

⁴¹ Maurice quoted in *Ibid.*, 346.

⁴² Lewis, “The Ideas of the Christian Socialists of 1848,” 422-423.

born.”⁴³ Maurice’s political conservatism stemmed from his liberal theology, which, as other historians have noted, contained a powerful “subversive” dimension that enabled later religious reformers to embrace a more inclusive view of Christianity and active social agenda for the Church of England.⁴⁴ The “simple but compelling idea” that Christ resided in all humans and aspects of human life, historian Paul Dafydd Jones has argued, allowed clergymen to recognize the various ways in which people performed God’s work. As Jones explained, “In light of the solidarity of all in Christ, church affiliation, class status, gender, and the like were no barriers to an individual inaugurating the transformation of English society. Anyone could challenge the competitive principle of political economy and promote the Christian ideal of cooperation.”⁴⁵ Under the leadership of the Headlam, a student of Maurice at Cambridge, Christian socialists engaged more directly in secular political reform and achieved greater tangible results.

Headlam used Maurice’s Theology of the Incarnation to renew interest in and adopt a new meaning of Church sacraments. He also developed Maurice’s claim of Divine Immanence to support the rights and efforts of secularists and theater performers, whose work he believed helped “awaken” the “deepest parts of our nature.”⁴⁶ And in late 1883 when he encountered the work of Henry George, Headlam became a fierce advocate for the abolition of private property in land. Under Headlam’s leadership, Christian socialism became synonymous with the promotion of mass, the ballet, and the single tax. Maurice provided the theological inspiration for the Christian socialist revival and George gave it political expediency. As a result of these two influences, Christian

⁴³ Ibid., 423.

⁴⁴ Paul Dafydd Jones, “Jesus Christ and the Transformation of English Society: The “Subversive Conservatism” of Frederick Denison Maurice” *Harvard Theological Review* 96:2 (2003), 206.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁶ Stewart D. Headlam, *The Service of Humanity and Other Sermons* (London: John Hodges, 1882), 18.

socialism became an important force in British social politics at the end of the nineteenth century.

Mass, the Ballet, and the Single Tax: Stewart Headlam and the Christian Socialist Revival

Headlam absorbed all of Maurice's liberal theological views and none of his political conservatism. He was frank, fearless, and possessed the troublesome habit of befriending those shunned by the Church, including secularist leader Charles Bradlaugh and the writer Oscar Wilde, for whom he posted bail in 1895 following the playwright's arrest on charges of sexual indecency. Headlam was prone to unconventional thinking and never shied away from the chance to broadcast his views, despite the consequences. He attracted as many opponents as supporters, and he liked them all the same. According to his biographer F.G. Bettany, "...for Headlam, knowing a man meant usually liking him."⁴⁷

Born on January 12, 1847, at Wavertree near Liverpool, Headlam enjoyed a privileged, yet strict upbringing. His father was a successful investor who pushed his son toward a career in the Church of England. Headlam attended Eton College from 1860 to 1865 and then enrolled at Cambridge University's Trinity College, where he earned his B.A. in 1869 and first encountered the ideas of Maurice. The ideas of the Christian socialist leader consumed him; according to Bettany, Cambridge came to mean "Maurice and little more" to Headlam.⁴⁸ Alarmed by his son's infatuation with Maurician theology, Headlam's father sent him to Evangelical clergyman Herbert James "in the

⁴⁷ Bettany, *Stewart Headlam*, 55

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

hope that he might cure him of the Maurice “virus.”⁴⁹ The effort failed and Headlam’s continued fixation with his teacher’s ideas almost blocked his ordination. In 1872, after much debate, the Bishop of London approved Headlam’s conferment into the priesthood. He regretted it almost immediately.

Upon his graduation from Cambridge, Headlam served as the curate of St. John’s Church at Drury Lane, and in 1873, he became the warden of St. Matthew’s Church at Bethnal Green. Located in largely working class neighborhoods of London, these positions allowed him to interact with the city’s poor, among whom he chose to live despite his family’s significant financial resources. In 1877, he established the Guild of St. Matthew to promote more frequent worship among his congregants and “the study of social and political questions in the light of the Incarnation.”⁵⁰ Like Maurice, he believed that the Incarnation of Christ had joined mankind into a universal brotherhood to which all were equal members on account of their humanity.

As the first and only president of the Guild of St. Matthew, Headlam developed Maurice’s ideas about the Incarnation and expounded a new interpretation of the role of the Church and its rites that became known as “sacramental socialism.” The phrase, according to historian Peter d’A. Jones, “stands for the belief that the best proof and witness of the socialism of Christ is in the Holy Sacraments of the Church.”⁵¹ Headlam believed that baptism, Holy Communion, confirmation, marriage, penance, orders, and unction—the seven sacraments—illustrated the principles of the Divine Order upon which all social reform should be directed. In particular, baptism, which he called “the

⁴⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁵¹ Peter d’A. Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914: Religion, Class, and Social Conscience in Late-Victorian England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 27-28.

Sacrament of Equality” and Holy Communion, or “the Sacrament of Brotherhood” were essential to the recognition of God’s Kingdom on earth. As he explained:

these two are fundamental; the one abolishing all class distinctions, and admitting all into the Christian Church, simply on the ground of humanity; the other pledging and enabling all to live the life of brotherhood; the one making it clear that *Christ* is the Head, and that it is of *all* men that He is the Head; the other bearing perpetual witness to the power of Christ’s life, making it clear that it is by allowing Christ’s life to influence our lives, by being strengthened and refreshed by Him, by realizing His presence, that we can live our lives.⁵²

For Headlam, baptism symbolized equality and the idea that everyone, regardless of race, religion, or class belonged to the Church because they were human. Holy Communion, or Mass, emphasized the social nature of Christianity and the idea “that men could only approach God in community.”⁵³ And both, as Cheryl Walsh neatly summarized, “reinforced rather than *defined* members in the Body [of Christ].”⁵⁴

In addition to the Incarnation, Headlam also used and built upon Maurice’s concept of the Immanence of the Divine to support secular activities traditionally rejected by religious officials as antithetical to organized religion. Prior to meeting Henry George, the theatre represented the greatest of Headlam’s “secular” concerns. His passion for the performance arts—and tendency toward rebelliousness—prompted the Bishop of London to remove him from his curacy and suspend his episcopal license following a lecture Headlam delivered to the Commonwealth Club of Bethnal Green on Sunday, October 7, 1877 in support of “Theatres and Music Halls.” Upon reading the lecture, which was published in the popular journal *The Era*, the Bishop wrote to Headlam that “Not for the first time [the lecture] has caused me to ask pardon of our

⁵² Stewart D. Headlam, *The Socialist Church* (London: George Allen, 1907), 5-6.

⁵³ Bettany, *Stewart Headlam*, 63.

⁵⁴ Walsh, “The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience in the Victorian Church of England,” 372.

great Master if I erred, as I fear I did, in admitting you to the Ministry.”⁵⁵ Headlam decided to issue a public reply, which he published along with the Bishop’s letter and a copy of the lecture.

Headlam prefaced his response to the Bishop with four statements in defense of his lecture. The first outlined the theological basis for his support of the performance arts. “I hold as an eternal truth,” he wrote, “that the Incarnation and Real Presence of Jesus Christ sanctifies all human things, not excluding human passion, mirth, and beauty, and in this firm conviction I am constantly strengthened by the fact that so many regular and devout communicants both here and elsewhere, enjoy heartily the drama, music, and dancing.”⁵⁶ God’s immanence extended beyond the Church; where there is beauty there is God, Headlam believed. Furthermore, Headlam wrote that he considered it his duty as a clergyman to fight the grave injustice committed against the reputations of dancers, actors, and performers of all stripes by Church leaders when they preached that “the pit of the Theatre was the way to the pit of Hell” and suggested that only “loose women” frequented Music Halls: “I hold that the religious world has done a grievous wrong, in refusing to recognize the calling of a Dancer or Public Amuser as a virtuous and honorable one.”⁵⁷ The Church should praise not punish those whose work provided a much needed respite from the dreariness and gloom that dominated the lives of so many who attended these performances, Headlam argued. His response was not well received; the Bishop removed him from his post as warden of St. Matthews and forbade him from preaching. His license was permanently suspended a few years later when Headlam

⁵⁵ Stewart D. Headlam, *Theaters and Music Halls: A Lecture. With a Letter to the Bishop of London and Other Correspondence*, 2nd ed. (Westminster, London: Women’s Printing Society, Ltd. [1877]), v.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, vi.

appeared at a public event with Michael Davitt in support of a measure to abolish the House of Lords.⁵⁸

Freed from his priestly duties, Headlam directed all of his energy towards the Guild and its three-pronged mission to combat secularism, promote more frequent worship, and study social and political questions. And while Headlam emphasized the desire to see Christian leaders take a more active role helping the poor, prior to 1883, he articulated only vague notions of how, practically, to do so. In a lecture titled “The Service of Humanity,” which Headlam delivered in 1881 on Holy Thursday, he criticized self-proclaimed “religious people” who “shut their eyes to the secular side of Christ’s work,” and offered the following and rather nebulous prescription for change:

Maunday Thursday then calls us to do secular service for men: because we are churchmen, disciples of Jesus Christ, the command is laid upon us to work practically and personally for the bodily welfare of our fellows, to recognize all who are so working as therefore followers of Jesus, at the very least to be honest enough to give some labour of our *own*, of heart, head or hand in return for what we consume.⁵⁹

The tone and content of Headlam’s lectures exhibited a marked change in 1883 because of his reading *Progress and Poverty*. From then on, Headlam accompanied nearly every demand he made for a more socially active and responsive clergy with calls for land reform generally, and the single tax specifically. “If Maurice was the first big inspiring influence of his life,” Bettany argued, “George was certainly the second.” *Progress and Poverty* provided a “new social evangel” for the former Anglican priest and the concrete political reform needed to abolish poverty and establish a truly Christian social order.

⁵⁸ Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, 99.

⁵⁹ Headlam, *The Service of Humanity and Other Sermons*, 9-10.

Like so many other social reformers in Britain in the early 1880s, Headlam's conversion to Georgism and the single tax occurred rapidly.⁶⁰ In addition to its Christian rhetoric, George's message appeared tailor-made for addressing the rising unemployment and poverty in London and the nation's other major urban centers. It also offered a solution to "the land question," which, as chapter two explained, had long dominated British political debates and reached a boiling point in the early 1880s due to the crisis in Ireland. And perhaps most importantly, the single tax appealed to those, like Headlam, for whom justice and morality trumped economic and political practicality as drivers of legislative reform. According to historian Edward Norman, "The simplicity of the Single Tax scheme appealed to Headlam," who "soon began to speak of [it] as the most important of the reforms that Christian Socialism could pursue."⁶¹ In October 1884, Headlam announced a new program for the Guild of St. Matthew at an open air meeting in Trafalgar Square.

The proposal sounded remarkably similar to George's description of "the problem" in the opening chapter of *Progress and Poverty*. "Whereas the present contrast between the great body of the workers who produce much and consume little, and those classes which produce little and consume much is contrary to the Christian doctrines of brotherhood and justice," the resolution began, "this meeting urges on all Churchmen the duty of supporting such measures as will tend a) to restore to the people the value which they give to the land; b) to bring about a better distribution of wealth created by labour; c) to give the whole body of the people a voice in their own government; d) to abolish false

⁶⁰ See chapter two of this dissertation for a deeper look at some of the other British social reformers who adopted George's ideas in the early 1880s.

⁶¹ Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, 116.

standards of worth and dignity.”⁶² The Guild of St. Matthew adopted the new program, and over the course of the following year, joined forces with several secular socialist and land reform associations including the Fabian Society, the Social Democratic Federation, and the English Land Restoration League (ELRL).

In addition to a new program for the Guild, in 1884 Headlam began a monthly journal called *The Church Reformer*, as noted earlier, he financed from his inheritance and ran at a loss for nearly 11 years. Although intended to serve as the main organ of the Guild of St. Matthew, Headlam used *The Church Reformer* to express his own opinions and promote the causes most dear to him. As such, the subject of most articles included the progress of the land reform movement and after 1888, when Headlam was elected to the London School Board, education.

Many of the land reform articles that appeared in *The Church Reformer* contained a “biblicism” that some historians attribute to Frederick Verinder, Headlam’s co-editor and secretary of the Guild and ELRL.⁶³ Verinder authored many pamphlets and several books on the Biblical origins of the land question directed at revealing the historic precedence and religious basis for George’s call to socialize land values. In *My Neighbour’s Landmark: Short Studies in Bible and Land Laws* first published in 1911, he pointed out that “The general principles upon which Hebrew Land Laws were based are absolutely fatal to the idea of private property in Land.”⁶⁴ Although Moses permitted individuals to use the land, he prohibited them from selling it or in any way treating it as their private property. “The Hebrew did not own land. It was not “his own” to do as he

⁶² Bettany, *Stewart Headlam*, 83.

⁶³ Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, 116.

⁶⁴ Frederick Verinder, *My Neighbour’s Landmark: Short Studies in Bible and Land Laws*, Memorial Edition (London: Land Liberty Press, 1950), 16.

liked with; “the land shall not be sold out and out”; it was only his to use, subject to the equal rights of every other Hebrew,” Verinder wrote. In other words, the ancient Hebrews adhered to a system of land tenure based on use; they enjoyed a usufruct right to land.

George also acknowledged the Mosaic origins of his critique of private property in land. At a lecture he delivered in June 1878 before the Young Men’s Hebrew Association of San Francisco, the former journalist and then-budding author attempted to highlight the “real grandeur” of the Mosaic Code and its author. “It is not the deliverance from Egypt,” George argued, “it is in the constructive statesmanship that laid the foundations of the Hebrew commonwealth that the superlative grandeur of that leadership looks up.”⁶⁵ First and foremost, George believed, history should recognize Moses as a great statesman who adeptly realized the injustice of private property in land and the danger of landlordism. “It is not the protection of property, but the protection of humanity that is the aim of the Mosaic Code, he claimed. “Its sanctions, he continued, “are not directed to securing the strong in heaping up wealth so much as to preventing the weak from being crowded to the wall. At every point it interposes its barriers to the selfish greed that, if left unchecked, will surely differentiate men into landlord and serf, capitalist and workman, millionaire and tramp, ruler and ruled.”⁶⁶ To George, the Mosaic Code demonstrated the same truth that he yearned to make clear: that landlordism presented a worse and more debasing system of slavery than any other.

⁶⁵ Henry George, “Moses” in Kenneth C. Wenzler, ed., *An Anthology of Henry George’s Thought. Volume I of the Henry George Centennial Trilogy* (Rochester, N.Y: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 17-18.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

In the same speech, George expressed sentiments about the nature of religion and God similar to the ideas held by Headlam and Christian socialists. He admired “the great distinctive feature” of Judaism that recognized “divine law in human life” and emphasized the applicability of God’s law in the governing of modern society. In contrast to the God imagined and described by the various branches of Christianity, the Jewish God, George argued, is “not a God whose domain is confined to the far-off beginning or the vague future, who is over and above and beyond men, but a God who in his inexorable laws is here and now; a God of the living as well as of the dead; a God of the market place as well as of the temple...”⁶⁷ Similar to the Christian socialists, George recognized the benefits of making religion more practical and urged Christian leaders to demonstrate the relevancy of their doctrines to the daily lives of their communicants.

By 1888, the Church of England finally appeared receptive to this advice. At the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops, held every 10 years, a committee was appointed to “consider the church’s practical work in relation to socialism,” and although the Bishops gave only “inconsistent and timid approval” to the doctrine they once associated with Atheism, according to Sidney Webb, the leading voice of the Fabian Society and co-founder of the London School of Economics, the action demonstrated that “the churches are accordingly turning timidly towards the rising sun.”⁶⁸ Webb credited George and Headlam’s influence for this shift. In particular, Webb argued that Bishops’ “blessing” of a memorial submitted to the Conference by the Guild of St. Matthew indicated the Church’s evolving outlook toward social reform and its relation to it.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁸ Webb, “Socialism in England,” 35, 38.

The memorial also demonstrated the influence of George's ideas on Christian socialism. After describing the alarming increase in wealth inequality and poverty throughout society, the memorial demanded that the Anglican Church take a position on "the great moral questions with which it is the plain duty of the Church to deal." Included in these questions is what to do about the wretched condition of housing of London's poor and whether George's plan offered a viable solution. As the memorial stated:

Under the 'Housing' question lies the land question as surely as the house stands on the land. Mr. George denounces our great land system as one that robs the many for the benefit of the few. His opponents retort of 'plunder,' and describe the movement for restoring to the people the value which they give to the land as one of 'robbery plus cant' Shall the Church of Christ be dumb when men turn to her for guidance in this matter? Her priests, in the name of God, from the altars of His Church, proclaim 'thou shalt not steal.' What is it to steal?⁶⁹

Does the taxation of land values amount to theft, or will the Church label the landowner who takes economic rent—the value added to land by society—for himself a robber, the memorial asked. To maintain its position of moral leadership, the Guild of St. Matthew urged religious leaders to become informed and take a position on current proposals to remedy social problems.

In addition to the "housing question," the memorial asked the Church to consider two moral questions of significant social and political urgency. The first involved the validity of the Socialist claim. "Is it *true*," the memorial stated, "that the landlord and capitalist are able, independently of any work done by themselves, to appropriate a large share of the results of the labor of their unprivileged bretheren? If it be true that this is so, is it *just*?" The second concerned the morality of private property: "What is rightfully a man's own?" And while the Bishops failed to issue direct answers to either question,

⁶⁹ Ibid., 36.

their general response to the memorial represented the first public and official pronouncement that the Church needed to become more involved in the resolution of social and economic problems. “No more important problems can well occupy the attention—whether the clergy or laity—than such as are connected with what is properly called Socialism,” the Bishops continued:

To study schemes proposed for redressing the social balance, to welcome the good which may be found in the aims or operations of any, and to devise methods whether by legislation or by social combinations, or in any other way for a peaceful solution of the problems without violence or injustice, is one of the noblest pursuits which can engage the thoughts of those who strive to follow in the footsteps of Christ.⁷⁰

The Bishops agreed that it was imperative that the Anglican Church to participate in social debates to inform and aid efforts to restore balance and dignity throughout society.

In its denunciation of the capitalist along with the landlord who “secure by far too great a share of the wealth created by labor,” the memorial appears to support historians’ description of Headlam as “the first really serious socialist, in the modern sense, in the Church” and of the Guild as England’s oldest socialist body.⁷¹ Both views require clarification. As discussed in the previous chapter, George’s relationship to the British socialist movement was complicated. While the appearance of a British edition of *Progress and Poverty* in 1881 followed by George’s six tours of the country over the next 15 years ignited the smoldering flames that became the modern British socialist movement, he was not a socialist nor did he support the socialist vision to nationalize

⁷⁰ Ibid., 36, 37, and 35.

⁷¹ Norman, *The Victorian Christian Socialists*, 105. See also, Walsh, “The Incarnation and the Christian Socialist Conscience,” 361, and Kenneth Leech, “Stewart Headlam and the Guild of St. Matthew” in Maurice B. Reckitt, ed., *For Christ and the People: Studies of Four Socialist Priests and Prophets of the Church of England between 1870 and 1930* (London: S.P.C.K., 1968), 64.

land *and* capital. He worked with socialists in their efforts to abolish private property in land, but stopped short of capital.

Headlam followed a similar path. He joined the Fabian Society in 1886 and over the next 25 years served three terms on its Executive Committee. As a member of the “special committee of fifteen” Headlam helped compose the “Basis” of the Society, and was likely responsible for the second of its five short paragraphs, which reads: “The Society accordingly works for the extinction of private property in Land and of the consequent individual appropriation, in the form of Rent, of the price paid for permission to use the earth, as well as for the advantages of superior soils and sites.”⁷² In the mid-1880s, when the Fabian Society and other socialist organizations began to move away from George and land value taxation, Headlam remained a committed single taxer. As George Bernard Shaw, Fabian socialist and member of the Guild of St. Matthew explained:

Politically [Headlam] was a Liberal plus a Land Nationaliser. I was bitten by Henry George about the same time that Headlam was—it may have been our common enthusiasm over George’s book that brought about our acquaintance. But I went on from Henry George to Karl Marx. Headlam stayed where I had begun, and he remained a Single-Tax man.⁷³

Although many socialists still accepted a place for the single tax in their programs they refused to make it the central reform they advocated. And whereas most Fabians viewed the single tax as a “fiscal measure,” according to Webb, Headlam held it up “as a panacea for all social problems.”⁷⁴ The single tax, he believed, provided a blueprint for a new social order based on Christian principles.

⁷² Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society*, 2nd ed. (London: Fabian Society, 1925), Appendix II.

⁷³ Shaw quoted in Bettany, *Stewart Headlam*, 139.

⁷⁴ Bettany, *Stewart Headlam*, 137.

A similar trend among religious social reformers occurred in the United States. While some of the leading figures of the social gospel, including Walter Rauschenbusch, credited George and *Progress and Poverty* for providing the inspiration to engage in social reform in the 1880s and early 1890s, like their British counterparts, by the turn of the twentieth century many had moved away from the single tax and towards a more comprehensive socialist program.⁷⁵ As one-time single taxer and editor of the American Christian socialist paper *The Dawn*, explained “[the single tax] used to mean the taxation of land values, ultimately to their full; in this we believe now as ever, but the term has come to stand for doing this *and refusing to do aught else*. In this we cannot believe; we believe in doing many things besides taxing land values.”⁷⁶ Others, like Father Edward McGlynn, however, remained committed to the single tax as he participated in the larger social gospel movement. For Father McGlynn, that commitment led to excommunication and what one historian has called, “one of the most significant cases of dissent within the American Catholic community of the late nineteenth century.”⁷⁷

The McGlynn Affair and the Catholic Social Gospel

At 6:30 p.m. on Saturday, June 18, 1887, thousands of people gathered in the streets of upper Manhattan and began a long procession toward Union Square. They were protesting the pending excommunication of New York City’s Father Edward McGlynn. The demonstration, which by some estimates swelled to over 20,000, included members from over 300 organizations throughout the state, including the Furriers’ and

⁷⁵ In *Christianizing the Social Order* Rauschenbusch writes, “I owe my own first awakening to the world of social problems to the agitation of Henry George in 1886, and wish here to record my lifelong debt to this single-minded apostle of a great truth.” See, Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1914), 394.

⁷⁶ [No title], *The Dawn* 1:5 (Sept. 15, 1889), 4.

⁷⁷ Robert Emmett Curran, “The McGlynn Affair and the Shaping of the New Conservatism in American Catholicism, 1886-1914” *The Catholic Historical Review* 66 (Apr., 1980), 184.

Shoemakers' Association, the Typographical Union, the Anti-Poverty Society, and the United Labor Party. The most enthusiastic demonstrators came from St. Stephens Church, from which McGlynn had been suspended as head priest that January. Their messages were emblazoned on the signs they carried. "Our purses will be open when our pastor is restored." "Don't, don't go to Rome." "Loyal Catholics, we are loyal Americans." "As Catholics, we believe in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man." "God made the land for the people." It was one of the largest gatherings to protest an excommunication in American history.⁷⁸

For more than a year, Father McGlynn had been engaged in a heated dispute with Catholic officials over his involvement in George's 1886 mayoral campaign. He had refused to comply with the Pope's demand for his presence in Rome, where he was expected to recant public statements he had made in support of the single tax and the abolition of private property in land. McGlynn's case divided American Catholics. McGlynn's supporters believed the Pope lacked the authority to bar American priests from political engagement or to demand their appearance in Rome. McGlynn's critics included supporters of Archbishop Michael Corrigan, who had instigated the disciplinary measures against McGlynn. Corriganites, as they were called, believed the St. Stephen's pastor had violated his priestly oath when he preached doctrines contrary to Church

⁷⁸ "Upholding McGlynn's Acts: The Parade and Meeting in His Honor" *The New York Times* (June 19, 1887), 1; "M'Glynn's Adherents: A Monster Parade in New York in Honor of the Contumacious Priest" *The Washington Post* (June 19, 1887), 1; "The McGlynn Parade: Many Trades Organizations Takes Part," *Boston Daily Globe* (June 19, 1887), 5; and, "McGlynn's Demonstration," *The Atlanta Constitution* (June 19, 1887), 5. While most press reports place the total number assembled at between 10,000 and 20,000, some historians have claimed as many as 75,000 people attended the demonstration. See, for example, Curran, "The McGlynn Affair and the Shaping of the New Conservatism in American Catholicism, 1886-1894," 184-204, and George Raymond Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George* (New York: the Macmillan Co., 1933), 352.

teaching and disobeyed direct orders from his superiors. They supported McGlynn's excommunication, which became official on July 3, 1887.

The controversy spread outside of the Church as well. Those who supported George's mayoral bid and his single tax plan defended McGlynn, while those who opposed George painted the St. Stephen's priest as a defiant idealist willing to sacrifice his religious integrity to further the political goals of a communist. "To leave the Church and follow Henry George," the editors of the humorist magazine *Puck* opined, "is to martyr himself for another enthusiast, far less sincere than himself, and to preach what is nothing but a crude, half-thought-out scheme of socialism."⁷⁹ To many, the battle between McGlynn and Corrigan was symptomatic of the larger political war between the defenders of private property in land and those, like George, who wished to abolish the institution altogether.

The McGlynn-Corrigan controversy had a polarizing effect in American Catholicism. According to historian Robert Emmett Curran, the McGlynn-Corrigan affair ignited a conservative backlash in American Catholicism against the greater liberalizing forces within organized religion. For several years following McGlynn's excommunication, his case became a sort of "litmus test" for determining one's loyalty to the Catholic Church and qualifications for priestly appointments.⁸⁰ "Among the factors that began to divide liberal and conservative Catholics in the late 1880's, none was as important as the McGlynn affair in setting in motion the synergistic effects that recast American Catholicism by the end of the century," Curran explained.

⁷⁹ [No Title], *Puck* (January 19, 1887), 342.

⁸⁰ Curran, "The McGlynn Affair and the Shaping of the New Conservatism in American Catholicism," 193-194.

While the McGlynn affair hardened the line that divided liberal and conservative Catholics in the late nineteenth century, it softened the one many used to differentiate purely secular concerns from religious ones. According to historian Aaron Abell and others, the McGlynn case encouraged many American Catholics to take a more active role in various social causes. Many began with the land reform movement. “A social view of property, revived and diffused by Father McGlynn’s movement served as the entering wedge for much contemporary and future American Catholic participation in social reform,” Abell explained.⁸¹ By endorsing the single tax McGlynn vouched for its religious foundation and opened the door to social politics and a way for Catholics to serve God by bettering life for all.

The roots of the McGlynn-Corrigan controversy began several years before 1886, when McGlynn supported George’s campaign for mayor. In fact, Father Alfred Isacson, who authored a 1999 biography of McGlynn, has argued that the conflict between McGlynn and Corrigan was a personal one that likely originated in 1859. That year, a 22-year old McGlynn had been selected, on account of his outstanding academic performance, to serve as the first prefect of the brand new American College in Rome. In this role, Isacson has pointed out, McGlynn effectively served as the dean to the College’s first 12 students, including a 20-year old Corrigan. “The differences in interests, the manliness of McGlynn, his sports mindedness, academic brilliance without much study,” Isacson wrote, “his command of Italian and Latin, the *éclat* and commanding presence that he possessed: all these I feel created a chasm between

⁸¹ Aaron I. Abell, “The Reception of Pope Leo XIII’s Labor Encyclical in America, 1891-1919,” *The Review of Politics* 7 (Oct., 1945), 471.

[McGlynn] and Corrigan.”⁸² McGlynn possessed natural talents and a dynamic personality that made him one of the most popular and beloved priests in all of New York. According to Isacson, Corrigan’s jealousy may have motivated the actions he took as Archbishop including the accusation he made in a letter to Pope Leo XIII that McGlynn traded confessions for sexual favors.⁸³

Whether jealousy influenced Corrigan’s actions against the St. Stephen’s priest, McGlynn certainly possessed many traits to envy. Born September 27, 1837, McGlynn’s upbringing was an immigrant success story. In 1827, both of McGlynn’s parents left Donegal, Ireland for New York, where they planned to start a new life and raise a family. McGlynn’s father, Peter, earned a comfortable living as a building contractor and left a sizeable inheritance for his wife Sarah and their 11 children when he suddenly died in 1847. All 11 children attended public grammar school and several of them, including Father McGlynn, also enrolled at the Free Academy, which later became the College of the City of New York and the nation’s first free public institution of higher education. In 1851, Sarah sent a 13-year old McGlynn to study at the Urban College of the Propaganda in Rome where he earned a Doctor of Theology eight years later. He was ordained on March 14, 1860, and returned to New York where he became assistant pastor at St. Joseph’s Church on Sixth Avenue. During the American Civil War he served in a military hospital near Central Park.⁸⁴

⁸² Alfred Isacson, *The Determined Doctor: The Story of Edward McGlynn*, 2nd and rev. ed. (Tarrytown, NY: Vestigium Press, 1998), 188-189.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁸⁴ For more on McGlynn’s family and early career, see: Sylvester L. Malone, ed., *Dr. Edward McGlynn* (New York: Dr. McGlynn Monument Association, 1918), 1-3; Manuel Scott Shanaberger, “The Reverend Dr. Edward McGlynn: An Early Advocate of the Social Gospel in the American Catholic Church. An Intellectual History” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1993), 1-66; Stephen Bell, *Rebel, Priest, and Prophet: A Biography of Dr. Edward McGlynn* (New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1937), 1-10; and, Isacson, *The Determined Doctor*, 1-12.

Sarah McGlynn might deserve a large portion of the credit for the selection of her son as the head pastorate at St. Stephen's Church in 1865 following the death of Father Jeremiah Cummings. After his father died, McGlynn's mother moved the family to the "outskirts" of the New York—near Third Avenue and Twenty-Eighth Street, or what is now the "east end." There, she met Cummings while he was collecting donations to build St. Stephens. After writing a large check, Father Cummings expressed shock at the donation and relayed his belief that she was "a poor widow with eleven children" and as such, never expected her to give so much. His mother, as Father McGlynn recalled, replied: "I will have you understand, Dr. Cummings, that I am rich, sir; I consider myself a millionaire. Yes, I have eleven children, and I consider every one of them worth at least a hundred thousand dollars."⁸⁵ This first encounter began a long friendship between Father Cummings and the McGlynn family.

Under Father Cummings, St. Stephen's boasted one of the largest memberships of any parish—approximately 25,000—and the reputation for the "best choir, furnishings, and conduct of services."⁸⁶ Under Cummings' successor, McGlynn's biographer Stephen Bell has claimed, "St. Stephen's became a sort of Mecca sought by visitors to New York, whether Catholic or Protestant, gentile or Jew."⁸⁷ Besides his charm and wit, McGlynn was known for his interest in social and economic issues and the unusual tendency to openly discuss them with his parishioners.

McGlynn also established a reputation early in his career as somewhat of an independent thinker and social radical, which he likely inherited from his participation in the "Accademia" in the 1860s. Described by many Catholic leaders as a "cabal of

⁸⁵ Bell, *Rebel, Priest, and Prophet*, 4.

⁸⁶ Isacson, *The Determined Doctor*, 17.

⁸⁷ Bell, *Rebel, Priest, and Prophet*, 16.

liberalism,” the Accademia consisted of a small network of priests who met regularly to further their religious education and discuss pressing issues before the Church. And according to religious historian Manuel Jeff Shanaberger, most adopted “very liberal ideas for Catholics of their time.” Members of the Accademia supported the abolition of slavery, the use of the vernacular in liturgy, expressed doubts about the idea of papal infallibility, and lamented the rise of what they termed “old-fogeyism” in Church governance.⁸⁸ Many even “opposed mandatory celibacy” for priests believing, as Curran has explained, that it “retarded emotional growth and tended to produce too many selfish and lonely priests.”⁸⁹ While the group disbanded in the 1870s, Father McGlynn continued to educate himself on political issues and participate in social reform movements.

Nearly a decade before he became an advocate of the single tax, McGlynn angered Catholic officials for his denunciation of sectarian education. Although the issue of whether to maintain its parochial school system or allow Catholic children to attend public school had long divided American Catholics, after the Civil War this division intensified. In 1866, American bishops met at the first Plenary Council of Baltimore where they adopted, among others, a resolution that urged—although, did not mandate—every priest to establish a parochial school in their parish. As a staunch supporter of America’s public school system, McGlynn refused. Following the second Plenary Council in 1886 in which the Bishops resolved to establish a nation-wide parochial school system and threatened to expel priests who opposed the effort, McGlynn

⁸⁸ Manuel S. “Jeff” Shanaberger, “Edward McGlynn: A Missionary Priest and His Social Gospel,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 13 (Summer, 1995), 28-29.

⁸⁹ Robert Emmett Curran, “Prelude To “Americanism:” The New York Accademia and Clerical Radicalism in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Church History* 42 (Mar., 1978), 55.

published an article in *The North American Review* that denigrated the Church's position on education and accused it trying to provoke a "new Know-Nothing" party in America.⁹⁰

Educated in public schools, McGlynn viewed them as one of the nation's "chief glories," and held them responsible for the creation of loyal and responsible American citizens. In contrast to his ecclesiastic authorities, he did not fear that public schools bred Protestantism and even joked to a large crowd who gathered to hear him speak on the issue in August 1886 that "the danger runs the other way." According to McGlynn:

Wherever Catholic children attend public schools they will find a goodly proportion—yes, generally a majority—of the teachers also Catholics. Danger to these Catholic children in sitting in the same room with unbaptized or half-baptized Protestant children. I should say that the danger runs the other way. Well might the children of industrious, clearly Protestant parents dread mixing with the children of parents who have been shamefully neglected by their Catholic pastors.⁹¹

Strike one.

But it was not his stance on education that attracted the ire of his Catholic superiors and ultimately led his second and third strikes against the Church. The issue that drove McGlynn to accept the single tax and support George's efforts to become mayor involved a deep-seated concern about poverty and his dissatisfaction with the efforts of organized religion to address it. McGlynn recalled his state of mind on the eve of his first meeting with George in 1882:

I began to feel life made a burden by the never ending procession of men, women and little children coming to my door begging not so much for alms as employment, not asking for food, but asking for influence and letters of recommendation, and personally appealing to me to obtain for them an

⁹⁰ Edward McGlynn, "The New Know-Nothingism and the Old" *The North American Review* 145 (Aug., 1887): 192-205. The Know-Nothing movement was a nativist, Anti-Catholic movement that formed in the 1850s to combat immigration and prevent Catholics from voting, holding office, or serving in other public capacities. The name "know nothing" comes from the phrase that movement member's replied when asked about their activities.

⁹¹ "More Sham than Schools. Dr. McGlynn on Parochial Institutions," *The New York Times* (Feb. 25, 1889), 2.

opportunity for working for their daily bread. And I felt that no matter how much I might give them, even though I reserved nothing for myself, even though I hopelessly involved myself in debt, I could accomplish nothing. I began to ask myself ‘Is there not Remedy? Is this God’s order that the poor shall be constantly becoming poorer in all our large cities, the world over? I was compelled out of sympathy for those right at my own door, as well as for thousands of the starving people of the native land of my father and my mother, to ask myself these questions, to study a little political economy, to ask what is God’s law as to the maintenance of His family down here below.’⁹²

Similar to Headlam and many others, McGlynn found George’s explanation of the causes of poverty and his confidence of its potential for eradication through state action invigorating. Its spiritual substance and basis in Christian principles made the single tax all the more appealing to McGlynn who quickly realized the probable benefits the land reform campaign would bring to organized religion and Catholicism in particular. Within days of their first meeting, McGlynn became, for all intents and purposes, the “Peter the Hermit” of the campaign for land reform.⁹³

Corrigan was not the first Catholic official to censure McGlynn. In the early 1880s, McGlynn aroused the concern of his superiors for his public support of Michael Davitt and the Irish Land League. In 1882, the St. Stephen’s priest ignored a direct order from Cardinal John McCloskey, Corrigan’s predecessor, not to speak at an Irish-American rally in Cleveland. While some called for McGlynn’s suspension for this act of defiance, McCloskey accepted a promise from Father McGlynn not to speak at any more events in support of the Irish Land League. Corrigan, however, interpreted the agreement as McGlynn’s promise not to speak at *any* political events. Thus, when he

⁹² Malone, ed., *Dr. Edward McGlynn*, 4.

⁹³ A.J. Steers, who first introduced George to McGlynn recalled a conversation in which George turned to him one day and said: “What we want, Steers, is a different kind of man. I can speak a little and you and others can work in your several ways but what we need is a preacher, a strong and forceful speaker, a man with learning, the spirit and the presence to take a leading part. We want a Peter the Hermit to preach this new Crusade.” Steers responded, “I have the very man,” referring to McGlynn. *Ibid.*, 123.

learned that the St. Stephen's priest would be the central speaker at a campaign rally for Henry George on October 1, 1886, he wrote to McGlynn to remind him of his promise. Father McGlynn promptly responded that neither Corrigan nor any other Catholic official possessed the authority to prohibit him from speaking on behalf of George. In a letter to Corrigan dated September 29, 1886, McGlynn wrote:

I, in view of my rights and duties as a citizen, which were not surrendered when I became a priest, am determined to do what I can to support Mr. George; and I am also stimulated by love for the poor and oppressed laboring classes, which seems to be particularly consonant with the charitable and philanthropic character of the priesthood, by virtue of which it has gained everywhere its greatest triumphs.⁹⁴

On October 1, 1886, Father McGlynn delivered the closing address to more than 2,000 people who had gathered at Chickering Hall to nominate Henry George for mayor of New York City. Strike two.

Prior to the Chickering Hall address, Father McGlynn organized a meeting between George and Corrigan in a futile attempt to convince the latter that the single tax complemented rather than conflicted with Catholic doctrine. Although the minutes of the meeting are unavailable, George likely cited an essay published in 1881 by Father Thomas Nulty, Bishop of Meath, Ireland. In "Back to the Land," Father Nulty claimed that private property possessed two essential characteristics. The first, he wrote is "the thing itself must be useful for some purpose; and secondly, it must be the product or the result of our labour."⁹⁵ Although useful, land was not the product of an individual's labor, but a gift to all mankind from its creator. "Again, no class of men could have such a right of private property in the land of a nation," Father Nulty declared:

⁹⁴ Henry George, "The Case of Dr. M'Glynn," *The Standard* 1:1 (Jan. 18, 1887), 1.

⁹⁵ Dr. Thomas Nulty, "Back to the Land: An Essay on the Land Question" reprinted in Henry George, *The Condition of Labour: An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII* (London: Land and Liberty Press, 1947), 136.

Firstly, because they could not by their own labour and industry created such a right themselves, for “no man has made the land,” and, secondly, because they couldn’t have received that right either by contract or free gift, from any one competent to give it. The people of the nation could not give it, for if they were to barter, or sell, or give away the land, they would expropriate the means that were necessary for their own subsistence, and that would be tantamount to a nation committing suicide [...].⁹⁶

Land lacked the qualifications to become the private property of any individual.

Although useful to George and his supporters, the views of Ireland’s Bishop Nulty were uncommon for a man of rank among learned Catholics in general, for that matter. Throughout the McGlynn-Corrigan affair, Catholic journals and magazines published numerous articles affirming that private property in land did *not* violate Christian law. While some cited the long history and tradition of private property in land in their defense, others offered a different meaning of the biblical phrase, often cited by George and his supporters, to the effect that the Lord gave the earth to the children of men. The problem with the use of this phrase to support efforts to abolish private property in land, the editors of *The Catholic Quarterly Review* claimed, for example, is that “This method of reasoning ignores the elementary truth that the abstract powers of the corporate body are one thing, and a personal, individual right another.”⁹⁷ While one may securely admit that every individual is entitled to “a livelihood in the land of his birth,” this does not imply equal access to land. There are other ways to earn a livelihood than from land, they argued.

George viewed the argument as preposterous and based on an unnaturally narrow description of land. George adopted a wide definition of the resource that encompassed much more than the earth’s soil. George filed all resources and powers “freely supplied

⁹⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁹⁷ “Land and Labor,” *The American Catholic Quarterly* 12 (Apr., 1887), 238.

by nature,” under the definition of land. Furthermore, the abolition of private property in land through the single tax did *not* prescribe to each individual an equal share of the earth; by removing all taxes on labor and its products and replacing them with one *single* tax on the value land, the single tax promised individuals a full and proportional share of the *wealth* that their labor helped create.

Firmly in the camp of the defenders of private property in land, in November 1886, Corrigan issued a Pastoral Letter to clarify the errors of men like George and McGlynn with regard to private property in land so that Catholics would “not be led by abuses, however flagrant, or by theories, however specious, to run the risk of embracing a falsehood for truth.”⁹⁸ That same month, the Archbishop temporarily suspended McGlynn from preaching and wrote the Pope for guidance in the matter. In December 1886 the Pope summoned Father McGlynn to Rome, and when he refused to go, citing personal reasons, Archbishop Corrigan permanently suspended his license to preach and ordered a replacement priest to lead St. Stephen’s.

The reaction of Father McGlynn’s parishioners to his suspension demonstrated the extent and passion of his following. Following Corrigan’s announcement that he had appointed Father Arthur Donnelly as the new head priest at St. Stephen’s, nearly 5,000 parishioners and McGlynn’s supporters formed an organization to protest his dismissal, campaign for his reinstatement, and raise funds to provide financial support to McGlynn during his suspension. They also organized an effective strike on January 17, when Donnelly was scheduled to deliver the first mass at his new parish. That day, the building

⁹⁸ Bell, *Rebel, Priest, and Prophet*, 41, and Frederic J. Zwierlein, *Letters of Archbishop Corrigan to Bishop McQuaid and Allied Documents* (Rochester, NY: The Art Print Shop, 1946), 105.

engineer of St. Stephen's refused to turn on the heat, the choir refused to sing, and the collection officers refused to perform their duties.

With Corrigan's help, Donnelly secured a large police guard to prevent any disruptions from McGlynn's supporters for the following week. He also sent for a replacement choir, collectors, and "summon[ed] a furnace brigade from St. Michael's Church," the *New York Times* reported.⁹⁹ McGlynn supporters still managed to make a loud statement of protest during the offering in the form of special donation cards which read: "Good for 10 cents when Dr. McGlynn is reinstated."¹⁰⁰ Derailed in their efforts to "freeze out the new and unpopular pastor," the *New York Times* noted, St. Stephen's parishioners now determined to starve the church of money.¹⁰¹

Without a formal church of his own, Father McGlynn found a surrogate in the Anti-Poverty Society officially established March 26, 1887 and publicly announced three days later in an address by the former St. Stephen's priest at the Academy of Music in New York City. In "The Cross of a New Crusade," arguably his most famous speech, McGlynn outlined the purpose of the society—to reveal the need for and encourage a strong religious presence in social reform—and its inspiration:

And I may say that during a certain political campaign...not a few men said to me that they were attracted to the movement in which I took a humble part by the religion that they found in it; by the fact that it was opening to them a new vista; that it was bringing them back to God; that it was making them feel ashamed, as it were, of the bitterness that they had cherished in their hearts against the very name of God, because God had been presented to them as a monster, as an ogre, as a being who made laws that necessarily resulted in the poverty, the degradation and the crime of a very large portion of His children; of an alleged father who did not know how to provide for his children, and who gave certain privileges to a

⁹⁹ "Standing by their Pastor. The Protest Against the Removal of Dr. McGlynn," *The New York Times* (Jan. 19, 1887), 2.

¹⁰⁰ "St. Stephen's Parish. Father Donnelly Conducting the Early Mass," *The New York Times* (Jan. 24, 1887), 5.

¹⁰¹ "Standing by their Pastor," 2.

chosen few of the children to impoverish, to degrade, to enslave, and to rob the greater part of their brethren.¹⁰²

Henry George and his Christian message provided the impetus for McGlynn's involvement in social reform and decision to lead the Anti-Poverty Society. After speaking for more than an hour on the ways the single tax would eliminate poverty and restore religion to a place of glory in society, he concluded with the following message of reassurance that nothing contradictory to Catholic teaching could be found in the doctrines he had preached:

I stand here and say, without fear of reasonable denial, that all that I have said tonight is eminently consonant with the highest Christian truth and the best Christian justice, and that no condemnation of this truth has ever been heard from the blessed lips of Christ nor from the highest tribunal in His church. Nor is there any more danger or possibility of such condemnation of so clear and salutary an economic truth than there is of the commendation of the proposition that two and two make four.¹⁰³

The Pope disagreed. On May 22, 1887 McGlynn received one final summons to Rome to answer for his "deplorable act of disobedience." Once again, McGlynn failed to appear before the Supreme Pontiff. Strike three. On July 4, 1887 McGlynn was excommunicated.

When by the fall of 1887 it became apparent that McGlynn's excommunication had failed to significantly dampen Catholic support for the renegade priest or the single tax, Corrigan pursued an alternative approach. Instead of attacking McGlynn, he targeted his supporters, beginning with John McGuire who died February 17, 1888. Citing his membership to the Anti-Poverty Society, the Archbishop refused McGuire a Christian burial or access to the family plot at St. Patrick's Calvary cemetery. In response,

¹⁰² Malone, ed., *Dr. Edward McGlynn*, 21.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

McGuire's family unsuccessfully sued for an injunction to prevent the officials at St. Patrick's Cathedral from interfering with his burial and \$1,000 in damages.¹⁰⁴

The case attracted national attention and refueled the debates that began brewing after McGlynn's suspension over whether individuals could be Catholic and enjoy all of the rights and privileges of American citizenship. Horace L. Traubel did not seem to think so. In an article published in *The Unitarian Review*, he argued:

The real question is not whether the land theory is right or wrong, but whether justice does not require of its Catholic adherence an entire surrender to the principles of freedom? The McGlynn Catholics seem to have caught a glimpse of a world of liberty, on whose threshold they still hesitate. Will they turn back, or will they accept the searching invitation? This is the pertinent, serious question, whether the nationalization scheme be truth or error. America needs free men who make no grants of conscience to the powers that be.¹⁰⁵

To Traubel, the main concern of Catholic officials in the cases of McGlynn and McGuire, was not whether the doctrines they supported contradicted Catholic teaching but the fact that they formed their political opinions from information they gleaned outside of the walls of the Cathedral. In other words, they were punished not for what they thought, but for the fact that they engaged in the act of independent thought.

Corrigan's supporters, on the other hand, insisted that the main issue did concern the justice of the single tax. McGlynn and his followers, they argued, were punished by the Church for preaching doctrines clearly contradictory to Catholic teaching and frankly, the history of the world. According to the editors of the *Catholic World*, "The sentiment of the time and the history of the world are against [George], but he does not shrink from proposing as a remedy for pauperism a scheme which shocks mankind and makes a sad

¹⁰⁴ Bell, *Rebel, Priest, and Prophet*, 178.

¹⁰⁵ Horace L. Traubel, "Freedom and Half-Freedom: The McGlynn Incident" *The Unitarian Review* 29 (Jun., 1888), 546.

blunder from the beginning.”¹⁰⁶ Some declared George’s teaching “anti-American” and “contrary to the letter and the spirit of all our institutions.”¹⁰⁷ In perhaps the clearest demonstration of Corrigan’s desire to make the McGlynn Affair about the actual doctrines he preached, the Archbishop wrote the Holy See in November 1887 and urged them to place *Progress and Poverty* on the Index of Forbidden Books. While the Pope heeded Corrigan’s request, he also forbade him or any other Bishop from publicly advertising the decision fearing that it would generate more interest, not less in George’s theories.¹⁰⁸ Although disappointed by the Vatican’s insistence on secrecy in the matter, Corrigan was elated to learn of the Pope’s planned Encyclical which he—and many others, including George—interpreted as an official denunciation of the single tax. In 1889, two years before it actually appeared, Corrigan received a letter from his friend Bishop McQuaid who reassured him that “Leo will cover, in his next Encyclical, the whole doctrine of property as to the right of ownership. This will settle George’s theories.”¹⁰⁹

While in the “*Rerum Novarum*” (On New Things) published in 1891 Pope Leo XIII made no mention of Henry George, *Progress and Poverty*, or the single tax, many read it as a direct rebuttal of the land reformer’s ideas and believed it sounded the final word in the McGlynn case.¹¹⁰ It is easy to see why. In the opening paragraphs of the

¹⁰⁶ “Where Henry George Stumbled,” *The Catholic World* (Apr. 1887), 117.

¹⁰⁷ “Henry George and His Land Theories,” *The Catholic World* 44 (Mar., 1887), 810.

¹⁰⁸ Frederick J. Zwierlein, *Letters of Archbishop Corrigan to Bishop McQuaid and Allied Documents* (Rochester, NY: The Art Print Shop, 1946), 112-113, and John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), 135.

¹⁰⁹ Zwierlein, *Letters of Archbishop Corrigan*, 133-134.

¹¹⁰ See for example, McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 135. McGreevy notes that although both George and Corrigan possessed a “mutual self-interest in reading *Rerum Novarum* as a commentary on the single tax did not mean both men were wrong.” Similarly in *Henry George*, Barker writes that “[T]he evidence does seem to indicate that not Karl Marx the materialist but a disturbing American idealist [Henry George] had been the great enemy in ideas, at whom Pope Leo was striking.”

Encyclical, the Pope explained his desire to enter the current discussion regarding the condition of labor not only because “there is nothing which has a deeper hold on the public attention,” but also because “crafty agitators constantly make use of these disputes to pervert men’s judgments and to stir up the people to sedition.”¹¹¹ He follows this statement with a discussion of the socialist plan which he described “as working on the poor man's envy of the rich,” to abolish private property in all things.¹¹² Although George was not a socialist, his opponents often accused him of preaching the doctrine of socialism, thus, the following statements may have been directed at George. And given that George cited the growing chasm separating the rich from the poor to justify the need for his reform, this is not an unreasonable assumption.

In the next section on private property, the Pope more directly addressed George’s ideas, specifically George’s argument that while private property in improvements to land is just, no private poverty should exist in the land itself. The Pope wrote:

We are told that it is right for private persons to have the use of the soil and the fruits of their land, but that it is unjust for any one to possess as owner either the land on which he has built or the estate which he has cultivated. But those who assert this do not perceive that they are robbing man of what his own labour has produced. For the soil which is tilled and cultivated with toil and skill utterly changes its condition; it was wild before, now it is fruitful; was barren, but now brings forth in abundance. That which has thus altered and improved the land becomes so truly part of itself as to be in great measure indistinguishable and inseparable from it. Is it just that the fruit of a man's own sweat and labor should be possessed and enjoyed by any one else? As effects follow their cause, so is it just and right that the results of labor should belong to those who have bestowed their labor.¹¹³

135. Most of George and McGlynn’s biographers advance some version of the notion that the Encyclical was addressed, in part, against further propagation of George’s theories. One exception is Joseph Nuisse who argues that this conviction is “certainly over drawn.” See Nuisse, “Henry George and ‘Rerum Novarum’: Evidence is Scant that the American Economist Was a Target of Leo XIII’s Classic Encyclical,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 44 (Apr., 1985), 241-254.

¹¹¹ Pope Leo XIII, “Encyclical Letter of Pope Leo XIII,” in Henry George, *The Condition of Labour: An Open Letter to Pope Leo XIII* (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1898), 163, 164.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 164.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 167.

George viewed the land upon which a house or farm sat and the land itself as two separate species of property—private ownership in the former was just, the latter was unjust. The Pope argued a man could call both the house and the land upon which it sat his private property.

Confident that recent Encyclical justified his actions leading to McGlynn's excommunication, in November 1891, Corrigan issued, with the Pope's approval, a letter that specified the parameters under which the St. Stephen's priest would be reinstated into the Church. The conditions set forth in "Rome's Ultimatum" required McGlynn to "publicly condemn all that he has said or done of an insulting character against the Archbishop and the Holy See" and "abstain from any public utterance or assistance at any meeting on the matter under consideration."¹¹⁴ In other words, Corrigan expected McGlynn to apologize, recant the single tax, and quit the Anti-Poverty Society. McGlynn refused and prepared a reply, later published in *The New York Tribune*, which he read at a meeting of the Anti-Poverty Society on November 22, 1891. In it, he stated:

My answer to this ultimatum is, that I cannot condemn or retract what I have "said and done of an insulting character as against the Archbishop and the Holy See," for the excellent reason that I have not insulted the Archbishop or the Holy See, although, I have criticized and differed with their policies, politics and opinions, as I had a perfect right to do. [...] I will not promise to abstain, nor will I abstain, from any public utterance or assistance at any meetings on the matter under consideration, namely, the doctrines of the Anti-Poverty Society. In all this my judgment is perfectly clear as to my duty, and my conscience is a rest.¹¹⁵

The following year, a panel of University professors of theology led by Papal delegate Monsignor Francisco Satolli validated McGlynn's reply and recommended his

¹¹⁴ Bell, *Rebel, Priest and Prophet*, 215.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 215-216.

reinstatement to the Church. On December 25, 1892, Father McGlynn delivered mass for the first time since his excommunication.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Christian churches in the United States and Great Britain faced a crisis of legitimacy. Declining church attendance and a lack of religious enthusiasm led many Christian leaders to reexamine Christian doctrine and its role in society. Inspired by Henry George and his powerful Christian message, two leaders in particular—Headlam and McGlynn—employed a variety of political efforts to modernize Church doctrine and take a more active role in the resolution of pressing social and economic concerns. But their support of the single tax was not an end in itself; rather, they also capitalized on the popularity of George's ideas to further their own religious goals. For Headlam, this included greater support for the theater and a reinterpretation of the meaning of the sacraments. Father McGlynn used George's ideas as a palliative to his dissatisfaction with Catholic teaching on poverty and in so doing, he played a significant role in helping to carve a place for American Catholics in the social gospel.

While George's ideas exerted a religious impact, they also inspired others to engage in political reform. The next chapter explores George's influence on streetcar monopolist Tom L. Johnson who, upon reading *Social Problems*, decided to devote the rest of his life to the application of the single tax. At George's suggestion, Johnson ran for and served in Congress and then became mayor of Cleveland. The single tax inspired and colored many of the reforms Johnson pursued as mayor, including constitutional home rule and the municipalization of public service monopolies.

V.

The Single Tax and the Municipal Ownership Movement in Cleveland

Barely 30 years old and at the height of a successful career as an inventor, steel manufacturer, and street railway monopolist, Tom Loftlin Johnson experienced a change of heart. In late 1883, while Johnson was traveling between Indianapolis and Cleveland—two cities in which he owned majority shares of the streetcar industry—a porter offered the heavy-set Southerner a copy of Henry George’s *Social Problems* (1883). “The title led me to think it dealt with [prostitution], and I said as much, adding that the subject didn’t appeal to me at all,” Johnson wrote in his autobiography, *My Story* (1911). The conductor overheard Johnson’s remark and promised the monopolist a refund if the book failed to maintain his interest. No refund was necessary. Johnson recalled that he read it “almost without stopping” and became a firm-believer of the doctrines espoused within.¹

Johnson sought validation of George’s theories from his closest friends. When Johnson had finished George’s masterwork, *Progress and Poverty*, he gave it to his lawyer L.A. Russell. “You made a free trader of me; now I want you to read this book and point out its errors to me and save me from becoming an advocate of the system of taxation it describes,” Johnson instructed his colleague.² Russell could not find any errors. Nor could Arthur J. Moxham, with whom Johnson owned and operated a steel

¹ Tom L. Johnson, *My Story* ed. Elizabeth J. Hauser (Seattle: University of Washington Press 1970, orig. 1911), 48-49.

² *Ibid.*, 49.

mill that manufactured the girder groove rail Johnson had invented.³ Confident that he had found a new calling, Johnson set out to meet Henry George and offer his services—or fortune—to the author during a business trip to New York in 1885. “I can’t write and I can’t speak, but I can make money. Can a man help who can just make money?” Johnson asked George at their first meeting. George, then aged 46, assured Johnson that he could help and convinced him not to abandon his business and to continue making money as long as he could. Johnson would devote the rest of his life to advancing the single tax.

George also encouraged Johnson to enter politics, beginning with his own campaign for mayor of New York City in 1886. Johnson’s participation, as a financial donor and political advisor introduced him to George’s closest allies in the fight for land value taxation including, Louis F. Post and Father Edward McGlynn. After the campaign, Johnson financed two newspapers—The Cleveland *Recorder* and the Chicago *Public*—both edited by Post and devoted to the discussion of the single tax, free trade, and other reforms.

Johnson lacked formal political ties and had never voted prior to meeting George.⁴ As a businessman, he had often contributed to the campaigns of both political parties and was, as he wrote, “indifferent as to which side won.”⁵ In 1890, the Democratic Party of Ohio nominated Johnson to run for Congress in the district of Cleveland, where he maintained a residence and voting privileges. Although he lost, Johnson determined to run again. He won in 1892 and served two terms in the House of

³ Ibid., 29. Johnson noted that he later discovered that “a similar rail had been made earlier and used in England.”

⁴ Eugene C. Murdock, “Life of Tom L. Johnson” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1951), 35.

⁵ Johnson, *My Story*, 48.

Representatives as a Democrat advocating free trade and George's single tax. Believing that unearned land values represented the only legitimate source of taxation, George and other single taxers opposed tariffs, which they believed artificially increased the price of consumer goods and services. As a steel manufacturer, Johnson's free trade position provoked charges of hypocrisy, especially after he proposed, against his own financial interests, to remove steel rails from the list of protected goods during a House debate on the Wilson-Gorman Tariff bill.⁶ Johnson failed to win reelection to a third term in 1894.

Johnson would make his mark far from Capitol Hill, in the gritty world of turn-of-the-century big city politics. In 1901, Cleveland voters elected Johnson to the first of his four terms as mayor of the industrial city of 400,000 people. During his eight-year reign as chief executive, Cleveland took over essential services such as garbage collection, street cleaning, lighting, and the operation of bathhouses from private enterprise. Johnson helped humanize the city's correctional system by replacing the old workhouse with a network of farm colonies designed to rehabilitate wayward youths and adults convicted of petty crimes. He also established a municipal forest department and expanded the city's system of parks, where, according to councilman and friend Frederic C. Howe, the entire population turned out every weekend to play baseball.⁷ Largely as a result of Johnson's efforts, Cleveland won constitutional home rule, a lower streetcar fare, the referendum, and higher taxes on the corporations that amassed giant fortunes through perpetual public franchise grants. And for a short time while he was still mayor, Cleveland owned and operated its own streetcar company, a rarity in early 20th century America. All of which made Johnson something of a hero to progressives. Lincoln

⁶ Ibid., 75.

⁷ Frederic C. Howe, *The Confessions of a Reformer* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), 109.

Steffens famously called him “the best Mayor of the best-governed city in the United States.”⁸

Johnson’s transition from private streetcar monopolist to public street car monopolist and reform mayor stemmed from his commitment to George’s single tax. The municipal reforms accomplished during Johnson’s administration also were achieved in spite of major political opposition and legal obstacles. While Cleveland and Cincinnati voted overwhelmingly Democrat, Republicans controlled Ohio state government. Every move Johnson made toward his three campaign promises—municipal ownership, fair and scientifically-based taxation, and a three-cent streetcar fare—met stiff resistance. In 1902, Republicans succeeded in a lawsuit that declared unconstitutional the “Tax School” that Johnson had created in 1901 and staffed with experts to study and recommend changes to Cleveland’s system of property appraisal. That same year, the Ohio Supreme Court overturned the Cleveland city charter and Johnson’s government was thrown out.

During his tenure, Ohio courts issued more than 50 injunctions to thwart Johnson’s efforts to wrestle control of the city’s streetcar franchises from private companies. “Injunctions got to be so common during my administration and were made to serve on such a variety of occasions,” he recalled, “that the practice gave rise to the witticism that ‘if a man doesn’t like the way Tom Johnson wears his hat he goes off and gets an injunction restraining him from wearing it that way.’”⁹ Despite these impediments, Cleveland earned national recognition under Johnson’s leadership. Johnson had successfully incorporated George’s ideas into workable program of local governance.

⁸ Lincoln Steffens, *The Struggle for Self-government: Being an Attempt to Trace American Political Corruption to Its Sources in Six States of the United States* (New York: Phillips & Co., 1906), 183.

⁹ Johnson, *My Story*, 166.

From George, Johnson learned to despise privilege, in all of its forms, and especially of the kind he enjoyed his entire life—monopoly. Johnson’s first “lesson of privilege,” as he referred to his multiple encounters with favoritism, occurred at the age of 11. The defeat of the South in the Civil War had left Johnson’s father, Captain Albert W. Johnson, a cotton planter, penniless. On a train trip from Louisville, Kentucky to Staunton, Virginia, shortly after General Robert E. Lee’s surrender, the young Johnson befriended the conductor, who gave him the opportunity to sell newspapers on his train without any competition from other newsboys. He could charge whatever he liked for the papers. The monopoly lasted five weeks and earned Johnson 88 dollars in silver, which helped move his family back to Louisville, where Johnson’s father hoped to secure a job at a streetcar company owned by relatives. The experience was transforming. As he later wrote, “The lesson of privilege taught me by that brief experience was one I never forgot[,] for in all my subsequent business arrangements I sought enterprises in which there was little or no competition. In short, I was always on the lookout for somebody or something which would stand in the same relation to me that my friend, the conductor had.”¹⁰ Johnson befriended many “conductors” throughout the next 20 years of his life.

Johnson amassed a fortune from privilege, which he defined as “the advantage conferred on one by law of denying the competition of others.” His career introduced him to five classes of monopoly—land, taxation, transportation, municipal, and patent—through which governments bestowed special rights and guarantees to their owners. Transportation monopolists enjoyed unfettered access to city streets and highways through untaxed, franchise grants, he explained. Often, monopoly of one type led to

¹⁰ Ibid., 5-7.

monopoly of another. The exclusive right to lay track through an urban area (transportation monopoly), included ownership of the land values upon which the track was laid (land monopoly).¹¹ And, as Johnson knew firsthand, state and county tax assessors consistently undervalued railway property and failed to include the full value added by the exclusive right to operate railway cars on continuous sections of track.

After meeting George, Johnson threw himself into a lifelong fight against privilege. The singularity of his goal helped make him a powerful competitor. Additionally, Johnson never lost sight of the fact that privilege was legally attained. That is, he and other monopolists had acquired special rights and favors through methods deemed legitimate according to the nation's laws. The successful reformer, Johnson believed, focused on the changing the hearts of institutions, not men. Political parties mattered little to Johnson. In selecting his mayoral cabinet, Johnson chose individuals loyal to their work rather than to a specific class or faction. As a result, Johnson's administration included individuals from varying backgrounds and political affiliations. The most famous included local attorney Newton D. Baker; Edward W. Bemis, University of Chicago professor and expert in municipal ownership; radical Populist and labor agitator Peter Witt; Harris R. Cooley, pastor of Johnson's church; and, Frederic C. Howe, a young, Republican lawyer and secretary of the Municipal Association, which opposed Johnson's election as mayor of Cleveland in 1901. After Johnson's reelection defeat in 1909, all of these men continued to enjoy successful careers in public service. Some also worked in national government. Under President Wilson Baker served as Secretary of War; President Calvin Coolidge selected him for the Permanent Court of

¹¹ Ibid., ix-xi.

Arbitration at The Hague. Similarly, President Wilson appointed Howe U.S. Immigration Commissioner at Ellis Island in 1914.

Although Johnson explicitly credited George for transforming his outlook on life and business, history has under appreciated the full extent to which George's ideas influenced Johnson's political career, especially his efforts to municipalize Cleveland's streetcars. In the Introduction to the 1970 edition of *My Story*, historian Melvin G. Holli claims that "there is little external evidence" to prove George converted Johnson to a life of reform or that his ideas informed Johnson's policies as mayor. Instead, Holli argues that George merely provided "spiritual succor" to Johnson, especially during the final weeks of his life when he dictated his autobiography. "In some respects," Holli writes, "the teachings of the 'saint' of the single tax were a surrogate religion that Johnson never had, and they provided the former Mayor with a kind of Christian symbol that linked him to the past and possibly to the future."¹²

While there is little doubt the two shared a spiritual bond—Johnson purchased burial plots next to George's in Brooklyn's Greenwood Cemetery long before his final illness—there is little reason to question Johnson's claim that George's ideas played a prominent role in his political program for Cleveland.¹³ Upon his election to Mayor of Cleveland in 1901, Johnson promised to bring fairness and scientific precision to the valuation of private property, lower the cost of vital public services, such as streetcar fares and water, and allow the people a greater role in governing the affairs of their city. All of these undertakings relied on and incorporated the core principles of the single tax.

¹² Melvin G. Holli, "Introduction to the 1970 Edition," in Johnson, *My Story*, li-liiii.

¹³ Johnson, *My Story*, 55.

The Single Tax Influence in Municipal Reform

Although they lacked a common political party or background, the men and women who studied and responded to the growing social demands facing turn-of-the-century American and European cities shared several characteristics. As historian Daniel Rodgers has noted, they formed a common “agenda of social politics” that accepted the notion that “not everything belonged in the market.” “Against the onrush of commodification,” Rodgers writes, “the advocates of social politics tried to hold certain elements out of the market’s processes, indeed, to roll back those parts of the market whose social costs had proved too high.”¹⁴ To George, land belonged outside of the marketplace because of its central role in the creation of wealth. Land, he explained, is not only “the habitation of man,” but also “the storehouse upon which he must draw for all his needs” and “the material to which his labor must be applied for the supply for all his desires.”¹⁵ Land was a basic human need.

To this category of resources too sacred for market allocation, other reformers added child labor, education, health care, housing, water, and natural monopolies—those industries in which it is most efficient to have just one supplier. George also believed that natural monopolies, railroads, in particular, belonged under state control. As he wrote in *Social Problems*, “The primary purpose and end of government is to secure the natural rights and equal liberty of each, all businesses that involve monopoly are within the necessary province of governmental regulation, and businesses that are in the nature complete monopolies become property functions of the state.” Furthermore, George believed history had proven the need for state control over vital public services such as

¹⁴ Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 29-30.

¹⁵ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 295.

transportation. “Either government must manage the railroads,” he continued, “or the railroads must manage the government. There is no escape.”¹⁶

At the city level, the fight to transfer the delivery of goods and services from private to public providers was called “municipalization.”¹⁷ And like George’s single tax, which attempted to reclaim and distribute the socially-created value of land, municipalization targeted the profits of public service corporations. The connection between municipal progressivism and the single tax is unmistakable. As Rodgers has noted, for example, “Recapturing the socially created value of the city’s streets and franchises meant confiscating the franchisers’ unearned profit; practically, it meant municipalization. Through this logical claim, the municipal ownership movement was to be heavily stocked with single taxers.”¹⁸ Johnson’s efforts in Cleveland provide a clear illustration of this point.

Besides specific policies such as municipalization, the single tax inspired and sustained the more general push for urban reform at the turn of the century. While internationally, city politics throughout this period “remained inchoate and implicit,” as Rodgers and others have argued, in places like Ohio, where single taxers held elected office, the urban reform agenda took more definite shape and focus. According to historian Robert H. Bremner, the reform programs launched in several major Ohio cities throughout in the early 20th century became known as the “Civic Revival”--“[s]o-named,” he explained, because it “represent[ed] the reawakening of faith in cities as

¹⁶ George, *Social Problems*, 177, 180-181.

¹⁷ Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 116. “Municipalization,” according to Rodgers, “meant, in short, the diminution of the market, a transformation of goods from private to public.”

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

positive agents of civilization.”¹⁹ Civic Revivalists shared the belief that privilege bred poverty by “siphoning off” or “taking wealth” without producing it. And like Johnson, Bremner wrote, “The Civic Revivalists were aroused because they thought that privilege, far from being a necessary or natural phenomenon of social development, was an artificial, abnormal condition.”²⁰ Civic revivalists looked to the single tax more frequently and with greater energy than any other proposal to destroy privilege.

The single tax appealed to advocates of municipal ownership because land values presented the greatest source of socially generated wealth in most cities; many also viewed the single tax as a stable source of revenue to fund the delivery of public services. In addition to Johnson, other leaders of Civic Revivalism such as Brand Whitlock and Samuel “Golden Rule” Jones of Toledo helped reveal the public’s stake not only in land values, but also in the enormous value of public franchises, which rarely depreciated and tended to increase without any effort by the owner.²¹ Johnson’s background as a single taxer and streetcar monopolist ideally positioned him to argue this point to the people.

The enactment of the single tax and the municipal ownership of public utilities required a larger degree of local autonomy than most American cities enjoyed in 1900. In their efforts to secure these reforms, Johnson and other progressive reformers throughout the country also fought for measures designed to increase cities’ governing power vis-à-vis the state in local affairs. Such measures included the initiative, referendum, and municipal home rule—the authority of city government to levy taxes and pass legislation without interference from state lawmakers. Single taxers so

¹⁹ Robert H. Bremner, “The Civic Revival in Ohio,” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 8 (Oct. 1948), 62-63.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

²¹ Bremner, “The Single Tax Philosophy in Cleveland and Toledo,” *AJES* 8 (July 1949), 375.

dominated the direct legislation movement in the United States that opposition to the initiative leaned heavily on arguments against land value taxation. “Of all the unsound schemes the initiative might be expected to usher in,” opponents of direct legislation believed, “the single tax was regarded as the most dangerous.”²² At the Ohio Constitutional Convention of 1912 anti-single tax delegates refused to vote for an initiative amendment unless it explicitly prohibited its use to shift the state’s tax burden to land values.²³

In addition to direct legislation, Johnson and other Civic revivalists continuously fought for the right of cities to establish their own governing powers. While the constitutional home rule movement had long been in motion when Johnson took local office in 1901, he and other revivalists promoted a new vision of the “self-governed city” they believed more accurately reflected the “ineluctable interdependencies,” as legal scholar David Barron has fittingly described, of urban life.²⁴ Frederic Howe, closely associated with the image of the “social city” as the self-governed city later became known, wrote that he “had an architectonic vision of what the city might be.” In his autobiography, *Confessions of a Reformer* (1925) Howe wrote:

I saw it as a picture. It was not economy, efficiency, and business methods that interested me so much as a city planned, built, and conducted as a community enterprise. I saw the city as an architect sees a skyscraper, as a commission of experts plans a world’s fair exposition. It was a unit, a thing with a mind, with a conscious purpose, seeing far in advance of the present and taking precautions for the future.²⁵

²² Bremner, “The Fight for Home Rule,” *AJES* 11 (Oct. 1951), 107.

²³ Barbara A. Terzian, “Ohio’s Constitutional Conventions and Constitutions” in *History of Ohio Laws* ed. Michael Les Benedict (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), 65.

²⁴ David J. Barron, “Reclaiming Home Rule,” *Harvard Law Review* 116 (Jun., 2003), 2309. Barron refers to this as the vision for home rule in the “social city.”

²⁵ Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, 113-114.

Civic revivalists recognized the potential in the city to serve as a model of governance. As historian Robert L. Briggs has noted Civic revivalists presented the city as capable of making “old American ideals” of political equality, economic independence, and public virtue viable again.²⁶

Home rule in the social city more fundamentally challenged the tradition of privatism that had for centuries defined the limits of local power than earlier campaigns for local autonomy. Under privatism, Barron has argued, “cities organized themselves less as general governments financed by general revenues than as corporate institutions for coordinating small groups of residents within their territorial limits.”²⁷ Lacking the authority to sell bonds or contract debt, cities in the early 19th century depended on the voluntary cooperation of local property owners to adopt “special assessments” to finance public projects. Though lacking in taxing power these early 19th century cities did not lack regulatory authority, also known as “police power” –a term, which, as the progressive-minded legal scholar Ernest Freund explained, refers to the broad capacity of governments to use various methods of “restraint and compulsion” to “secure and promote the public welfare.”²⁸ Cities relied heavily on police power throughout the nineteenth century. As historian William Novak has shown, for example, local governments routinely levied fines, seized private property, regulated public markets, and delivered—often with physical force—vaccinations, designed to protect public safety, morality, and health.²⁹

²⁶ Robert L. Briggs, “The Progressive Era in Cleveland, Ohio: Tom L. Johnson’s Administration, 1901-1909” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1962), 44.

²⁷ Barron, “Reclaiming Home Rule,” 2282.

²⁸ Ernest Freund, *The Police Power: Public policy and constitutional rights*, Coll. Ed. (Chicago: Callaghan & Company. The University of Chicago Press, 1904), 3.

²⁹ William J. Novak, *The People’s Welfare: Law & Regulation in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). See also Michael Willrich, *Pox: An American*

Expansive regulatory power, however, proved insufficient to govern the urban behemoths that emerged during the second half of the 19th century. By then, cities not only had increased rapidly in size, but also complexity. By the turn of the century, as Rodgers writes, “The great cities were distended collections of contrasting subcities...subdivided by turn into neighborhood and ethnic territories.”³⁰ As cities grew, so did the demands for fundamental services such as fresh water, electricity, paved streets, and transportation. However, as historian Robert Wiebe has pointed out, “the same conditions that made the need so imperative diminished the capacity to meet it. Pell-mell expansion destroyed the groups and neighborhoods that sustained social action.”³¹ The first phase of the home rule movement responded to this crisis by demanding “some measure of local initiatory power” independent of private or state delegation and within the “usual range” of municipal activity.³² Intrusion, of any kind, into the private market by local governments fell outside of this usual range.

Home rule advocates soon realized that the “usual range” of city power needed broadening to address the unusual conditions facing turn-of-the-century urban leaders. To that end, home rulers fashioned an “administrative city” with a wider program of governance capable of responding efficiently and with expert information, “to a fast-changing urban world.”³³ Supporters of this vision argued that the functions of a city were neither completely public, nor private, but a mix of “semi-scientific, *quasi-judicial*

History (New York: Penguin Press, 2011) for more on governments’ use of police powers—and the legal and social backlash the use of these powers inspired—in the effort to contain small pox epidemics in the early twentieth century.

³⁰ Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 113-114.

³¹ Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 13.

³² Barron, “Reclaiming Home Rule,” 2290.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2301.

and *quasi*-business” and, as such, should be carried out by professionals with technical expertise in aspects of social management.³⁴ Cities needed bureaucrats.

Turn-of-the-century Cleveland looked significantly different than the visions of an independent city offered by either the early home rule campaigners or those who favored an administrative approach to local governance. When Johnson took office in 1901, Cleveland operated under a charter called the Federal Plan. Passed by the state legislature in 1892, this plan separated the executive and legislative branches, gave the City council authority over the budget, and complete administrative control to the mayor. While the council made and financed laws, the mayor appointed the civil servants in charge of their implementation. “Because of the system of checks and balances, the mayor’s veto power and the council’s control of the purse,” as Cleveland historian Thomas F. Campbell has noted, “the backers of the Federal Plan believed that they had created a perfect form of government that would meet the future needs of their city.”³⁵ The Federal Plan faced little opposition until Johnson’s election.

Just months after his historic victory—he won by the second largest margin in the city’s history—Ohio Republicans filed suit alleging that Cleveland’s charter violated the constitutional requirement for a uniformity of laws.³⁶ No other city in the state operated under the so-called Federal Plan. The state Supreme Court agreed, and in 1903, Cleveland received a new charter based on “Cincinnati Board Plan” in which the heads of each board, or department—police, transportation, public works, etc.—were elected instead of appointed by the governor. Despite this, nearly every individual Johnson had

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2302.

³⁵ Thomas F. Campbell, “Mounting Crisis and Reform: Cleveland’s Political Development” in *The Birth of Modern Cleveland, 1865-1930* eds. Thomas F. Campbell and Edward M. Miggins (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, 1988), 301.

³⁶ Terzian, “Ohio Constitutional Conventions and Constitutions,” 68.

appointed to head the city's departments under the old charter won election to the respective boards created by the new plan in 1903. The "ouster suit," as the press called it, slowed but did not stop Johnson's momentum toward the fulfillment of his campaign promises.

With the legal and political cards stacked against him, Johnson understood that he would lose more battles than he would win in the war against privilege in Cleveland. While Johnson was mayor, Republicans pushed back against every step he took toward the fulfillment of his three campaign promises—higher taxes on corporations holding public franchises, municipal ownership, and a three-cent car fare. Still, the story of his political career is not one of failure. Johnson recognized, as did George, the ability of the fight to affect change.

The Cleveland Streetcar War

The ten-year struggle for municipal control of Cleveland's streetcars defined Johnson's mayoral tenure. Voters elected, re-elected, and removed him from office on this single issue. It was the frontline in his war against privilege and it attracted national attention. Although reformers waged similar traction battles in other cities, the war in Cleveland more clearly demonstrated the power of public service corporations and the ruthlessness with which they fought. Cleveland's two largest streetcar corporations, the Cleveland Electric Railway Company and the Cleveland Railway Company, defended their interests through injunctions, liability suits, bribes, referendums, and "ripper" bills—those designed to change the machinery of government to gain partisan advantage, like the so-called ouster suit that invalidated the charter of Cleveland shortly after

Johnson took office.³⁷ Although Johnson campaigned on the guarantee of a three-cent streetcar fare for Clevelanders he believed municipal ownership offered the only way to permanently fulfill this promise. The rate of fare when Johnson took office averaged about five cents per ride plus additional cost for transfers.³⁸ He favored a three-cent fare, Johnson's closest allies and fiercest opponents understood, because "it was two-cents closer to nothing."³⁹

Johnson also campaigned on the three-cent fare due to the constitutional ban on municipal ownership in Ohio. Johnson first became convinced of the profitability of a three-cent fare while managing a Detroit railway line owned by his brother Albert from 1894 to 1899. When Johnson arrived in Detroit, the mayor, Hazen S. Pingree, was working with streetcar owner, Henry Everett, to introduce a three-cent line that, while privately owned, would be managed by individuals friendly to the mayor's goal of affordable transportation with maximum public oversight. Johnson determined to compete with the mayor's low-fare line on merit rather than the "old tricks"—large buyouts, costly litigation, and campaign contributions to City Council members—he had used to destroy rival businesses prior to encountering George's work. Merit, however, failed to sustain healthy competition because Johnson was unable to renew his operating rights as they expired. By refusing to renew Johnson's franchises, the City Council successfully blocked his ability to compete with the municipal line.⁴⁰

Although competitors, Johnson and Pingree formed a close bond, and in 1899, cooperated on a proposal in which Johnson would sell his entire railway system to

³⁷ Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio*, 17.

³⁸ E.W. Bemis, "The Street Railway Settlement in Cleveland," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 22:4 (Aug., 1908), 545.

³⁹ Bremner, "The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland," 187.

⁴⁰ Holli, "Introduction, 1970 Edition," in Johnson, *My Story*, xlix.

Detroit. Under the plan, a municipally controlled board of trustees, acting as private investors, would purchase Johnson's line and operate it along with the three-cent line for the public.⁴¹ The plan might have succeeded if not for the skepticism Johnson's involvement generated among the Detroit public who believed the asking-price for Johnson's company was too high.⁴² The courts eventually overturned the legislation that would have allowed Mayor Pingree to go through with his plan. Although unsuccessful, the experience inspired Johnson to test the proposal in another city. At the end of 1898, he sold off his remaining business interests and invested his entire fortune in government bonds.⁴³ Then, he moved to Cleveland.

The entire country followed Johnson's campaign for mayor in 1901. The press portrayed his election as a symbol of the people's desire for greater municipal control over public services, or for socialism, depending on the editors' political leanings.⁴⁴ The press also recognized the potential of Johnson's handling of the traction issue to serve as a model for mayors in other cities around the country. Late in 1906 and at the height of Johnson's efforts to secure municipal ownership of Cleveland streetcars, a reporter for *Outlook*, edited by Lyman Abbott likely echoed the sentiments of many when he wrote:

Mayor Johnson is fighting the battle, not for Cleveland alone, but for all American cities. If he wins, the way to success will be indicated for other municipalities. If Johnson, with his unusual qualifications for carrying on a struggle of this kind, can be worried out and finally beaten, the public utility companies everywhere will be encouraged to strive for the mastery, and to enter, where necessary, upon time-consuming conflicts which must prove distracting and detrimental to the public welfare.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴³ Hoyt Landon Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio, 1897-1917* (Athens, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1964), 58.

⁴⁴ George Gunton, editor of *Gunton's Magazine* published in New York interpreted Johnson's election as "the materialization of the growing public sentiment... towards socialism." See "Meaning of the Cleveland and Toledo Elections," *Gunton's Magazine* (May 1901), 467.

⁴⁵ George C. Sikes, "Cleveland's Traction Struggle," *Outlook* 84:12 (Nov. 17, 1906), 658.

Johnson succeeded in obtaining a three-cent fare with universal transfers but failed in his larger goal of municipal ownership. After Johnson left office, however, his supporters carried on the fight and helped pass a constitutional amendment in 1912 that gave Ohio cities the power to own and operate public utilities.

Less tangible than three-cent fares but more significant to Johnson as a single taxpayer, the streetcar controversy in Cleveland allowed him to highlight and maintain key components of George's philosophy in the public dialogue. These included the denunciation of monopoly privilege, the privatization of land and natural resources, and the private control of socially-generated wealth--that is, wealth created not by one individual, but through the advance of population and social development. As Bremner has pointed out, throughout the streetcar fight, Johnson urged voters to look at the origins of streetcar companies' profits and showed how these profits resulted from the exclusive privilege to provide and operate transportation—a social necessity—to the public.⁴⁶ In his battle to municipalize streetcars, Johnson tried to reclaim the public's stake in the wealth generated by the performance of this social demand. As he recalled, "Our entire Cleveland fight in one sense was a struggle to have recognized the sacredness of public property by private interests as the sacredness of private property is recognized by public interests." The courts, however, more consistently ruled that privately-held wealth, regardless of its origins, was private property.

Besides its incorporation of single tax principles, the streetcar struggle offered an ideal test-case for the municipalization movement. As Rodgers has observed, "Nowhere in the late-nineteenth-American city had the imbalance between private market forces

⁴⁶ Bremner, "The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland," 186, 204-5.

and public direction been clearer than in transit politics.” Streetcars, like land, “were potentially everyone’s utility. Rodgers continued: “The urban dwellers’ automobile in the pre-auto city, they were the key determinant of a city’s spatial growth, the wage earners’ means of escape for a Sunday’s outing, and perhaps even the means to a modest house in the suburbs, if streetcar prices could be driven low enough.”⁴⁷ The profits and monopoly position of streetcar companies depended closely on city granted franchises for access to public streets and highways. As such, streetcars were an inherently local matter. The industry’s rapid expansion at the end of the nineteenth century also illustrates their importance. By 1890, most cities had begun installing electric streetcars to meet the growing transportation demands of their residents. Between 1880 and 1890, as historian Barbara Welke has noted, American streetcar tracks increased in total distance covered from 2,000 to 8,000 miles, reaching 22,000 miles by 1902.⁴⁸ The introduction of electricity into local transportation increased the speed of streetcars and the rate of accidents, creating two other fields of interaction between city officials and the heads of private corporations; besides management of public services, city governments became increasingly involved in the protection of public safety against private negligence.

Within months of taking office, Johnson convinced Republican Councilman Howe to sponsor and introduce the first three-cent car fare ordinance to the City Council. The “Howe Bill” enforced the following restrictions on future railway franchises in city: the fare must not exceed three-cents with universal transfers; that no franchise would be

⁴⁷ Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 145.

⁴⁸ Barbara Young Welke, *Recasting American Liberty: Gender, Race, Law, and the Railroad Revolution, 1865-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17. In addition to useful statistics on the growth of the transportation industry at the turn of the century, Welke’s study reveals how Americans interacted and responded to the growth in technological and corporate power and how their relationship to the state and sense of liberty changed as a result of this increased interaction.

granted for longer than 20 years; and, that the city reserved the right to purchase the lines from the private company at any time. The bill also retained the right of the city to change streetcar schedules and mandated the use of “modern” technology on all lines.⁴⁹ The bill’s passage immediately provoked negative reactions from the transit industry. A spokesperson for the Cleveland Railway Company, the city’s second largest streetcar corporation, called the bill “a foolish measure” and claimed that no company could live for a minute under its conditions.”⁵⁰ The Council received one bid, which it awarded on March 17, 1902, to John B. Hoefgen, one of Johnson’s former business associates.

Ohio laws governing the awarding of new franchises and the “ouster” suit account for the lack of bids received under the Howe ordinance. Two days after its introduction to the City Council, Ohio Attorney General John B. Sheets filed suit against the legality of Cleveland’s charter. Few companies wanted to take on the lengthy process required by law to bid on a new franchise while the City’s charter was in legal limbo. Ohio laws required new companies seeking franchises to offer the lowest bid and receive written consent from a majority of the property owners along the proposed route before beginning construction. By comparison, no competitive bidding or property owners’ consent was required for companies with existing franchises which wanted to extend their routes or renew them.⁵¹ The consent provision often presented the most significant obstacle facing new companies. After the City Council accepted Hoefgen’s bid, the two largest railway companies in Cleveland, the Cleveland Electric Railway known as “Big Con” and the Cleveland Railway Company, or “Little Con,” paid property owners to

⁴⁹ “No Franchises Unless 3-Cent Fare,” *The Cleveland Press* (December 10, 1901).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ For more on this process, see Bremner, “The Railway Controversy in Cleveland,” 189 and Bemis, “The Street Railway Settlement in Cleveland,” 544.

refuse consent while Hoefgen's company paid for it.⁵² Two months after the City Council accepted Hoefgen's bid, the Eighth District Court Ohio declared the three-cent franchise invalid because it only covered a portion of the entire route the Council had advertised for bids. On June 27, 1902, six days after the Hoefgen ruling, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that Cleveland's city charter was unconstitutional and enjoined the city council from granting or renewing any franchises until the state legislature passed and the governor signed a new city charter the following year.

Despite a lack of results on the traction issue, Cleveland voters reelected Johnson on April 7, 1903 with an even greater plurality than in the first election. Equally indicative of the public's support for Johnson's goals, voters elected the entire Democratic ticket, with the exception of the police clerk. The ouster suit had backfired. Rather than decrease Mayor Johnson's influence in city government by taking away his power of appointment, the new municipal charter—known as the “Nash Code,” named for Ohio Republican Governor George Kilborn Nash—strengthened it. “The result [of the election] is the fruit of the work that we have been doing for the past two years along the lines of the 3-cent fare and the equalization of taxes,” Johnson said after the votes had been tallied. “The opposition could not distract the minds of the people from these issues.”⁵³ Within a month of his re-election, Johnson introduced 11 new three-cent fare ordinances.

The public expressed its support for Johnson's work toward the three-cent fare in other ways besides voting. In his first two years of office, Johnson received many letters of approval and fielded a number of requests for advice from city officials and interested

⁵² Bremner, “The Railway Controversy in Cleveland,” 189.

⁵³ *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, (April 7, 1903).

students around the country. By 1903, Johnson had become national expert on the street railway issue. “Believing that no one is better qualified to discuss street car operations than you are,” the manager of the Fort Wayne, Indiana *Journal-Gazette* wrote to Johnson, “we take the liberty of asking you, whether you believe it possible for a company operating in Fort Wayne, with a population of about 50,000, to sell seven tickets for twenty-five cents on board the cars and do a profitable business.”⁵⁴ Johnson also fielded requests for statements from high school and college debate clubs, studying the question of municipal ownership or transit politics. In one particularly revealing letter to the mayor, 13-year old Clara Rugers asked for Johnson’s help financing her education. “I have heard mama say you was the best man in Cleveland, and is so kind and papa is dead and mama is sick...we live in the country I have been taking the street car to Oberlin mama can’t afford to pay it.”⁵⁵ Clevelanders needed a low-fare streetcar to travel within the city but also to and from it.

Residents came closer to a three-cent crosstown line by the end of 1903, when the city council awarded to Albert Green’s Forest City Railway Company (Hoefgen’s successor) a franchise to build and construct a streetcar line on Dennison Ave. Long-term strategy played a key role in the location of this franchise. Earlier in 1903, the two largest streetcar companies in Cleveland—Big Con and Little Con—together controlling all of the railway business in Cleveland, consolidated to form the Cleveland Electric Railway Company, or, as it was more popularly known, “Concon.” Most of Concon’s franchises would expire by 1907, some within the next year. Concon authorities planned

⁵⁴ Letter to Johnson from H.C. Rockhill, May 16, 1902, Tom L. Johnson Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

⁵⁵ Letter to Johnson from Clara Rugers, November 11, 1904, Tom L. Johnson Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

to propose extensions of their lines through Dennison Avenue when they applied for renewals. Johnson hoped to beat them to this destination. From Dennison Avenue, Johnson believed, the three-cent line could extend into the city through Concon's other expired franchises, such as those on Central and Quincy Avenues.⁵⁶

Concon officials understood the significance of the Green franchise and immediately searched for ways to nullify it or at the very least, halt construction. According to Johnson, "Every one of the property owners' signatures on the consents was scrutinized by the courts and fought over like the signature to a contested will. Every fly speck that might possibly offer an excuse for a law suit was examined."⁵⁷ Concon won a temporary injunction against further construction on the Dennison line on November 12, 1903. By then, however, the Forest City Railway Company had already poured \$30,000 into construction and was bonded for another \$25,000. "Injunctions multiplied so rapidly and checked the progress of construction so effectually," Johnson recalled, "that the enterprise was often referred to as the three-cent fare railroad buried in the mud."⁵⁸

Besides injunctions, Concon's cozy relationship with the city's largest financial institutions created funding difficulties for Green. He found few investors willing to lend to a company constantly in court and created to maximize public control over its operations. As Johnson explained, "It was not easy to capitalize an enterprise which was so badly handicapped, and to find a person too honest to be bought, willing to take the risk of losing money without any possibility of making more than an ordinary six or seven per cent."⁵⁹ Additionally, as Johnson had learned from personal experience,

⁵⁶ Johnson, *My Story*, 86, 188-190.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 222.

railway owners and bank managers were sometimes the same person. William H. English owner of the Indianapolis streetcar line that Johnson purchased in 1876, for example, also served as president of one of the city's largest banks. In this position, Johnson noted, English used the people's own money—in the form of bank deposits—to finance his railway private operations.⁶⁰

Unable to secure enough private investment, Johnson decided to tap into the pockets of the people. In July of 1906, Johnson partnered with *Cleveland Press* owner E.W. Scripps to guarantee a six percent return on Forest City stock, the sale of which they advertised in the *Press*.⁶¹ Earlier that summer Green and city officials cooperated on a plan similar to the one proposed by Johnson and Pingree in Detroit. The City Council organized the Municipal Traction Company to lease Forest City property after the necessary capital for construction was raised by the sale of Forest City stock.⁶² The plan worked well until Concon successfully halted construction with a personal liability suit against the mayor. The suit claimed that the Forest City grants were invalid as a result of Johnson's financial interest in the company. Five days of testimony proved that although Johnson and Scripps stood to lose \$400,000 if the three-cent line failed, the mayor could not earn a single penny from the enterprise if it succeeded.⁶³ Forest City completed construction on the Dennison Avenue line in October, and the first three-cent-fare car ran on November 1, 1906. Mayor Johnson himself served as the motorman.

The next year proved a turning point in the traction struggle. The low-fare movement won key battles that allowed Johnson to push ahead with his plan to

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶¹ Bremner, "The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland," 193.

⁶² Johnson, *My Story*, 224.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 236.

municipalize Cleveland's streetcars. In January 1907, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court ruling that Concon franchises on Central and Quincy Avenues had expired in 1905.⁶⁴ The city now had the legal authority to grant these expired franchises to Forest City thereby expanding the Municipal Traction Company's network of street railway lines. Throughout the next six months, officials from Concon and the Municipal Traction Company discussed the possibility of a lease agreement similar to the one entered into by Forest City. The two companies failed to reach an agreement on the valuation of Concon property. Concon pulled out of the negotiations until after the November 1907 election in which it hoped U.S. Senator Theodore Burton would defeat Johnson for mayor and renew its expired franchises.

The election became a national affair and served as a referendum on municipal ownership of streetcars. Besides Concon, the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce, the Ohio Republican Party, and even President Theodore Roosevelt came out in support of Burton. In the spring of 1906, Johnson had sent every member of the City Council a circular designed to gauge their support for two proposals: a municipally operated three-cent line and referendum on franchise grants passed within a limited time frame. (The latter proposal eventually became state law.) The response of the Council was largely favorable and helped convince Johnson to go ahead with his plan to establish the Municipal Traction Company. The responses of those opposed helped prepare Johnson for the rest of the traction fight and especially, the campaign against Senator Burton.

⁶⁴ See *Cleveland Electric Company v. Cleveland and the Forest City Railway Company*, 204 U.S. 116 (1907)

The Debate over Municipal Ownership

Discussion of municipal ownership, and city governance in general, filled the pages of academic journals in the years around the turn of the century. More articles on municipal affairs appeared in the ten years between 1882 and 1892 than the rest of the nineteenth century.⁶⁵ Those in favor of municipal ownership of transportation and other public services, such as J. Dorsey Forrest, Professor of Sociology and Economics at Butler University, expressed the desire to “conserve to the public the unearned increment of the franchise” and ensure affordable and reliable service – a very Georgian formula for urban reform.⁶⁶ To these individuals, as Howe put it, municipal ownership represented an “industrial expression of democracy.”⁶⁷

Opponents of municipal ownership frequently argued that it would be less efficient and in the long-run, more costly, than private control. In an academic discussion on the issue published in the journal of *The American Economic Association*, Leo S. Rowe argued that the nation’s “limited experience with public management has shown that municipal industries are constantly subjected to the danger of deterioration consequent upon the failure adequately to provide for their maintenance and improvement.”⁶⁸ Other skeptics of municipal ownership also pointed out that there were few guarantees against the corruption of public service monopolies under government rather than private ownership. Cleveland City Councilman, H.E. Hackenberg wrote in his response to the Mayor’s March 1906 circular that he opposed municipal ownership

⁶⁵ Barron, “Reclaiming Home Rule,” 2289.

⁶⁶ Leo S. Rowe, et. al., “Municipal Ownership—Discussion,” *Publications of the American Economic Association*, 3rd Series 7 (Feb., 1906), 152.

⁶⁷ Frederic C. Howe, “The Case for Municipal Ownership,” *Publications of the American Economic Association*, 3rd Series, 7 (Feb., 1906), 113.

⁶⁸ Leo S. Rowe, et. al., “Municipal Ownership,” 145.

because “there is not the same individual responsibility” when operated by the city and that under public ownership, “the incentive of employes [sic] is usually to hang on to their jobs as long as possible, at as high salaries as they are able to get, and then, too, they have more opportunities for graft.”⁶⁹ *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* expressed a similar fear that the municipal ownership of street cars would simply replace one type of political machine with another. A more rational policy would leave the ownership and management of streetcars to private business “under strict regulations for the protection of the interests of the city as well as of the traveling public.”⁷⁰ Public regulation, not ownership, presented a safer alternative.

In response to the fear of public graft, supporters noted that corruption would be easier to fight under public management than private control. At the Conference of American Mayors on Public Policies as to Municipal Utilities in 1915, Newton Baker, then mayor of Cleveland, reminded “those who fear political activity in municipal ownership” that, “[O]pen activity is better than secret political activity; that it is better to have our adversary out in the field where we can see him and fight him than to have him hiding behind ledgers and books that are closed accounts to public inspection, and where we never know the extent or the character of the forces we are fighting.”⁷¹ Similarly, Howe argued there would be less corruption under municipal ownership because its main sources—the fight over franchise grants—would be removed. “There can be no question but that municipal ownership will remove the most tempting stakes from the public

⁶⁹ Letter to Johnson from H.E. Hackenberg, March 16, 1906, Tom L. Johnson Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.

⁷⁰ “Municipal Railway Ownership,” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (January 14, 1902).

⁷¹ Newton D. Baker, “Municipal Ownership,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 57, Proceedings of the Conference of American Mayors on Public Politics as to Municipal Utilities (Jan., 1915), 193.

gaming-table,” he wrote, “It will take the big privileges out of city politics.”⁷² It was certainly the case that in Cleveland, the ugliest battles of the traction war, those that involved endless litigation and bribery, were fought over franchise grants and renewals.

Howe also provided a powerful response to the claim that municipal ownership would be less economical than private control. The issue of municipal ownership, he argued, was “least of all a financial one.” As he pointed out:

No other agency of government is subjected to a purely commercial test. The motive of our police, fire, health, street, park, school and library departments is one of safety, convenience, comfort, happiness. Even the annual deficit in the postal department is willingly borne, because the social service is so great. The real test of municipal ownership is not a monetary one; not the relief of taxation; not a profit or loss account; not even cheap water, gas or electricity. It is rather one of higher civic life.⁷³

Professor Richard T. Ely, tended to agree that the question of municipal ownership was one of “higher civic life,” but he doubted whether American cities were ready for the kind of “social action” needed to sustain it. “The question of municipal ownership is a quest of social psychology,” he insisted. “Have we in our country the social man to back social action?”⁷⁴

Johnson believed so, although, he didn’t live long enough to see Cleveland own and operate its own street railways. After he pummeled Burton for re-election in November 1907, Concon finally agreed to work out a settlement to *lease* all of its remaining lines to the Municipal Traction Company. Between December 1907 and April 1908, Concon representative Frederic H. Goff, a well-known banker and attorney, and the

⁷² Howe, “The Case for Municipal Ownership,” 126.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁷⁴ Richard T. Ely, “Municipal Ownership of Natural Monopolies,” *The North American Review* 172 (Mar., 1901), 455.

mayor re-elect met 100 times to hammer out the details of such a transfer.⁷⁵

Disagreement over the value of Concon nearly doomed the effort. When the meetings began, Goff insisted that Concon stock was worth \$52.37 per share whereas Johnson believed \$41.43 provided a more accurate assessment. In round numbers, *The Cleveland Press* reported, Johnson and Goff were \$2,500,000 apart in their claims.⁷⁶ Eventually, Goff and the mayor agreed on a total value of \$22 million or \$55 per share.⁷⁷

On April 27, 1908, the Municipal Traction Company took charge of Concon lines and on April 28—which became known as “Municipal Day”—operated all of the city’s streetcars free of charge. Jubilance over the mayor’s victory and the “end” of the seven-year traction war was, however, short-lived. On May 16, three-fourths of Municipal Traction Company employees went on strike for higher wages. Late in 1906, prior to the Supreme Court’s ruling, Concon promised its employees a new contract with a two-cent per hour wage increase when the city renewed its franchises on Quincy and Central Ave. After the Goff-Johnson settlement, most of Concon’s employees went to work for the Municipal Traction Company with a new contract that increased their wages by one cent an hour. The old Concon employees insisted on the full two cents an hour raise promised to them by their old company.⁷⁸ The Municipal Traction Company might have been able to meet that demand if not for the effects of the business depression, at its height in 1908, in reducing ridership and the company’s profit margin. The Goff-Johnson settlement

⁷⁵ Bremner, “The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland,” 195.

⁷⁶ “Mayor Claims \$41.73 Concon Stock Value,” *The Cleveland Press* (February 20, 1908).

⁷⁷ Bremner, “The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland,” 195.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 198-199.

included a security grant that returned control of Concon lines if the Municipal Traction Company failed to pay stockholders a six percent return on Concon's agreed value.⁷⁹

Shortly after the strike ended, a referendum petition circulated demanding a vote on the Goff-Johnson settlement. Earlier in the year, the Ohio Legislature passed the Schmidt law stipulating that new companies seeking franchises no longer needed property owners' consent on streets with existing railway line and that 15 percent of the voters could call for a referendum election within 30 days of a new franchise ordinance.⁸⁰ At the election on October 22, 1908, voters overturned the holding company's franchise by 605 votes, or less than one percent of the total votes cast.⁸¹ Shortly after the election, U.S. District Court Judge Robert W. Tayler placed the Municipal Traction Company under receivership, while officials from the city, Concon, and Forest City worked out the transfer of lines back to Concon.

Explanations for the referendum point to the deterioration of service on streetcars since the city's takeover. *The Cleveland Press* believed that voters defeated the security grant not because they were against municipal ownership, but because "the people of Cleveland consider SERVICE of far more importance than RATE OF FARE" According to the newspaper, the Mayor promised, "BUT DID NOT GIVE THEM the kind of service, which he had promised was possible and would be given."⁸² In the first months after the Goff-Johnson agreement, the Municipal Traction Company faced a great deal of "mechanical difficulty" collecting and distributing change for the three-cent fare. As Bremner explained, "This should have been only a temporary and minor annoyance,"

⁷⁹ Johnson, *My Story*, 279.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 278-9.

⁸¹ Bremner, "The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland," 200.

⁸² "The Lesson of the Referendum," *The Cleveland Press* (October 23, 1908). Emphasis in the original.

since Johnson had introduced a new fare box capable of distributing change. Former employees of Concon and other opponents of the Municipal Traction Company, however, helped turn the temporary “change problem,” into a much bigger protest against the entire system. According to Bremner, “Crowds of men would get on the cars together and press past the conductor, who was unable, and in some cases unwilling, to make them pay their fares.”⁸³ Additionally, some riders “deliberately exhausted the conductor’s change by presenting large bills in payment of fare,” with the effect of slowing down fare collection and making the Municipal Traction Company appear dysfunctional.⁸⁴

While traction officials worked out a new settlement, the City Council issued 13 new three-cent fare ordinances on franchises set to expire in January 1910. It awarded one such franchise to Herman Schmidt on Payne Avenue with permission to extend this line farther into the city. The Chamber of Commerce, whose members owned one-half of Concon’s stock, immediately circulated petitions for a referendum on the Schmidt franchise.⁸⁵ At the same time, Judge Tayler and others proceeded to work on a new and hopefully more permanent settlement to replace the Goff-Johnson agreement. Voters grew increasingly impatient with the uncertain future and service interruptions that plagued the city’s streetcar industry during this time. Likely echoing the sentiments of many others, one such voter, W.H. Garlock, wrote the Mayor in April 1908 asking him to “please make a bargain with the Con-Con” and put an end to the “fracas that has been going on for several years.” He added: “I would awfully like to see the thing settled and

⁸³ Bremner, “The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland,” 198.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 198

⁸⁵ Ibid., 202.

you are the one who can settle it and settle it to the satisfaction of the people.”⁸⁶ A year later, it appeared that the people of Cleveland no longer trusted Johnson to reach an accord. Voters overturned the Schmidt grant at a referendum election held August 3, 1909. Three months later, Johnson failed to win re-election to a fifth term as mayor of Cleveland.

Judge Tayler, Johnson, and other traction officials had settled on a new and hopefully permanent resolution to the streetcar war prior to the November 1909 election. The new agreement, known as the Tayler ordinance, which Johnson signed into law December 18, 1909, abandoned efforts for full municipal control and did not mandate a three-cent fare. While it appeared that the Tayler amendment symbolized victory for Concon and failure for Johnson and his supporters, a closer look at the ordinance, however, reveals a more complicated outcome. Although the Tayler grant did not require that franchise recipients offer a three-cent fare, it set a maximum rate at four cents and limited the profits of streetcar companies to six percent on actual capital. As a result of these two provisions, street car fares in Cleveland from 1910 through 1917 stayed at three cents.⁸⁷ Johnson also insisted that the new ordinance contain an “invalidity clause,” granting full authority to the city to regulate rates and service if the courts invalidated any of the rate requirements in the new ordinance.⁸⁸ The clause served as a deterrent against using the courts to stall reform.

Johnson and Judge Tayler held the widest difference of opinion with regard to the role of the city in regulating service and cost. Whereas Johnson wanted to maximize

⁸⁶ Letter from W.H. Garlock to Mayor Johnson, April 11, 1908, Tom L. Johnson Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, OH.

⁸⁷ Bremner, “The Street Railway Controversy in Cleveland,” 204.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 203.

municipal authority, Tayler insisted that the city serve only a supervisory role. Johnson wanted indeterminate franchise grants to promote competition and reserve the right of the city to revoke them if a private company failed to act in the best interest of the people. Instead, the Tayler ordinance appointed a Street Railway Commissioner to resolve differences over service and fare rates between the city and streetcar companies.⁸⁹ Although the Tayler grant issued 25-year franchises, the city reserved the right to name a purchaser or buy the streetcar system at \$110 per share after eight years. The people of Cleveland accepted the Tayler grant by a vote of 27,307 for and 19,197 against at the referendum election held February 7, 1910.⁹⁰

The limited success of Johnson's efforts to municipalize Cleveland's streetcars, to some historians, is unsurprising. American municipalizers, as Rodgers has pointed out, faced more obstacles than their European counterparts. Besides constitutional limitations, the fight for municipal ownership in American cities occurred on two fronts:

Where everything, down to the finest details of a purchase agreement or a regulatory measure, went through the political system twice—first through the process of government as normally conceived, and then, all over again, through the courts, where the property rights of investors were certain of a particularly solicitous hearing—the American system guaranteed greater delays and obstacles than progressives faced abroad.⁹¹

While the two-front campaign frustrated reformers like Johnson, city voters and policy experts appreciated the extra layer of oversight the American system forced upon major structural changes—muckrakers had uncovered “democratized corruption” in the nation's cities a bit too well. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, many citizens

⁸⁹ Ibid., 203.

⁹⁰ Johnson, *My Story*, 290.

⁹¹ Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 153.

distrusted *both* government and private industry with ultimate authority over public services.⁹²

Surprisingly, Johnson appeared rather satisfied with the outcome of the traction fight when he left office at the end of 1909. He believed that although the public had lost patience and accepted the limited victory of a three-cent fare the sentiment in favor of municipal ownership of streetcars was stronger than it had ever been. Johnson noted that in February 1911, the Cleveland City Council, dominated then by Republicans, unanimously voted to endorse a bill pending in the Ohio Legislature for municipal ownership of street railways. Additionally, he firmly believed that it was “in the nature of Truth never to fail.”⁹³ Municipal ownership of streetcars would someday come to Cleveland.

Cleveland’s Fight for Fair Taxation

Johnson’s more favorable results in the fight for tax equalization might also account for his apparent satisfaction upon leaving office in 1909. In addition to municipal ownership, Johnson’s war on privilege involved efforts to force public service corporations to pay their “fair share” of city taxes. Toward this goal, he exposed the gross deficiencies within the state’s system of property appraisal and revealed the methods corporations used to “hide” taxable property in order to reduce their overall valuation. When Johnson successfully convinced the Board of Equalization to raise corporate property appraisals, the corporations fought back with lawsuits, injunctions, and campaign contributions to the mayor’s opponents. Johnson prevailed in this fight, and his efforts led to an overhaul of Ohio’s system of taxation. In the same election that

⁹² Ibid., 155-6.

⁹³ Johnson, *My Story*, 294.

voters denied Johnson a fifth term, they elected four of the five members for whom he campaigned to serve on the newly-created Board of Quadrennial Assessors. Three of those elected, as previously mentioned, were single taxers. At the first meeting of this new Board, the members agreed to appraise property at its full value and to place more emphasis on the value of land than improvements.⁹⁴

Johnson pursued tax reform not only because of his interest in George's theories, but also because he believed it could be used as a formidable weapon against privilege. "The greatest of all the privileges," Johnson quipped, "is the privilege of having another man pay your taxes."⁹⁵ Public institutions sustained this privilege through shoddy valuation mechanisms and tax exemptions for franchises, rights-of-way, and other "intangibles" that increase land value. Eight years before Johnson became mayor of Cleveland, a special tax commission created by the Legislature reported, among other things, that the state's appraisal system invited corruption and discriminated among various sources of property. Although the Constitution required the appraisal of all property at its *full* market value, the commission found that the state taxed real estate at only 14 to 25 percent of its actual worth and railroads only paid taxes on only between 5 and 12 percent of their net earnings.⁹⁶

The system of general property taxation in Ohio, and throughout much of America suffered from inequities in design. Local and state governments implemented the general property tax largely because they believed it offered the fairest way to

⁹⁴ Robert H. Bremner, "The Civic Revival in Ohio: Tax Equalization in Cleveland," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 10:3 (April 1951), 311.

⁹⁵ Johnson, *My Story*, 129.

⁹⁶ Murdock, "The Life of Tom L. Johnson," 202; Ernest L. Bogart, "Recent Tax Reforms in Ohio," *The American Economic Review* 1:3 (Sept., 1911), 507; and, Frederic C. Howe, "Taxation of Quasi-Public Corporations in the State of Ohio and the Franchise Tax," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 14 (Sept., 1899), 161-162.

distribute taxes in proportion to total wealth. Property included a wide range of tangible and intangible assets including buildings, livestock furniture, jewelry, machinery, stocks, and bonds. From the outset, appraisers faced difficulties gathering accurate accounts of what things were worth and often relied solely on the values provided by the individual and corporate property owners themselves. Property owners did not always tell the truth. “Before the enactment of Prohibition,” historian C.K. Yearly noted, “probably nothing in American life entailed more calculated premeditated lying than the general property tax.”⁹⁷ Besides lying, the general property tax evoked fears, especially in the South, that it would be used as a political tool to discourage the ownership of certain types of property, such as slaves. In reaction to this fear, according to historian Robin L. Einhorn, state legislatures adopted uniformity clauses that mandated the same rate of taxation for *all* types of property. In this way, she writes, uniformity clauses attempted to “take politics out of an inherently political decision—who pays the taxes—by setting it in constitutional stone.”⁹⁸ Uniformity worked well in theory, but, as the situation in Ohio illustrates, failed miserably in practice.

When Johnson became mayor of Cleveland in 1901, Ohio’s system of taxation had changed very little since the mid-19th century. The constitution still required uniformity, and state and local governments relied almost exclusively on general property taxation for revenue.⁹⁹ Three institutions conducted property appraisals. Locally elected Decennial Boards of Appraisers produced general property assessments every 10 years, which were reviewed each year by mayor-appointed City Boards of Equalization. A

⁹⁷ Yearly quoted in Einhorn, *American Taxation*, 208.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 210-211.

⁹⁹ Some local governments taxed liquor and in 1893, the state passed a “collateral inheritance law” which was overturned two years later. Bogart, “Recent Tax Reforms in Ohio,” 506.

separate elected body of County Auditors appraised the railroad property which ran through the districts they represented.¹⁰⁰ In 1894, the Ohio Legislature passed, and the Supreme Court later upheld, the Nichols Law, which allowed appraisers to determine the total valuation of telephone, telegraph, and express companies from the selling value of their stocks and bonds. Essentially, the Nichols Law allowed the state to determine the franchise values of corporations with interstate charters. After its passage, some hoped the Legislature would extend the Nichols Law to apply to street railway, gas, water, electric, and other types of “quasi-public” companies with valuable franchises.¹⁰¹ But until Johnson became mayor, there had been no sustained effort in the state to do so.

Johnson’s tax equalization program consisted of education and corrective action. Within weeks of taking office, Johnson created a “Tax School” to reveal the inequalities in local property assessments and propose more accurate valuations. He appointed local lawyer Newton D. Baker and Peter Witt, a former iron molder, to lead the school. Besides organizing the Cleveland section of the Populist Party, Witt, had also published a popular pamphlet titled *Cleveland Before St. Peter: A Handful of Hot Stuff*, in which he listed the city’s biggest “tax dodgers.” Johnson appeared on this list.¹⁰² Johnson gave Witt and Baker two tasks. The first included using the tax duplicates to produce a large map of all the assessed property values in Cleveland. The second involved holding a series of public meetings with Cleveland taxpayers to determine the “real value of one foot of land by one hundred feet in depth” based on real estate listings and mortgage statements. Then, they produced new maps of each ward listing the actual and assessed

¹⁰⁰ Bremner, “Tax Equalization in Cleveland,” 302-3.

¹⁰¹ Howe, “Taxation of Quasi-Public Corporations in the State of Ohio and the Franchise Tax,” 169.

¹⁰² Bremner, “Tax Equalization in Cleveland,” 305-6 and Kenneth Kolson, *Big Plans: the Allure and Folly of Urban Design* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2003), 55.

values of land in the city. These new maps indicated a wide difference between the actual and assessed values. While some assessments came out much lower than the cash value, others were much higher.¹⁰³

The method utilized by the Tax School to calculate property values in Cleveland, known as the Somers System, achieved widespread satisfaction among the cities which adopted it in the early decades of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁴ W.A. Somers, a civil engineer, perfected the method in 1896 after his appointment as deputy assessor for Ramsey County, Minnesota where he discovered a lack of scientific rules or precision to property appraisals.¹⁰⁵ Somers believed, like George, that location represented the greatest factor in determining the value of real estate and that since land values were largely relative, the relationship between the value of one plot of land to another in any given area, could be expressed through a mathematical formula. In arriving at this formula, it was necessary first to determine the average unit value of land and the factors that increased—such as an lakeside view—and decreased property value. “But perhaps the greatest gain to a community that uses the Somers system” Edward W. Doty wrote in a 1912 article for *American City*, “is that which comes from the taking part by individual property owners in the work of assessing the realty of their community.”¹⁰⁶ Somers hoped that the participation of local taxpayers in public meetings would not only lead to more accurate appraisals—every land owner, it was believed, knew how much his neighbor’s land would sell for—but also to generate greater satisfaction in the inherently unsatisfying activity of paying taxes.

¹⁰³ Johnson, *My Story*, 127-128.

¹⁰⁴ Edward W. Doty, “Assessment Work Under the Somers System,” *The American City* VII (July-Dec., 1912), 239.

¹⁰⁵ Murdock, “Life of Tom Johnson,” 202-203.

¹⁰⁶ Doty, “Assessment Work Under the Somers System,” 239.

While Witt and Baker worked to prepare more accurate appraisals of real estate, Johnson held several meetings with members of the Board of Equalization to correct the inequalities in the valuations of corporate property in the city. Increasing the appraisals of the Cleveland public service corporations remained his top priority. In these highly publicized meetings, Johnson reminded each of the members of the oath they had “all sworn to assess property at its full value, 100 per cent,” and showed them the various ways corporate property escaped taxation.¹⁰⁷ After one meeting in May 1901, Board member T.J. McManus explained to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* how corporations utilized the different appraising bodies to shield property from valuation. As he described:

A decennial appraiser goes to a large manufacturing establishment to appraise the real estate. He is informed that a lot of valuable machinery was returned as personal property and so does not put it upon his books. Then the personal property assessor comes along and he is informed that the same machinery was classed along with the shafting as real estate and it doesn't get upon his books.¹⁰⁸

Johnson also lectured County Auditors on the similar tricks used by railway companies to lower their property valuations. To prevent the inclusion of various cars running on their property in tax assessments, Johnson explained, railroad companies tell county assessors that the cars are rentals and will be included on the tax roll of the company which owns them. But when the general property assessor comes to the company owning the cars in question, the company will claim that the cars were counted on the renting company's tax receipt.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ “Mayor Lectures the Equalizers,” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (April 14, 1901).

¹⁰⁸ T.J. McManus quoted in “Believe in Tax Views of Mayor,” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (May 5, 1901).

¹⁰⁹ “Mayor Gains Small Victory: The Auditors Raised Eire Company's Valuation over \$500,000,” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (May 17, 1901).

In meetings with County Auditors, Johnson prodded them to consider the value added by railroads rights-of-way privileges in the land assessments. As he explained:

One mile of right of way of an average width of seventy feet contains about twelve acres of land. The railroads make the claim that these twelve acres should not be taxed any higher than the adjacent farm land, and they get away with the claim. Every farmer knows that is not true and not fair. The right of way is valuable for just what it can be used for—just what it will sell for. The value of right of way is in the fact that it is a continuous, unbroken stretch of land over which trains run forty miles or more an hour—from ocean to ocean.¹¹⁰

The value added by rights-of-way, much like the value added by franchise grants, represented unearned sources of wealth that originated with society, not private industry. Although Johnson failed to convince the County Auditors of the need to raise valuations, the Board of Equalizers voted four to three in July 1901 to increase the property appraisals of Cleveland public service companies by 450 percent.

The corporations immediately appealed the ruling. At a hearing before the State Board of Tax Remissions, which included the Governor George K. Nash and Attorney General John M. Sheets, Andrew Squire, a representative for the public service corporations argued that the equalizers had acted “without legislative permission” “and that its action in raising their valuation amounted to “confiscation.”¹¹¹ He insisted that the law only called for the assessment of “tangible property” and that franchise value was clearly “intangible.”¹¹² The State Board agreed and overturned the entire increase on February 1, 1902. Shortly after the Board’s decision and perhaps to “prevent a recurrence of such an impertinent increase in appraisal” the Legislature replaced the local Boards of Equalization with County Boards of Review financed by local governments

¹¹⁰ “Four Planks for State Platform: Mayor Tells What He Would Have Democrats Take Up,” *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (May 23, 1901).

¹¹¹ “Tax Fight On Before Nash,” *The Cleveland Press* (January 17, 1902).

¹¹² “Tax Reform in Cleveland,” *Ohio Farmer* (August 1, 1901).

and composed of state appointees.¹¹³ Six months later, on October 8, 1902, W.J. Crawford, a large property owner and local Republican leader, secured a permanent injunction against the use of city funds to support Johnson's Tax School. By that time, however, Witt and Baker had finished their reassessments of Cleveland real estate and sent every voter a pamphlet of their findings.

These legal rulings did not deter Johnson's efforts at tax reform; they merely forced him to pursue alternative methods of attack. Nor did they appear to provide much assurance to Cleveland public service corporations that their property valuations would permanently remain under-assessed. In 1903 the Big and Little Consolidated Streetcar corporations in Cleveland voluntarily doubled their reported property values. The five companies involved in the initial appraisal increase issued by the City Board willingly raised their tax assessments from \$4.5 million to \$7.8 million between 1900 and 1904. Although quite a bit less than the \$20 million increase passed by the Board, the action added \$60,000 a year to the city's tax revenue.¹¹⁴

To proceed with his campaign for tax equalization in Cleveland, Johnson sought to elect state officials committed to his reforms. He accepted the Democratic nomination for Ohio Governor in 1903, but spent more effort on the campaigns of his friends. He was particularly devoted to the election of single taxer and personal friend, Herbert S. Bigelow as Secretary of State in 1902. Johnson personally chauffeured Bigelow to various speaking engagements in his famous car known as the Red Devil.¹¹⁵ Although he lost the election, the campaign cemented Bigelow's interest in public service. His later political career included election to the State Legislature, Congress, and Cincinnati City

¹¹³ Bremner, "Tax Equalization in Cleveland," 304.

¹¹⁴ Warner, *Progressivism in Ohio, 1897-1917*, 91.

¹¹⁵ Murdock, "The Life of Tom L. Johnson," 219-220.

Council. Bigelow also served as a delegate to and president of the 1912 Constitutional Convention where he helped secure the passage of constitutional home rule for cities, the initiative, and an act allowing for municipal ownership of public services.¹¹⁶

Johnson's opponents capitalized on his support for the single tax to discredit the mayor's state campaigns. Ohio Republicans targeted rural voters and claimed that if elected governor, Johnson would shift the entire burden of taxation onto land to the detriment of every small landowner and farmer. There were aided in this effort by national organs opposed to the single tax. *Gunton's Magazine*, edited by the pro-labor and pro-big business advocate George E. Gunton and published in New York, for example, provided extensive coverage of Johnson's efforts in Cleveland and the 1903 election in particular. Gunton lumped single taxers into the same camp as socialists and argued that single taxers wanted "to make every laborer or non-land owning citizen suspicious of, and hostile to, every one that owns land."¹¹⁷ As a supporter of the single tax, Johnson supported and even promoted class warfare.

Despite losing the gubernatorial election in 1903, Johnson maintained control of the Democratic Party in Ohio and helped elect legislators sympathetic to tax reform, including Howe, who served in the State Senate between 1905 and 1907. In 1906, the Legislature created a special tax commission to study and recommend changes to the state's system of taxation. The 1908 report of the commission led to a major overhaul of the state's tax system, largely in the direction paved by Johnson and his supporters and

¹¹⁶ See Barbara A. Terzian, "Ohio's Constitutional Conventions and Constitutions," 66 and Bremner, "The Civic Revival in Ohio: The Fight for Home Rule," 105, 107.

¹¹⁷ "Johnsonism" in Ohio," *Gunton's Magazine* (Oct., 1903), 294.

based on the commissioners' conclusion "that the general property tax is a failure."¹¹⁸

The report confirmed Johnson's position on the need to capture the value added by "intangible property" which, the commissioners found, accounted for more than half of the total wealth in the state.¹¹⁹

The report also revealed the need for more frequent real estate appraisals utilizing a scientific process. Although the constitution required uniform taxation on the *full* value of land and improvements, appraisers, the commissioners found, significantly undervalued land. According to their report, between 1871 and 1910 the valuation of land and improvements in Ohio increased by \$631,325,570 of which, \$610,135,064 was attributed to improvements. Over a 40-year period, land values had reportedly only increased by \$21,190,533.¹²⁰ To correct these inequities, the commissioners recommended greater publicity in matters of local taxation and the creation of a permanent state tax board to strictly enforce all of the laws governing taxation. The Legislature enacted both recommendations.

The newly created Board of Quadrennial Appraisers in Cleveland made significant progress towards Johnson's goal of tax equalization and the single tax. Most of their work, however, came after Johnson's defeat in 1909 and death in April 1911. At their first meeting, the members of the Cleveland Board agreed not only to work towards the appraisal of the *full* value of local property but also to place more emphasis on the value of land than improvements. They also selected W.A. Somers to serve as chief clerk and by doing so, repeated much of the work that had been done almost a decade earlier

¹¹⁸ Edwin R.A. Seligman, "Recent Reports on State and Local Taxation," *The American Economic Review* 1 (June 1911), 277.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹²⁰ Oliver C. Lockhart, "Recent Developments in Taxation in Ohio," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 29 (May 1915), 481-482.

by the Tax School. As a result of their assessments, the total valuation of Cleveland property increased from \$200 million to \$500 million; the value of some parcels increased by a factor of between three and ten.¹²¹ To individuals who objected to the increased valuation of their property, the Board offered the following reply: “Give the Real Estate Board a thirty-day option on your land at appraisal. If the land can’t be sold at that figure, we will reduce it.” According to Bremner, only one property owner in Cleveland took advantage of this offer.¹²²

Howe considered his work on the Cleveland Board “the most satisfactory experience” of his entire political life because of the progress made toward the single tax. The law required the assessors to include the value of buildings and other improvements to land in their assessments, so their work could only represent a partial demonstration of the benefits of the single tax. Still, by placing greater weight on the factors that increase the value of land, such as location, over the next few years, much of the vacant land in Cleveland had been forced into use and many of the dilapidated buildings throughout the city were improved, or replaced with newer structures. As a result, according to Howe, Cleveland blossomed into “one of the finest cities of the Middle West” and other cities adopted its method of property appraisals.¹²³

On May 31, 1910, eleven months before his death from kidney failure, Tom Johnson delivered an important speech at a dinner hosted in his honor at the Astor Hotel in New York City. The former mayor highlighted the core values and experiences that had informed his fight against privilege. Johnson began the speech with a tale of an

¹²¹ Bremner, “Tax Equalization in Cleveland,” 311.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 312.

¹²³ Howe, *Confessions of a Reformer*, 230.

encounter he had once had with a prominent single taxer named John Paul during a trip through Great Britain. John Paul told Johnson of a dream he once had, in which there was a river with dozens of people struggling to get out. While some were pulled ashore “by kind-hearted people on the banks,” many others were not rescued and ultimately drowned. After acknowledging the good work of those who helped pull some of the victims from the water, John Paul told Johnson that it would have been better if some of them had gone up stream to find out who was pushing the people into the river in the first place. “It is in the way that I would answer those who ask us to help the poor,” Johnson told his Astor Hotel audience. “Let us help them, that they may at last fight the battle with more strength and courage; but let us never lose sight of our mission up the river to see who is pushing the people in.”¹²⁴

George’s work enabled Johnson to focus his energies “up river,” where he sought to identify and thwart the forces that drove people into the rushing current. Building on George’s insights about the origins of inequality in a land of plenty, Johnson targeted the laws and institutions that sustained privilege, rather than the individuals who benefitted from them. A single tax on the value of the wealth of corporations and other monopolists would not only destroy land monopoly, Johnson believed; it would encourage municipal ownership of those basic resources and services essential to the lives of 20th century Americans. In this way, the single tax would attack the economic and political forces that pushed ordinary Americans into the river.

Johnson’s career powerfully demonstrates how the single tax shaped the political imagination and projects of progressive-minded reformers. Unable to make much headway in his efforts to implement the single tax nationally, Johnson successfully

¹²⁴ Johnson, *My Story*, 300-301.

applied its principles to fight inequality and improve governance in one dynamic American city. In the same election in which voters denied Johnson a fifth term as mayor, they elected four of the five members of the newly created Board of Quadrennial Appraisers for whom Johnson had campaigned. Three of these men were single taxers.¹²⁵ More than a year after his death on April 10, 1911, Ohio voters approved a constitutional amendment granting cities the power to issue bonds and own municipal utilities. Other single taxers, as the next chapter discusses, took a different approach. In 1894 and 1901 George's supporters established autonomous communities devoted to the collection of the full rental value of land. To those utopian projects, we now turn.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 311.

VI.

A Simulated Single Tax:

America's First 'Full' Rental Enclaves at Fairhope, Alabama and Arden, Delaware

On the surface, Fairhope, Alabama and Arden, Delaware appear to have little in common. Located in southeastern Alabama with a population of 16,000, Fairhope enjoys warm weather nearly year round. A subtropical climate and rich soil allows almost anything to grow there, including wheat, corn, peanuts, and lush evergreen forest. Arden sits nearly 1,200 miles to the northeast of Fairhope on the Delaware-Pennsylvania border. This tiny village of only 440 people lies 27 miles south of Philadelphia and a mere seven miles north of the state's capital at Wilmington. Arden experiences all four seasons: it is hot in the summer and cold in the winter. In modern political terminology, Delaware is solidly blue. Alabama, on the other hand, could not be redder. Despite the vast differences in geography and politics, Fairhope and Arden share one important distinction: they are the two oldest single tax "enclaves" still active in the United States.¹ Established in 1895 and 1900 respectively, Fairhope and Arden operate on the Georgist principle that land values rightfully belong to the community that created them.

¹ Fiske Warren explains that an enclave, defined as "an area of land where the economic rent is collected under the terms of leaseholds and used to pay certain of the taxes levied by the town, county, State, or nation," also was considered a colony if "its characteristic note is attracting settlers or extension of territory." See, Fiske Warren, "Single Tax Enclaves," in *The Single Tax Yearbook (Quinquennial): The History, Principles and Application of the Single Tax Philosophy*, ed. Joseph Dana Miller (New York: Single Tax Review Publishing Company, 1917), 66.

Henry George disliked the idea of establishing colonies to “test” the single tax. He feared the limited nature of such experiments might cause them to fail, thereby detracting from the public reputation of his philosophy. George believed that so long as state and federal governments continue to levy other taxes in addition to a tax on land values, the single tax can never be “single” and therefore, must ultimately fail. Despite his warning, George’s followers established more than a dozen single tax enclaves in the United States, Europe, Australia, and Asia. Fairhope and Arden, the first settled and the longest surviving enclaves, provide important insights into the single tax movement.

Single taxers around the world watched closely as the leaders of Fairhope and Arden struggled to balance their residents’ commitment to the collection of land values and freedom from oppressive taxation. And, as many feared, this balance proved impossible to maintain as long as city, county, and state governments continued to levy taxes on other goods and services. Shortly after their founding, both colonies abandoned attempts to collect the full rental value of land. Each decided instead to collect only the amount needed to cover expenditures. As a result, Fairhope and Arden represent only partial experiments with the single tax.

The histories of Fairhope and Arden illustrate the hardships that George’s followers endured in order to establish their versions of a Georgian utopia. Members of these communities suffered imprisonment, isolation, and great financial loss. More importantly, these settlements revealed that the assessment and collection of land values was a great deal more difficult than their founders or George himself realized. The most heated debates within both colonies arose over how to determine the full annual rental value of land, that is, the income a landowner might receive in an open market for the use

of his or her land over a 12-month period. Lacking a consensus among single taxers or much in the way of guidance from George's own works on this matter, the leaders of Fairhope and Arden experimented with various methods. They landed on a system developed by W.A. Somers, a real estate appraiser from St. Paul, Minnesota. Somers' system calculated land value by determining a site's relative worth within a defined area. Proving both practical and less divisive than other methods, the Somers system gained wide acceptance among single taxers as a reliable system to calculate land values.

Given the limited scale of the Fairhope and Arden experiments, historians of Henry George and the larger movement he inspired have tended to ignore them or at least downplay their historical significance. George Raymond Geiger, for example, has noted that while both colonies "have been most vigorous and seemed to have had a continued increase of vitality," their success or failure "can argue little for the applicability of the general concepts of land value taxation or the single tax."² If we view the single tax as a strictly financial mechanism, Geiger is correct; neither Fairhope nor Arden successfully collected the full rental value of land and thus cannot provide an accurate assessment of the practicality of the single tax.

George's conception of the single tax, however, stretched well beyond the bounds of fiscal policy. George felt that the term "single tax" was a poor proxy for the full ambition of his social and political vision. "The term single tax does not really express all that a perfect name would convey," he wrote in 1889, shortly after the movement had adopted the term. "It only suggests the fiscal side of our aims. And in reality the single

² Geiger, *The Philosophy of Henry George*, 445. Neither Fairhope nor Arden is mentioned in George Jr., *The Life of Henry George* or Barker, *Henry George*.

tax is not a tax at all.”³ To George, the essence of his proposal to abolish private property through the socialization of land rent lay in the type of society it promised to deliver. As he explained, “Our proper name, if it would not seem too high flown, would be “freedom men,” or “liberty men,” or “natural order men,” for it is on establishing liberty, on removing restrictions, on giving natural order full play, and not on any mere fiscal change that we base our hopes of social reconstruction.”⁴ Viewed with these broader goals in mind, the stories of Fairhope and Arden paint a rich picture of the struggles involved in constructing a community devoted to the protection of individual liberty without private ownership of land.

The histories of America’s first single tax enclaves also add to the vast literature on North American utopias. Fairhope and Arden are examples of what historians and social scientists have called “intentional communities.” In the decade prior to 1900, middle-class Americans engaged in a new wave of utopia-building that differed in significant ways from earlier movements. Unlike the experiments of the early and mid-nineteenth century, which were characterized by a heavy religious or cooperative element, those of the 1890s contained a more “pragmatic” quality and were established to demonstrate a specific moral principle or to further large-scale political and economic reform. Often these communities aimed to implement a system of “improved capitalism,” with less economic inequality and under which workers would enjoy a greater amount of control over their lives.⁵

³ Wenzer, *An Anthology of Henry George’s Thought. Volume I*, 50.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁵ John W. and Virginia Lyons Friesen, *North American Utopias: The Palgrave Companion to North American Utopias* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 18, and Robert S. Fogarty, “American Communes, 1865-1914” *Journal of American Studies* 9 (August 1975), 150.

Topolobampo Bay Colony, located in Western Mexico, provides an example of this late-nineteenth century attempt to reform capitalism through community-building. Established in the early 1880s, Topolobampo Bay Colony existed to showcase the transformative benefits of what its founder Albert Kimsey Owen (1847-1916) called “integral co-operation.”⁶ Essentially, Owen sought to apply the monopoly principle: that an enterprise is most successful when it combines with other businesses and eliminates competition from public life. Owen had observed the perils of cutthroat competition firsthand during his career as a railway engineer. With careful planning and support from the U.S. and Mexican governments, Owen attempted to make the government of Topolobampo Bay completely self-sufficient. He aimed to provide residents all the necessities of modern living—transportation, water, energy, etc.—without private investment or the capitalistic devices that he blamed for social maladjustment. These included interest and rent charges, the accumulation of debt, extension of credit, and competitive wage labor.

Another type of intentional community formed at this time included the “model cities” or “company towns,” created by some late-nineteenth industrialists for their employees. In an effort to increase labor productivity, reduce conflict, and attract the best workers, George Pullman, an engineer and manufacturer of railcars designed and financed “Pullman Town,” just outside of Chicago. He utilized the best practices in urban planning and equipped the community with all of the amenities of a modern city including comfortable housing, clean streets, state-of-the-art water and plumbing

⁶ Leopold Katscher, “Owen’s Topolobampo Colony, Mexico” *The American Journal of Sociology* 12 (Sept., 1906), 146.

services, and schools. Intricately planned, Pullman Town attracted the attention of city officials from around the country with its reputation for cleanliness and order.⁷

Much like the communal experiments of the early nineteenth century, the intentional communities of the 1880s and 1890s crumbled under a mixture of financial pressure and internal conflict. Great social reform takes time; and residents of these utopian societies often lost sight or tired of the ultimate goal they had sacrificed to achieve. The early settlers of Topolobampo Bay found themselves unprepared to handle the responsibilities of running an autonomous community in a foreign place. Health problems and financial difficulties forced Owen to close the colony within a decade of its opening.⁸ Pullman Town suffered a similar fate. Following the financial panic of 1893, Pullman's workers went on strike to protest wage cuts, high rent, and a lack of self-government in the community. The strike triggered uprisings in Pullman factories and railroad cars around the country. Chicago annexed the town shortly after George Pullman's death in 1897.

In contrast to these other communities, the leaders of Fairhope and Arden adapted to residents' evolving interests, appealed to outsiders for financial and moral support, and survived. Despite their longevity, both colonies experienced many of the same tensions and influences that beset other utopian societies such as the constant struggle to protect individual liberty and provide for the long-term welfare of the community. To prevent implosion, the leaders of Fairhope and Arden often compromised their utopian goals to

⁷ For more on Pullman and "model towns," see: Oliver J. Dinus and Angela Vergara, eds., *Company Towns in the Americas: Landscape, Power, and Working-Class Communities* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), Carl Smith, *Urban Disorder and the Shape of Belief: The Great Chicago Fire, the Haymarket Bomb, and the Model Town of Pullman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), and Stanley Buder, *Pullman: An Experiment in Industrial Order and Community Planning, 1880-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

⁸ Fogarty, "American Communes," 156.

address the practical concerns of their residents. For both, this meant accepting a limited version of the single tax.

The early histories of Fairhope and Arden demonstrate the law of unintended consequences. Formed to reveal the virtues of the single tax, both colonies proved something else. From Fairhope, the world gained a new way of educating children that relied less on books and more on interactive experience. Organic education, as this method came to be called, applied the pragmatic belief that knowledge is grown, not planted. Under this method, schools catered to the needs of a growing child who lives within a growing community. Fairhope thus began as an experiment in the single tax and grew into a laboratory for testing the virtues of organic education.

Similarly, Arden achieved considerable notoriety for events and actions only tangentially related to the application of the single tax. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Arden attracted a wide array of reformers who believed the colony provided an ideal setting to test other unconventional ideas, including open marriage, vegetarianism, racial integration, and socialism. Interestingly, the application of these ideas provoked as much internal strife as external alarm. Residents fought, divorced, and in the most extreme cases, relied on local law enforcement to quell disputes. Throughout its struggles, Arden maintained its commitment to artistic living and communal ownership of land. Arden residents continue to conduct dozens of free concerts, theater performances, and festivals on village property--which included the land on which their own houses stood.

‘A Fair Hope for Success’

From its founding in 1894, Fairhope flirted with irony. Its location on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay, Alabama, allowed Fairhope to revel in the distinction of representing one of the few “progressive” utopias located in the South.⁹ Despite the colony’s commitment to the philosophy of Henry George, Fairhope attracted as many socialists, anarchists, and populists as it did single taxers.¹⁰ Ernest B. Gaston, Fairhope founder and guiding spirit, enjoyed mild success as a land and real estate speculator prior to his conversion to Georgism.¹¹ And in 1914, the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation narrowly escaped dissolution prompted by a lawsuit brought by two of the colony’s most avowed single taxers.¹² Despite the forces seemingly working against America’s first single tax settlement, Fairhope—so-named for the founders’ belief that it had “a fair hope of success”—remained committed to Henry George’s ideas throughout its troubled history.¹³

The Fairhope idea grew out of a small, Des Moines-based social club formed in 1889 by Gaston and a few of his friends to “investigate” social and economic issues of the day by studying the “best and latest literature.” According to his grandson and biographer, Paul M. Gaston, E. B. Gaston formed the Club to serve as a “forum for gaining perspective, broadening and testing his ideas, and sharpening his editorial skills.”

⁹ There are serious exceptions to the description of Fairhope as “progressive,” which will be discussed later in the chapter. The decision of its founders to prohibit blacks from joining their experiment represents the most blatant exception. Other aspects of the colony, however, such as its economic and political values rightly qualify it as “progressive” for the time and place that it was established.

¹⁰ Paul E. and Blanche R. Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954: The Story of a Single Tax Colony* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1956), 27-28.

¹¹ Paul M. Gaston, *Man and Mission: E.B. Gaston and the Origins of the Fairhope Single Tax Colony* (Montgomery, AL: Black Belt Press, 1993), 23.

¹² See *Fairhope Single Tax Corporation v. Melville*, 193 Ala. 289 (1915).

¹³ According to Paul M. Gaston, “The name “Fairhope” was suggested by Alf Wooster. Gaston, *Man and Mission*, 72.

It succeeded on all three points. Three years after the initial meeting of the Club, Gaston had become an active member of the Iowa Populist Party and part of the editorial staff of the *Farmer's Tribune*, and he had created a blueprint for an experimental community called the National Co-operative Company.¹⁴

Born in Knox County, Illinois, on November 2, 1861, Gaston spent most of his childhood and young adult life in Des Moines, Iowa. He attended Drake University and graduated top of his class in 1886 with a degree from the commerce department. In college, Gaston dabbled in business ventures that earned him both praise and the reputation of an “imaginative” entrepreneur. When Gaston created the Investigating Club in 1889, at the age of 28, he enjoyed a good deal of financial security as a result of his real estate purchases around the University, where he had correctly predicted that land values would rise.¹⁵

The Investigating Club especially broadened and tested Gaston’s ideas about economic and social life. Three books in particular deeply affected him: *Progress and Poverty* (1879), Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* (1888), and *The Cooperative Commonwealth* (1884) by Laurence Gronlund. Although Gaston agreed with George’s analysis of the evil perpetuated by land monopolies, in 1889, Bellamy and Gronlund’s case for establishing a socialist utopia made a more powerful and immediate impact on Gaston and his plans for the future.¹⁶ He began studying and corresponding with residents of the cooperative experiments at Topolobambo Bay and the Kaweah Cooperative Colony formed by Bellamy’s followers in Tulare County, California. While Gaston sympathized with the aims of these experiments and their founders’ goals of

¹⁴ Gaston, *Man and Mission*, 13-14, 23-24, 40.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13-20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

creating a model society, he believed that he could do better. In 1890, Gaston engaged a number of his friends from the Club and the Iowa Populist Party to begin drafting plans for their own utopian experiment. These men included L.R. Clements; E.A. Ott, a former professor at Drake University; and Iowa newspaper publisher Alfred Wooster.¹⁷

The initial blueprint for what later became Fairhope was incredibly vague. Gaston and his friends provided few details when they announced their intention to formulate National Co-operative Company in regional newspapers towards the end of 1890. The press mainly described Gaston's organization as yet another "Bellamy Plan." Despite the lack of specifics, the response to their announcement was overwhelming. Gaston received more than one hundred letters from interested individuals and parties in 21 different states and even one from Germany. While most of the responses and inquiries came from native-born workingmen eager for the opportunity to escape the drudgery of factory work, some were sent by poor immigrants desperate to discover even the smallest shred of evidence that the American Dream did in fact exist. According to Paul Gaston, the letters "deepened [E.B. Gaston's] resolve to find the explanation for their grief and the answer to their plight."¹⁸

The 1892 presidential and congressional elections delayed colony planning while many of the original members of the National Co-operative Company campaigned for the People's Party and its candidate for president, James B. Weaver. Weaver, an Iowan, ran on the so-called the "Omaha Platform," which called for, among other things, free and unlimited coinage of silver and a graduated income tax. It also included the following statement about land:

¹⁷ Ibid., 39-41.

¹⁸ Ibid., 40-41.

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.¹⁹

George's ideas greatly influenced the Populist movement. Many members of the Farmer's Alliance and People's Party, the two main Populist organizations, supported the single tax.²⁰

While also active in the Party, Gaston continued to act as company secretary, answering and submitting inquiries. He began to clarify the specific nature and details of the planned experiment. By the end of 1893, Gaston had tired of Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement's "extreme socialism" and instead, decided to revisit the ideas of Henry George. While he shared George's belief in the need to restore individuals' natural right to land, Gaston also sympathized with populists, most of whom "refused to accept the single tax as the 'universal solvent'" to the social and economic problems plaguing the country and whose platform George, therefore, dismissed as ineffective.²¹ Despite George's objections, Gaston decided to administer the proposed colony based on the tenets of Populism and the single tax.²²

The result of this combination was a new, clearer blueprint for a utopian community, which Gaston described in an essay that he presented to his friends in early 1894 called "True Cooperative Individualism." The colony, he argued, should restrict

¹⁹ Cuthbert Vincent, *The Platform Textbook* (Omaha, Neb.: Vincent Publishing, 1900), 134.

²⁰ Gaston, *Man and Mission*, 45.

²¹ For more on the relationship between Henry George and the Populist movement, see Destler, *American Radicalism, 1865-1901. Essays and Documents*, 13, 22, 30-31, and 164; Gene Clanton, *Populism: The Human Preference in America, 1890-1900* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991), xiv-xvii; and, Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11, 228-233.

²² Paul Gaston partially credits his grandfather's relationship with Populist novelist Hamlin Garland as well as his friend and mentor, James Bellangee, an avid single taxer, for this decision. See *Man and Mission*, 50, 65.

land ownership, collect the full rental value of land, supply “a safe, adequate and independent medium of exchange,” and collectively own and operate all public utilities, including electricity and water.²³ It also would adhere to the principle contained in the “Law of Equal Freedom,” which Gaston defined as the idea that “every man has freedom to do all that he wills provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man.”²⁴ The plan thus promoted individualism while also protecting the rights and interests of the community.

Gaston’s essay was well received. As a first step toward establishing a society based on “true cooperative individualism,” the group decided on a new name for their enterprise: the Fairhope Industrial Association. The term “industrial association,” Paul Gaston explained, was often used in the 19th century to describe “small model communities” with ties to the American Fourierism in the 1840s.²⁵ As such, their name “linked them to a broad tradition of utopian socialism and indigenous radicalism rather than to the specific single-tax reform.”²⁶ In 1904 the Association incorporated and changed its name to the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation. Article IX of the Association’s constitution prohibited individual ownership of land within its jurisdiction and dictated that colony land be “equitably divided and leased to members at an annual appraised rental” that would be “convert[ed] into the treasury of the Association for the common benefit of all of its members.”²⁷ Furthermore, values added by residents’

²³ Gaston, *Man and mission*, 144.

²⁴ E.B. Gaston, “Fairhope,” *The Fairhope Courier*, January 1, 1897.

²⁵ Arthur Brisbane started the movement in America to implement the ideas of Charles Fourier (1777-1837) who believed in an eight-stage process of social evolution that ended with the overthrow of individualism and capitalism. Fourierism became popular in the U.S. among some farmers and craft workers after the Panic of 1837. See Friesen, *North American Utopias*, 129, 130-136.

²⁶ Gaston, *Man and mission*, 73, The name “Fairhope” as previously mentioned, was suggested by founding member Alf Wooster who claimed that the group “had a ‘fair hope’ of success, 72.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

individual efforts and improvements—i.e. the construction of houses, gardens, fences, etc.—would not be included in the annual rental assessment.

The constitution empowered an Executive Council, with the approval of Association members, to determine the annual value of land not derived from improvements and how to spend land rents after paying state and county taxes. The issue of membership created a firestorm of controversy unpredicted by the founders. According Article IV of the Fairhope Constitution, any person over the age 18 who purchased at least one share of capital stock—initially priced at \$200, and later reduced to \$100—was eligible upon approval of the Executive Council to become a voting member of the Association. Additionally, Article IV granted membership status to the spouse of a member, upon signing, and thereby agreeing to the principles of the constitution.

The founders established this system of membership to attract investors who sympathized with the colony's mission and to reward them for their investment with a vote in colony affairs, even if they decided not to reside at Fairhope. The reason this form of membership-government continued after the founders secured enough investment to purchase land for the colony, Gaston explained, was one of simple math. In response to a letter published in *The Single Tax Review* and critical of Fairhope's membership system, Gaston wrote:

[I]f every one who came to Fairhope because he liked the location or the climate, or because he found land easier of access than elsewhere, were admitted to full participation in determining the policy of the colony or electing the officers to execute it, there would not be any Single Tax colony to criticize by the time another issue of the REVIEW was due.²⁸

²⁸ E.B. Gaston, "Reply to Prescott A. Parker," *The Single Tax Review* 4:3 (January 15, 1905): 20-23.

For most of its history, non-single taxers outnumbered those committed to George's theory. If all residents had a vote in approving annual rentals, the single tax would undoubtedly fail.

Despite the fact that most Fairhope residents did not sympathize with the single tax, according to Paul Gaston, "no apparent effort was made to determine the single-tax leanings of applicants," for membership and leaseholds.²⁹ Still, very few residents ever applied for membership. Rather than the single tax, the favorable climate and opportunity to secure the use of land drew families to Fairhope. According to one former resident and Fairhope critic, only two residents had become members of the Association in its first five years and that "because of the payment of one hundred dollars and a vote of acceptance by the executive council, less than forty people (nine of whom do not live on the colony land) hold absolute power and sway over the administration."³⁰ Whether the membership system helped maintain the colony's commitment to single tax principles, it certainly fostered increasing resentment toward the Association by non-member residents who lacked a vote in colony affairs. Some historians have suggested that the Association should have restricted *both* residency and membership to single taxers. If it had, Fairhope may have escaped internal strife by attracting only single taxers to their settlement and in turn, won the support of the national movement, which—for reasons that will be discussed later in the chapter—refused to endorse the colony as an official demonstration of the single tax.³¹

²⁹ Gaston, *Man and mission*, 90. The application did include a question asking the applicant to list the periodicals they subscribed to for the apparent purpose of determining their philosophical leaning.

³⁰ Prescott A. Parker, "Fairhope Criticised," *The Single Tax Review* 4:3 (January 15, 1904): 18-20.

³¹ See Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 250-256; Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954*: 35; and, Gaston, *Man and mission*, 91.

Early in 1894, the Association solicited applications for membership and sent out a search committee to scout possible locations for the colony. Following the announcement of his planned community, Gaston received dozens of letters from land commissioners and real estate agents offering their services and suggestions for the colony's location. Most boasted of knowing where the cheapest, most fertile and favorably located land could be found and many expressed support for an experiment in cooperative living. S.A. Hackworth, of Hackworth & Corwin land sales, assured Gaston that he did "not write this letter as a real estate agent soliciting your attention to lands of control in Texas for the purpose of earning a commission," but because "I am interested in the desire to form and to aid you in the matter of promoting the best interest of your enterprise."³² Among the most determined efforts to secure Gaston's business came from John W. Troeger of Chicago. He exchanged several letters with Gaston urging him to consider Honduras for the colony's location. Troeger enclosed a detailed brochure with one of his letters on the benefits of living in Honduras, which included "the chance to make fortunes," few snakes or reptiles, and a stable labor force. "Besides the Americans who recently went to the Patuca region," the letter continued "the inhabitants consist of Waika Indians; of these there are about 500; they are peaceable and make fair laborers on the plantations. They soon imitate their white neighbors in habit of dress and living. Natives can be hired at from \$10 to \$12 a month."³³ Gaston received similar letters that preached the virtues of Florida, Louisiana, Kansas, and Texas.

³² S.A. Hackworth to E.B. Gaston, 18 August 1890, Records of the Fairhope Industrial Association and the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation, Accession #10517-a-b, Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

³³ John W. Troeger to E.B. Gaston, 19 September 1890, Records of the Fairhope Industrial Association.

“Climate, cost, and fraternal ties,” according to Paul Gaston, directed the search committee to the south, where the Farmer’s Alliance and other populist organizations thrived. The search committee recommended and Association members approved the purchase of 132-acres in Baldwin County, Alabama along Mobile Bay.³⁴ Fairhope co-founder and close friend of Gaston, James Bellangee noted in a 1911 article about Fairhope for *Twentieth Century Magazine* that the committee also recommended Mobile Bay as a possible location for Fairhope because “situated on tidewater, it could never be put at the mercy of some dominating railroad.”³⁵ The natural beauty and warm climate offered additional benefits for the location of Fairhope in the southwest of Alabama.

As a result of its location, Fairhope’s founders opted to exclude blacks from their experiment and avoid the “race question” altogether. Although Gaston sympathized with the plight of Southern blacks, he, like other single taxers, believed that economic justice, rather than racial integration, provided the antidote to racism.³⁶ With membership dues and donations from Fairhope supporters, the Association purchased the land for \$6.00 an acre and in November 1894, the first settlers—five families, which included E.B. Gaston, his wife and four children—arrived in Baldwin County, AL.³⁷

All five families and subsequent Fairhope settlers leased land directly from the Association for 99-year periods. The terms of the lease closely followed the Association constitution, mandating that lessees pay the annual rental value, determined by Association members and exclusive of improvements, of the land leased. Delinquent rents accrued one percent monthly interest until paid. After six months, the Association

³⁴ Bellangee quoted in Gaston, *Man and mission*, 85.

³⁵ James Bellangee, “Fairhope the Forerunner,” *Twentieth Century Magazine* 4:24 (Sept., 1911), 486.

³⁶ See Gaston, *Man and mission*, 80-83.

³⁷ Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954*, 31.

retained the right to sell any and all improvements to the leasehold for the amount due. Lessees retained the right of exclusive ownership—except in the case of delinquent rents—to any improvements made to the leasehold, and in the case of the Association’s dissolution, could purchase the title to the land of their lease. The terms of the lease provided lessees with two important guarantees: that no portion of the collected rent would be “appropriated as dividends to Association members” and that “in the distribution of benefits” financed by ground rents, “no distinction shall be made between individuals, whether members of the corporation or not.”³⁸ For non-members of the Association, the lease represented their only connection *to* and legal stake *in* the colony.

‘The Matter of Land Rentals’

Equally divisive and connected to the membership issue, the valuation and collection of the rental value of land generated disunion in Fairhope from the first year the Association conducted assessments. While some of the discontent sprung naturally from the desires of the lessees to keep their rents low, the lack of a clear procedure—outlined in the constitution or by Henry George—for calculating land values and determining ground rents accounts for most of the controversy. George envisioned a simple process for the implementation of a single tax on land values. “Since in all our states we now levy some tax on the value of land,” he explained, “the Single Tax can be instituted by the simple and easy way of abolishing, one after another, all other taxes now levied and commensurately increasing the tax on land values” until it covered all

³⁸ Charles White Huntington and Fiske Warren, *Enclaves of Single Tax Being a Compendium of the Legal Documents Involved Together With A Historical Description by Charles White Huntington*, sec. vol. (Harvard, Mass.: Fiske Warren, 1922), 37.

government expenses.³⁹ Even for those states or municipalities without taxes on land values, the calculation of land rent, George believed, remained clear. “The value of land is more easily and certainly ascertained than any other value,” he explained, “Land lies out of doors, everybody can see it, and in every neighbourhood a close idea of its value can be had.”⁴⁰ Unlike other forms of property such as buildings and business, land cannot be moved; its use cannot be hidden; and, its value is not dependent upon age.⁴¹

The large adjustments to rental assessments year-to-year in addition to the frequent complaints of lessees testifies to the practical difficulty of determining and collecting land rents, even in a small community like Fairhope. The Executive Council conducted its first assessment in 1896, and levied a mere five percent tax on land values in Fairhope. According to Paul and Blanche Alyea, this charge ranged from \$1.25 for bay front lots to 12 and one half cent per acre for those farther from the water.⁴² Residents immediately complained that the rent was too high. The following year, the council decided to focus on the “relative” rather than “absolute” values of land and adopted what became known as the “unit system.” Under this system, the council first determined the value of an “average” lot in units as opposed to dollars and cents. It then calculated the unit value of all the other lots based on this average lot. Finally, it divided the total number of units by the amount of money needed to be raised to determine the dollar value per unit. While this system gained residents’ support, as Paul and Blanche Alyea have rightly pointed out, it represented a clear departure from the Association’s

³⁹ Henry George, “The Single Tax,” in *Selected Articles on The Single Tax*, eds. Edna D. Bullock and Julie E. Johnson (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1917), 33.

⁴⁰ George quoted in “Land and Taxation: A Conversation,” *North American Review* 141 (July 1885), 2.

⁴¹ On why land is an ideal tax base, see M. Mason Gaffney, “Property Taxes and the Frequency of Urban Renewal,” Reprinted from the Proceedings of the Fifty-Seventh National Tax Conference Held at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, September 14-17, 1964 (Harrisburg, PA: National Tax Association, n.d.), 272-285.

⁴² Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954*, 57.

charge to collect the *full* rental value of land regardless of the amount needed to cover expenses.⁴³

By fixing land rent on the amount of revenue needed rather than its actual economic value, the Association entered a national debate between single taxers on the side of Thomas G. Shearman. Shearman, who first suggested the term “single tax” to refer to George’s remedy, believed that landowners should be charged “whatever amount the state really needs, for the effective but economical administration of government.”⁴⁴ While some Georgists accepted the “single tax limited,” as Shearman’s proposal became known, as a first and practical step toward the restoration of individuals’ natural right to the land, most understood that “economic justice,” could not be “obtained short of diverting the whole of land income, as nearly as possible, from the individual landowners into the coffers of the state.”⁴⁵ Although the Fairhope Association abandoned the unit system soon after its first use, residents continued to prefer the practice of taking only what was needed to pay local and county taxes.

The process of determining land rents required a clear understanding of important economic terms. According to George, land represented “all that external nature offers to the use of man,” and includes not only the solid ground, “but all that is above and all that may be below it, from zenith to nadir.”⁴⁶ Land includes water, oil, and minerals. George adopted the Ricardian belief that land gained value or “rent” *only* as a result of demand. “Rent,” David Ricardo famously declared, “is that portion of the produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original and indestructible powers of the

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 59. See also “Appraising Land Values,” *The Fairhope Courier*, December 1, 1896.

⁴⁴ Shearman quoted in Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 264. Young notes that Shearman believed that taking half of the rental value would be enough.

⁴⁵ Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 265.

⁴⁶ George, *The Science of the Political Economy*, 353, 408-409.

soil.”⁴⁷ Furthermore, he explained, land gained rent when, “in the progress of population, land of an inferior quality, or less advantageously situated, is called into cultivation.”⁴⁸

In other words, so long as land of better or equal quality and location can easily be acquired, land lacks economic value.

In addition to population growth, land becomes more valuable and desirable as a result of personal effort and labor. When a landowner erects a house, digs a well, or plants crops, others are willing to pay more for the use and occupation of that plot of land. These values, added by personal effort provided the only rightful basis of private property, and according to George, should not be included in the assessment of land values for the purpose of determining its rental value. As George explained, the first canon of taxation dictates that the “best” tax bears “as lightly as possible upon production.”⁴⁹ A land value tax that included the value added by personal effort would discourage productivity and improvement. Assessments must include, however, values added by virtue of land’s location such as its proximity to a school, a water source, or forest.

The Council faced considerable difficulty assigning factors of location numerical value. Like George, the Association initially attempted to determine the value of land based on its selling price—what an individual would pay, in an open market, for land of the same quantity and quality of location. Some lessees criticized the Association for using this standard since speculation on non-colony owned land artificially increased the

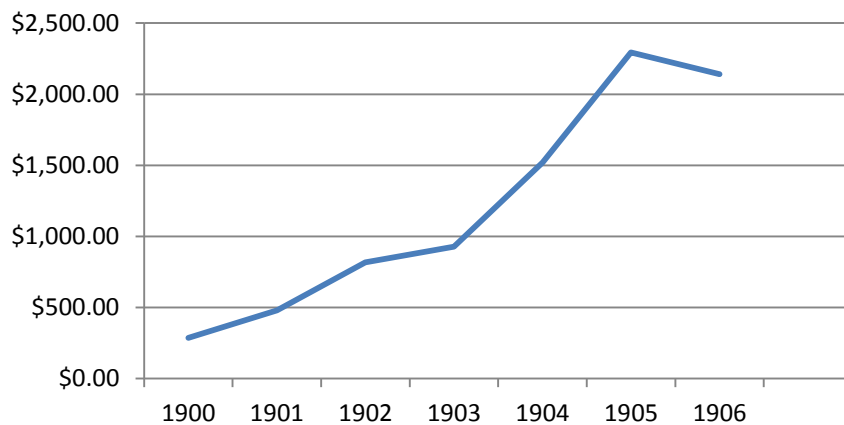
⁴⁷ David Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation with an Introduction by Robert E. Wright* (New York, NY: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 2005), 27.

⁴⁸ Ricardo, *The Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 29.

⁴⁹ George, *Progress and Poverty*, 408-409. According to George, “Taxation which lessens the reward of the producer necessarily lessens the incentive to production.”

market value of land within Fairhope.⁵⁰ Additionally, some argued against “the collection of anything more than the value of the land at the time of its original purchase,” alleging that any increase in land values since its original purchase was due to the individual efforts of the lessees.⁵¹ The Association reminded lessees that land values also increased as a result of an increase in population, however small, and that the entire community contributed to that increase. To quell discontent, the Council provided each lessee a copy of all the rental assessments in Fairhope along with a notice of when the members would meet to approve them.

Collected Land Rents, 1900-1906



Source: Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954*, 93.

⁵⁰ As Matthew M. Harris noted in his study of Fairhope and Arden for the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, by 1906 “About half the population lived on private, deeded land that benefited enormously from the colony provided benefits” and which, some believed, artificially raised the value of land in the colony. See Matthew M. Harris, “Lessons from Attempted Utopia: Fairhope, AL and Arden, DE” (working paper, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2004), 15.

⁵¹ “The Value of Land Governed by Supply and Demand,” *The Fairhope Courier*, May 26, 1905.

After the difficult process of calculating the taxable value of land within the colony, the next step—collecting it—should have been easy; it wasn't. The events that occurred between 1902 and 1907 known collectively as “The Fairhope Controversy,” largely illustrate why. Over those years, Fairhope lessees formed a Tenants Association to voice their complaints to the Executive Council and the *Fairhope Courier*, the official organ of the Fairhope Industrial Association, published numerous reports on the calculation of land values and articles warning residents of the dangers of “too low rents.” Additionally, in 1904, the members of the Fairhope Industrial Association voted to incorporate and change its name to the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation under an Alabama law that allowed any non-profit organization, not paying dividends or interest to its members to incorporate. While not immediately important to the rental controversy, this move enabled angry tenants to sue for the Corporation's dissolution in 1914, alleging that it had created a tax system that violated both the U.S. and Alabama constitutions.

Throughout the five-year dispute, lessees opposed the increase in rental fees each year and complained that non-members were unfairly denied a vote in approving annual assessments.⁵² In response, Corporation members insisted that lessees lacked “understanding and appreciation” of the colony's principles and failed to recognize the numerous benefits they enjoyed based on the application of those ideals. Both sides levied charges of ignorance and greed.

At a January 1905 meeting, leaseholders drafted a memorial that, among other things, accused Corporation officers of personally profiting from land rentals and acting as “a landlord in the most objectionable sense of the word.” The leaseholders demanded that the Council fix a legal limit to the increase of ground rents from year-to-year and

⁵² Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954*, 91-92.

prohibit paid Corporation officers from the serving on the appraisal committee. “This body is assured,” the memorial read, “that there will be no peace until there is a limit fixed to this non-ending and excessive taxation.”⁵³ In a formal “reply” published in the *Courier*, the Council dismissed lessees’ complaints. First, it pointed out that although the Council had “urged” tenants to submit their own estimates of what their land is worth each year “To this date, but one person accepted this invitation.” Furthermore, the Council argued that its hands were tied with regard to limiting the increase of rents each year. “As is amply set forth in the constitution of the Corporation, its leases, and its other literature,” the Council wrote, “[our] policy cannot be consistently carried out without taking *all* of the unearned increment, because anything less would not “equalize the varying advantages of the different tracts.”⁵⁴ While rent prices continued to rise over the next several years, so did the rate of delinquency, prompting, in some cases, the Corporation to take legal action.⁵⁵

The national single tax movement sided with the lessees throughout the most of the Fairhope controversy. As previously mentioned, prominent single taxers including George held unfavorable views toward the establishment of a single tax colony. Besides their fears of the damage its failure might inflict on the larger movement, many single taxers rejected the idea of a private corporation administering the affairs of a supposedly democratic community. While Fairhope “has many admirable features,” Joseph Dana Miller, editor of the *Single Tax Review*, wrote in the spring of 1905, a “close corporation”

⁵³ “The Rental Controversy. Memorial of Objecting Tenants and Reply of the Executive Council,” *The Fairhope Courier*, January 27, 1905.

⁵⁴ “Reply of the Council,” *The Fairhope Courier*, January 27, 1905.

⁵⁵ Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954*, 128.

handles all of its affairs and “exercises all the functions of a landlord.”⁵⁶ This form of management, Miller believed, failed to uphold George’s commitment to local self-government.⁵⁷ Similarly, E.Q. Norton, single taxer and editor of the *Daphne, Alabama Standard* criticized the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation for denying renters an official voice in determining the land values their presence helped create. To remedy this, Norton—who had helped Gaston and the other first families settle in Fairhope—argued for determining land values at an open meeting of renters each year.⁵⁸

Eventually, the Council acted on Norton’s suggestion in 1914, when it adopted the recommendations of W.A. Somers for calculating annual assessments. Believing, as did Henry George, that communities create land value, Somers devised a system for assessing that value based on each site’s *relative* worth. Rather than attempt to determine the *absolute* value of each leasehold—a process which, for Fairhope, proved both difficult and controversial—Somers assigned land values for a given site as “the sum total, expressed in price, of all the influences under existing conditions of life, of the people of that community in relation to that site.”⁵⁹ In other words, Somers assumed that the value of one site to another could be calculated using a mathematical ratio, which separately accounted for all the factors that increase or decrease land value—such as road and market access or soil fertility.⁶⁰ Additionally, Somers relied on the extensive input of

⁵⁶ Editor, *Single Tax Review* 4 (April 15, 1905): 42-43.

⁵⁷ See Henry George, *Social Problems*, 171-193 for more on George’s ideas regarding democratic government.

⁵⁸ E.Q. Norton, “The Changes Needed to Make Fairhope a Success,” *The Single Tax Review* 4 (April 15, 1905; reprinted from the *Daphne, Ala. Standard*, n.d.), 45.

⁵⁹ Walter W. Pollock, “An Equitable Standard for Land Valuation” in *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Conference Under the Auspices of the National Tax Association (Formerly “State and Local Taxation”) Held at Buffalo, New York, October 23 to 25, 1913* (Madison, WI: National Taxation Association, 1914), 241.

⁶⁰ Doty, “Assessment Work Under the Somers System,” 240.

people living within each neighborhood of the assessed land at open meetings conducted during the entire valuation process.

Somers recommended that the Council fix the gross rent for 1914 at \$6,500 and then determine each lot's rental charge based on its relative value to the other lots within the colony. While the lessees generally approved of Somers' method over previous attempts by the Council to set rental charges, as Paul and Blanche Alyea have pointed out, it presented two major problems. First, the Somers system required an unrealistic amount of participation by each lessee. Second, and most importantly, it did not guarantee the collection of *full* rent, since the system based each lot's rental charge on relative proportion of a pre-determined and fixed annual assessment for the entire colony.⁶¹ The Somers system more closely resembled the colony's previous practice of calculating individual rentals based on the total revenue needed, rather than its founding charge to collect the full rental value of land.

The application of the Somers system of valuation at Fairhope appeased some residents while further angering others—especially committed single taxers. On April 25, 1914, the Fairhope Lessees Association, led by two prominent single taxers, submitted a Bill of Complaint to the Mobile Chancery Court. In it they alleged that the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation not only violated the Alabama's law prohibiting not-for-profit corporations from paying dividends to its members, but that it also had “failed, and must continue to fail, to carry out or accomplish any of the purposes for which such an organization may exist:” the application of the single tax.⁶² To Alfred Wolf and Alexander Melville, the two main movers in the suit against the Corporation, Fairhope

⁶¹ Alyea, *Fairhope, 1894-1954*, 163.

⁶² *Alexr. J. Melville vs. Fairhope Single Tax Corporation*, 5. Bill of Complaint. Submitted April 25, 1914 in Records of the Fairhope Industrial Association.

proved that it was both impossible and unjust to try and collect the full rental value of land while state and local governments levied other taxes. The system established at Fairhope in which residents pay a land value tax in addition to state and local duties, Wolf and Melville believed, proved horribly oppressive and represented “a miserable parody upon the teachings of Henry George.”⁶³ The Chancery Court agreed.

To the Corporation, the suit, ironically, proved helpful. While the Chancery Court sided with the Lessees Association, on appeal, the Alabama Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation and issued the final word on its legality under State law. Contrary to the lower court, which found that the Corporation’s tax system violated the Alabama and U.S. Constitutions, the State Supreme Court ruled that the tenants of the Corporation were subject to the same system of taxation as all state and national residents.⁶⁴ In fact, the Court ruled, the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation lacked any official taxing power. Instead, the Court found that the Corporation acted more like a “benevolent landlord,” treating its private land as the common property of all lessees, who thereby shared in the benefits of its single tax demonstration.⁶⁵

Beyond Taxation: Life in a ‘Single Tax’ Colony

Despite the failure of Fairhope to collect the full rental value of land, deriving local revenue entirely from land rent provided residents with many benefits. Over the years the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation financed several community projects and purchased more land for future settlers. At the Quarter Centennial Celebration of Fairhope in 1920, Gaston reminded residents of the all the free and discounted services

⁶³ Ibid., 7. See also Alfred J. Wolf, “Fairhope Colony on Mobile Bay: An Alleged Application of the Single Tax” (Fairhope, AL: Sept., 1907).

⁶⁴ *Fairhope Single Tax Corporation v. Melville*, 193 Ala. 289 (1915).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

available to them as a result of Fairhope's land policy. Among those that he highlighted—which included the wharf and steamer, railway, waterworks, and telephone service—access to the world-renown and highly successful Organic School represented the most prized.⁶⁶

Besides its distinction as America's first single tax colony, Fairhope enjoys international recognition for its School of Organic Education, founded in 1907 by Marietta Johnson. Johnson, a Minnesota school teacher, came to Fairhope with her husband and young son in December 1902. In January 1903, she took charge of the colony school and implemented a new, experimental curriculum, which emphasized manual tasks and catered to students' individual interests. Johnson called the theory behind this curriculum "organic education," which followed the maxim that "education is growth." Johnson believed that no economic reform, including the single tax, would be successful until the "false concepts of justice" first learned in the nation's schools were corrected. Education needed to do more than train students for the future; it needed to nurture the "immediate needs of the whole organism." In 1909, Fairhope financier and soap magnate Joseph Fels donated \$10,000 to Johnson's school.⁶⁷

Fairhope provided an ideal setting to test a new theory of education, especially one based on the premise that the traditional practice—filling children with as much knowledge as possible and testing to see how much they retained—contained serious flaws.⁶⁸ In many ways, Johnson's theory of organic education applied Gaston's concept

⁶⁶ "Quarter Centennial History of Fairhope Single Tax Colony. Read by E.B. Gaston, Secretary at Celebration, January 1, 1920" Records of the Fairhope Industrial Association.

⁶⁷ Paul M. Gaston, *Women of Fairhope* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1984), 66-80.

⁶⁸ Marietta Johnson once wrote: "It is one thing to have an educational theory; it is something quite different to put it into practice. The town of Fairhope is an effort to make a "good theory work," so this is an eminently appropriate location for a school working out a good theory." See Johnson, *Thirty Years with an Idea* (University, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1974), 51.

of true cooperative individualism to schooling. Johnson granted children near total freedom to pursue their individual interests so long as their pursuit did not interfere with those of other children's or stifle the growth of the entire class. Similarly, the job of the teacher at the organic school closely aligned to the mission of the Fairhope Single Tax Corporation: to secure "equality of opportunity, the full reward of individual efforts, and the benefits of cooperation in matters of general concern."⁶⁹ The Corporation existed not to amass profits for its members, but to stimulate the growth of the entire community through the promotion of individual interests. Likewise, Johnson described the role of the school to provide children with the experiences necessary to grow. "Our school has been an effort to work with children from the point of view of meeting their needs rather than getting them to meet the demands of any system." She wrote, "Not "what do they know," but "how do they grow" is our slogan. The school must provide conditions under which every child may flourish."⁷⁰ To that end, Johnson abolished fixed desks and postponed lessons in reading or mathematics until ages eight or nine. Before then, she believed, children's nervous systems lacked the maturity to handle formal book work.⁷¹

The popularity of Johnson's theory of organic education relied, in part, on its incorporation of the principles of pragmatism—an intellectual movement of growing importance in the early decades of the twentieth century. Johnson shared pragmatists' belief that knowledge was not simply something passed down from one generation to the next; individuals needed to experience knowledge and discover its usefulness firsthand. "Too often people take truth on authority," Johnson wrote, "that is, they accept things

⁶⁹ Article II of the Constitution of the Fairhope Industrial Association reprinted in Gaston, *Man and mission*, 150.

⁷⁰ Johnson, *Thirty Years with an Idea*, 15.

⁷¹ "What is Organic Education? Excerpts from Mrs. Johnson's Explanatory Speech," *The Vanguard American* 2 (January 1946), 1.

because of the word of the book or some authority.” Instead, she believed that “If children were allowed to think through experience, a tendency to wait for data, to search for truth and use it for authority, might be developed.”⁷² Johnson conducted most of the lessons for students in her First Life Group—ages 6 to 7—outdoors to provide physical examples of the ideas they studied. Eventually, Johnson believed, children discover the limits to what they can learn through direct experience and when that happened, usually around age eight or nine, they discover books to fill in what they cannot experience themselves.

Johnson arrived at her organic theory of education after years of study and experience. In preparation to teach children, she read the latest literature on childhood development—Nathaniel Oppenheim’s *Development of the Child* (1898) became her “educational bible”—and studied how children naturally interacted with their environment, beginning with her own son.⁷³ “It seems extraordinary to me that I did not start upon such work long, long before I did,” Johnson remarked:

That educators generally let the centuries slip by before they began to see the great necessity for it is a continual sense of amazement in me. The men who have raised cabbages have had sense enough to study cabbages; but we, who have raised children, are not just beginning to have the sense enough to study children.⁷⁴

Her observations reaffirmed the principle, first proposed by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that “The child is best prepared for life as an adult by experiencing in childhood what has meaning to him as a child.”⁷⁵ Put another way, children must be allowed to be children.

⁷² Johnson, *Thirty Years with an Idea*, 62.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁷⁴ Johnson quoted in Davis Edwards, “Founder of Organic Education Tells of New School,” *The New York Times* (March 16, 1913).

⁷⁵ John and Evelyn Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow* (New York, NY: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1915), 17-18.

The height of the careers of both Johnson and the Organic School came in 1915, when John Dewey and his wife Evelyn discussed the findings of their visit to Fairhope in a book titled *Schools of Tomorrow*. The Deweys praised Johnson for designing a curriculum that provided experiences children needed not only to develop their minds, but also their bodies and spirit. “The school has provided conditions for wholesome, natural growth,” they wrote. “It has demonstrated that it is possible for children to lead the same natural lives in school that they lead in good homes...to progress bodily, mentally, and morally in school without factitious pressure, rewards, examinations, grades, or promotions.”⁷⁶ Johnson’s pupils rarely received examinations, and when they did, most were open-book since the purpose of evaluating students, according to John and Evelyn Dewey, is not to show what the child had memorized but that they could successfully use books and other tools to gain knowledge.

From 1909 until her death in 1938, Johnson lectured on organic education around the United States and Europe. In the process, she not only familiarized the world with the organic school method, but also with the ideas that had inspired Fairhope—the single tax and true cooperative individualism. Furthermore, the success of Johnson’s school helped demonstrate George’s point that the single tax promised more than fiscal reform; it promoted social organization based on the principle that what the community creates the community shall receive and that which the individual produces the individual shall receive.

⁷⁶ Dewey, *Schools of Tomorrow*, 1915.



The Organic School, 1913. Photograph taken by John Dewey. Reprinted with the permission of the Marietta Johnson Museum.



Marietta Johnson and students in front of the "Bell Building" on the Organic School Campus. Photograph taken by Frank Stewart in 1912. Reprinted with the permission of the Marietta Johnson Museum.

'You Are Welcome Hither'

While E.B. Gaston and other Fairhope settlers celebrated the arrival of the colony's first summer, Frank Stephens and Will Price prepared for battle. On June 15, 1895, both men led an army of Philadelphia single taxers into Delaware, where they hoped to elect a new state government friendly to George's ideas. They donned Union Army uniforms, called themselves the Delaware Single Tax Party, and adopted the planet Earth as the official party image. For 17 months, they marched throughout the Diamond State distributing literature, delivering speeches and singing songs, including one set to the tune of "My Maryland:" "We want the Earth we want it all; We want the whole terrestrial ball! Awake, Awake, 'tis Freedom's Call; Delaware, my Delaware."

The campaign proved highly unsuccessful. The press portrayed the single taxers as "invaders" and "depraved and irresponsible vagabonds." Local officials arrested Stephens and other members of his army on multiple occasions for "noisy assemblage" and "impeding the thoroughfare." On Election Day, no single tax candidate earned more than a thousand votes. At a state Constitutional Convention the following year, delegates approved a clause *prohibiting* the legislature from ever adopting "a system of taxation the object of which is the confiscation of land."⁷⁷

Stephens and Price remained committed to the cause of making Delaware the first Single Tax State. In addition to its size and the concentration of voters in Wilmington; Delaware presented an ideal test case for George's theory as a result of the positive ratio

⁷⁷ Brother Michael Ignatious O'Shea, *A History of Arden: An Experiment in the Application of the Single Tax Theory of Henry George* (master's thesis, Seton Hall University, 1957) 7-9, 12-13 in Papers of Frank and Donald Stephens, Delaware Historical Society; Nancy T. Wolfe, "The Single Taxers, 'Invasion' of Delaware" *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 35 (Jan., 1976): 96, 101; H. Wiencek, "Laying out the idyllic life in a latter-day Arden," *Smithsonian* 23 (1992), 127; and, Harris, "Lessons from Attempted Utopia," 34. According to Harris, "The phrase "confiscation of land" was a deliberate and inflammatory distortion of George's proposal," and "was the equivalent of a slap in the face just for good measure."

between its land values and expenses. In a speech to Delaware businessmen, Stephens explained that a mere two percent tax on land rent would cover *all* of the state's expenditures.⁷⁸ When the campaign failed to convince Delaware voters of the virtues of George's theory, Stephens and Price decided to establish a working demonstration of the single tax. They reasoned that if voters witnessed the benefits of land value taxation on a small scale, they might be persuaded to give it a try at the state level. In 1900, with the financial backing of Joseph Fels, Stephens, Price, and one of Price's colleagues, Frank Martin, purchased a 162-acre farm six miles north of Wilmington and 20 miles south of Philadelphia. They paid \$9,000 for this site on which they hoped to establish America's second single tax colony.

Prior to their reading of *Progress and Poverty*, Stephens and Price enjoyed successful careers as skilled artisans. In the 1880s, Stephens established two businesses specializing in sculpture decorative arts and Price was on his way to becoming a well-known architect.⁷⁹ In addition to George, both celebrated the ideas and accomplishments of William Morris, who inspired the English Arts and Crafts Movement, and Peter Kropotkin, a Russian theorist who believed that cooperation, rather than conflict, fueled progress. At the Second International Conference on the Taxation of Land Values held at Oxford University in 1923, Stephens described the sources of inspiration for the colony:

We had learned William Morris' truth that nothing can be done for Art until we have bridged the terrible gulf between the rich and the poor. We were so disgusted with civilization that we determined then and there to go out into the open and make a better one, in which the land theory of Henry

⁷⁸ "To Delaware Business Men," in *Speeches by Frank Stephens*, Papers of Frank and Donald Stephens, Delaware Historical Society.

⁷⁹ Harris, "Lessons from Attempted Utopia," 34-35.

George should make the social basis for the industrial theory of Kropotkin and the art theory of William Morris.⁸⁰

In addition to a working demonstration of the single tax, Stephens and Price wanted to establish a community that promoted cooperation and artistic living.



Two views of Arden gate, 1922. Reprinted with the permission of the Delaware Historical Society.

⁸⁰ *The Arden Book: History, Government, Laws & Organizations*, Rev. Ed. (Arden Community Planning Committee: 1999), 4-5.

The intellectual and creative backgrounds of Stephens and Price informed every aspect of their experiment. Price designed the layout of the colony around two central greens connected by intersecting pathways and a woodland border.⁸¹ Stephens created the blueprints and helped construct the community's first homesteads. As a reflection of their shared love of Shakespeare, Stephens and Price named their colony after the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*—"as that forest was a refuge for exiles," one scholar wrote, "so Arden was to be a refuge for those who were tired of the tensions of city life."⁸² Additionally, at the entrance to one of the village greens, Arden's founders erected a wooden stile with an inscription from *King Lear* on the front—"You are welcome hither"—and on the back, one from *Julius Caesar*—"If we do meet again, we shall smile."⁸³

Unlike the architects of Fairhope, Stephens, Price and Martin established a system of trusteeship to administer colony affairs. As trustees, they held the title to the land and agreed to lease it for 99-year terms to anyone who applied, regardless of religion, race, or political association. In return, Arden lessees contracted to pay "the full rental value of the premises" from which the trustees contracted to pay all State and local taxes. Additionally, the trustees promised to use any money left over after paying taxes to provide services desired by the leaseholders.⁸⁴ Similar to Fairhope, neither the Deed of Trust nor Arden's constitution outlined a procedure for assessing land values or collecting economic rent, besides the vague statement that "the rentals shall be assessed

⁸¹ Mark Taylor, "Utopia by Taxation: Frank Stephens and the Single Tax Community of Arden, Delaware" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126 (Apr., 2001), 316.

⁸² Carolyn Neff Andrews, *Arden: Experiment in Idealism* (master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1967), 13.

⁸³ Taylor, "Utopia by Taxation," 310.

⁸⁴ Huntington and Warren, *Enclaves of the Single Tax*, 70.

to correspond to the value or desirableness of each plot...”⁸⁵ Shortly after all of the land in Arden had been leased—around 1909—the village experienced its own version of the Fairhope Controversy: single taxers demanded the collection of the full rental value of land and the lessees refused to pay it. Although the story of Arden’s founding significantly differed from that of Fairhope’s, the colony soon found itself facing the very same issues with regards to the implementation of George’s theory.

“What is the full rent?”

Arden grew slowly during its first decade. Land policy expert Matthew Harris attributes the colony’s stunted development to the terms of the original Deed of Trust, which gave the trustees complete authority over the assessment and collection of rents. This arrangement, Harris pointed out, may have prevented settlers from developing their leaseholds out of fear that their rents would increase. It may also have kept potential residents from making their home in Arden due to the closed process of rent-setting.⁸⁶ When Stephens, Price, and Martin revised the Deed of Trust in 1908 to allow residents to elect their own rent assessors, Arden proceeded to grow. By August 1, 1909, the trustees had secured a renter for every foot of leasable ground in Arden.⁸⁷

While the new Deed of Trust promoted growth, it also indirectly led to the policy of basing land rents on the revenue needed to pay taxes and cover expenses, rather than the full economic value of land. In an article in the new village paper, *Arden Leaves*, C.F. Shandrew attributed the shift in practice to residents’ lack of understanding of the term “full rent.” Like Gaston, Shandrew insisted that the full rental value of land “cannot

⁸⁵ Ibid., 64.

⁸⁶ Harris, “Lessons from Attempted Utopia,” 37.

⁸⁷ Ibid. See also, “Deed of Trust,” in Warren and Huntington, *Enclaves of the Single Tax*, 57, 69-70.

be that minimum amount which the leaseholder will consent to pay, neither can it be that excessive amount which some one individual would pay to gratify his whim for a particular site.” Rent, he argued, “is determined by “the haggling of the market.”⁸⁸ As proof that the trustees failed to collect full rent, Shandrew noted that land adjacent to the colony and lacking many of its benefits, sold at a higher price than the assessed value of land in Arden. Since the value of land outside full rent communities represents the speculative price of land, Shandrew reasoned, trustees should collect as much if not more in rent for land within Arden, which is more valuable.

On August 3, 1911 Arden residents conducted a public meeting to consider the “good and welfare of Arden,” or, in other words, whether to continue basing land rents on expected expenditures. Residents voted to allow a Committee of Twelve to further investigate and make recommendations to resolve the issue of annual rental assessments. The results of the Committee’s investigation proved disappointing to Arden’s single taxers. The Committee recommended that the assessors continue its usual practice of basing assessments “upon a carefully prepared budget for the coming year.”⁸⁹ Additionally, it suggested that assessors charge no more than 5 percent of the total land value in rent—the “customary” practice in the State of Delaware. Besides its apparent ignorance of the terms of Arden leases, one single taxer lamented the Committee’s blatant disregard for the history of the village:

They seem to have overlooked the fact that if Arden means anything at all, it means a breaking away from precedent! Yet it was because it follows no precedent, because it is unique, that these Twelve men came to Arden,

⁸⁸ C.G. Shandrew, “1912 Rentals,” *Arden Leaves* (September 1911), 20. Papers of Frank and Donald Stephens, Delaware Historical Society.

⁸⁹ Report of the Committee of Twelve quoted in F.J.S., “Wayside Notes and Comments,” *Arden Leaves* (Oct., 1911), 27. Papers of Frank and Donald Stephens, Delaware Historical Society.

and for that same reason dozens of others followed, and for that same reason other Ardens are being established.⁹⁰

Residents voted favorably for the recommendations submitted by the Committee of Twelve thereby institutionalizing the practice of determining rents based on projected expenses. For 1911-1912, the trustees collected nearly \$500 less in total rent than what they paid in taxes and general expenses.

Adultery, Treason, and the Sabbath: Arden in the News

Despite its failure to collect the full rental value of land after 1908, Arden, like Fairhope, continued to brand itself a “single tax colony.” As a result, Henry George’s ideas remained in the public view whenever Arden or its residents appeared in the news. Throughout the early decades of the 20th century, the names of Arden residents frequently made headlines, often for engaging in “scandalous” behavior such as playing baseball on the Sabbath. Other times, Arden, like Fairhope, triggered public interest in the single tax as a result of the success of one or more of its institutions. Both types of coverage helped paint an image of the “Georgist” colony as a place where idealists entertained unconventional ideas. One such idea included a bank that loaned on “character” rather than financial collateral.

Established in April 1911, the Raiffeisen Gild promoted single tax ideals by providing loans and mortgages to “the landless laboring classes and those most in need of help.” Stephens and Price fashioned the Gild after the village credit union plan created in the mid-19th century by Burgomeister Raiffeisen of Heddesdorf, Germany, which issued loans to members based on moral character and neighborly reputation. Similarly,

⁹⁰ F.J.S., “Wayside Notes and Comments,” *Arden Leaves* (Oct., 1911), 28. Papers of Frank and Donald Stephens, Delaware Historical Society.

according to the charter of the Raiffeisen Guild at Arden, “The object of the Guild shall be to lend money to its members by utilizing their credit through co-operation and the pledge of their unlimited liability in borrowing.” Raiffeisen Guild membership was open to any leaseholder or resident pending the unanimous approval of a five-member Council, elected by Arden residents. Initially, the Guild loaned at five percent interest—later increased to six percent—and deposited all surpluses from repaid loans to the central borrowing fund. The Guild charter also prevented the issuance of dividends or profits of any kind. In addition to the unanimous approval of the Council, loan applications required, as surety, the signatures of two neighbors. By 1921, the Guild had supplied nearly \$40,000 in loans mostly to cover the costs of building homes and businesses in Arden without a single default or loss.⁹¹

Besides the Raiffeisen Guild, Arden’s numerous cultural clubs and events earned it the reputation of a modern *As You Like It*.⁹² Arden maintained its founders’ commitments to the promotion art and their love of Shakespeare long after Stephens and Price died. For years, the village operated a successful Craft shop where Stephens and his protégées produced and sold hand-crafted furniture, lamps, and other decorative items. Additionally, the Players’ and Musicians’ Guilds performed several times each year at the open-air theater on the West side of the Village Green.⁹³ One village visitor described Arden as “a kind of undress temple of learning” and his visit in 1910 “like turning the

⁹¹ Huntington and Warren, *Enclaves of the Single Tax*, 60, 74, and 61.

⁹² J.W. Gaskine, “Arden: a Modern “As You Like It”” *The Independent* 71 (August 10, 1911): 299-304.

⁹³ *The Arden Book*, 6-7. According to the *Arden Book*, Stephens built the Arden Theater before constructing his own home.

pages of an old romance.”⁹⁴ In 1973, Arden became the only village ever placed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁹⁵

In addition to the press accounts that applauded its rich artistic and cultural life, Arden received a considerable amount of public attention as a result of its residents’ tendency to defy social conventions. Beginning in the summer of 1910, Arden enjoyed two consecutive years of press coverage that began and ended with its most famous resident, Socialist author Upton Sinclair. Early that summer, Sinclair had invited his friend and poet Harry Kemp to stay with him and his wife Meta in their “Jungalow.” Sinclair had moved to Arden after the demise of his own socialist utopian experiment at Helicon Home Colony.⁹⁶ Kemp apparently fell in love with more than just the village—in his 1922 memoir, *Tramping on Life*, Kemp referred to Arden as Eden.⁹⁷ At the end of his stay, Kemp left Arden with Sinclair’s wife, forcing the author to file for divorce. The affair attracted national attention and the press rebranded Arden a colony of free love.⁹⁸

After the affair, Arden apparently tried to suppress some of the ideas and actions of its more radical residents. The effort backfired. At a summer 1911 meeting of the Arden Economic Club, residents called the local police to arrest Arden resident George Brown for disrupting the meeting. Brown, an “anarchist shoemaker” and longtime confidant of Emma Goldman, had apparently tried to use the public meeting to express

⁹⁴ “Impressions of a Visiting Scribe” *North American Philadelphia* reprinted in *Arden Leaves* (November 1910), 10. Papers of Frank and Donald Stephens, Delaware Historical Society.

⁹⁵ *The Arden Book*, 8.

⁹⁶ Taylor, “Utopia by Taxation,” 323-4. According to Taylor, Stephens built Sinclair’s home at Arden and the residents nicknamed it the “Jungalow.”

⁹⁷ William P. Frank, “Harry Kemp Death Recalls Arden’s ‘Free Love’ Scandal” *Wilmington Morning News* (Aug. 10, 1964) in Arden Papers, Delaware Historical Society.

⁹⁸ See “Wife’s Freedom Galls Sinclair” *The Oregonian* (Sept. 4, 1911), 3; “Kemp Drifted into Love,” *Kansas City Star* (Dec. 27, 1911), 6; “‘Free Love a Delusion, I Know,’ Meta Sinclair” *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (Aug. 1, 1915); 2; and, Frank, “Harry Kemp Death Recalls Arden’s ‘Free Love’ Scandal,” *Wilmington Morning News* (Aug. 6, 1960).

his rather unconventional theories of sexuality.⁹⁹ In retaliation for his arrest, Brown later had a number of Arden residents arrested for violating Delaware's Blue Laws by playing baseball on the Sabbath. Previously the victim and now the hero, Sinclair, one of 11 arrested and jailed for the incident, vowed to launch a campaign to repeal the law that landed him in jail. Additionally, he penned a poem entitled "Menagerie" and later printed in the *New York Times*, from his jail cell decrying the conditions of prison life. Reports of Sinclair's arrest and the entire Brown-Baseball incident flooded Northeastern newspapers. Arden, once again, found itself at the center of a story that had nothing to do with the single tax.¹⁰⁰

Press coverage that connected Arden to Henry George and the single tax usually focused on the actions of trustee and founder Frank Stephens, who enjoyed a strong media presence prior the colony's establishment. Besides the single tax, Stephens actively campaigned against the tariff, the American-Filipino War, and vivisection. His activism was neither unusual for George supporters nor helpful to the image of single taxers. Stephens' tendency to speak his mind and willingness to break the law contributed to the portrayal of single taxers in the press as "cranks." On the other hand, his passion earned the confidence of prominent single taxers, such as those in the Philadelphia Club who selected Stephens to lead the Delaware campaign and Joseph Fels who trusted his vision for Arden.

In the press, his frankness provoked charges of treason. No more so than after Stephens' speech at a dinner of the Manhattan Single Tax Club in February 1900, in

⁹⁹ H. Wienczek, "Laying out the idyllic life in a latter-day Arden," *Smithsonian* 23:2 (1992), 130.

¹⁰⁰ See "Anarchists Turn Now," *The New York Times* (Aug. 1, 1911), 3; "Arden Stirred by Brown's Warrants," *the Philadelphia Inquirer* 165 (Aug. 1, 1911), 2; "Ardenites Prefer Jail to \$4 Fines," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 165 (Aug. 2, 1911), 2; and, "U. Sinclair Takes to Crime and Rime," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 165 (Aug. 3, 1911), 2.

which he announced that he prayed for the defeat of the U.S. military in the Philippines and blamed the President for the deaths of the war:

It is ridiculous to attempt to scatter the blame for the atrocities that have been perpetuated in the Philippines. The sin lies at the door of one man, and on many only, that murderer, William McKinley. He predicted the trouble; he took the reins of the government into his own hand. He made himself emperor for the unholy purpose. We do not wish to blame the Republican party nor the administration; we must blame the head and front of this whole affair, the President of the United States. Let us not hesitate to publish to the whole world our opinions of the butcher who menaces the institutions of our country. Let there be no doubt that we now where the trouble lies.¹⁰¹

Editors across the country censored Stephens and demanded that he retract his statements. Stephens refused to apologize and instead, used the increased media attention to clarify his position on the Philippines and others related to the nation's land policy. "The Filipinos have just as much right to fight for their country as we did for ours," the *Wilmington Evening Journal* quoted Stephens, "The United States cannot show any free and clear title to the islands. They were purchased from a people who had no right to sell them."¹⁰² Like other single taxers, Stephens connected the "land question" to foreign policy and territorial expansion. Had the U.S. been more careful with its once vast public domain, it may not have needed to annex new territories abroad. Stephens' loyalty to the country was again put on trial 18 years later when he was arrested for violating the Espionage Act. According to a Liberty Bonds saleswoman, Stephens made derogatory comments toward her and her partner, calling both of them murderers, when they

¹⁰¹ "M'Kinley Flayed by the Ants," *New York Morning Telegraph* (February 3, 1900).

¹⁰² "Stevens Will Not Retract," *The Wilmington Evening Journal*, n.d. in Arden Papers, Delaware Historical Society.

attempted to sell war bonds in Arden. Although a jury acquitted Stephens, the episode reaffirmed his resolve to exercise his right of free speech despite the consequences.¹⁰³

The failure of Arden's experiment in the single tax did not dampen Stephens' commitment to George's ideas. When it became clear that Arden residents no longer desired to collect the full economic value of land, Stephens resigned as trustee. In 1922 he purchased land next to the village and set up a new colony called "Ardentown." As he intended to do with Arden, Stephens founded Ardentown to demonstrate the advantages of a full rent community. Although the two villages were nearly identical, Stephens unsuccessfully campaigned for their incorporation. Ardentown eventually adopted the former's practice of collecting only as much land rent needed to cover taxes, expenses and an occasional community project. Once again, a demonstration of the single tax failed. Although Stephens conceded defeat, he maintained his commitment to the single tax and the power of intentional communities until his death in 1935. In his last will and testament, Stephens set aside \$25,000 for the establishment of a "settlement for Negroes on the plan of Arden village and its credit union." In 1950, Delaware became the first state to voluntarily integrate its schools with the establishment of the third Arden village at Ardencroft.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ "Frank Stephens is Held for Espionage" *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (May 7, 1918), 15; "Claims Espionage Act is Unconstitutional," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 5, 1918), 6; and, "Jury Acquits Frank Stephens of Spy Law Violations," *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 23, 1918), 5.

¹⁰⁴ Harris, "Lessons from Attempted Utopia," 38; O'Shea, *A History of Arden*, 33-34; Frank Stephens, "Last Will and Testament," *The Homestead* (April 4, 1917) in Arden Papers, Delaware Historical Society; and, H. Wiencek, "Laying out the idyllic life in a latter-day Arden," 132.



Frank Stephens as a young man, no date (left) and in his studio, 1920 (right). Reproduced with the permission of the Delaware Historical Society.



Photo of a family at work in Arden, circa 1900. Reprinted with permission of the Delaware Historical Society.

The failure of Arden and Fairhope to become full rental enclaves validates Henry George's skepticism toward single tax colonies. While the founders of Fairhope and Arden never ceased to believe in the mission of their experiments, both attracted residents who did. Thus, single taxers faced the tough decision of whether to stay the course or adapt to the evolving views of the entire community. Both Fairhope and Arden chose the latter. Even in failure, both colonies developed into desirable places to live and constructed lasting institutions that help keep George and the single tax in public discussions. The histories of Fairhope and Arden represent an important chapter in the life of George's ideas. The difficulties colony leaders faced calculating and collecting land rent reflected those predicted by single tax critics. On the other hand, the colonies' ability to provide free and discounted public services to its residents demonstrated one of the many benefits of deriving local revenue from land rent anticipated by George's supporters. Additionally, both Fairhope and Arden inspired social developments unpredicted by either side.

Conclusion

Henry George died of a stroke on October 29, 1897, in the mist of his second campaign for mayor of New York City. News of his death spread quickly. A funeral was held on November 1 in New York City, and according to several reports, it was one fit for a hero. “His funeral was the most imposing ceremony ever seen in New York since the death of General Grant, not in magnificence, but in the throngs of people that gazed and wept over his body,” the *Independent* reported. “No demonstration of popular feeling on the death of a public man since Lincoln’s body lay in the City Hall has been so imposing in extent and character as that of yesterday,” the *New York Times* similarly noted. “Call it, if you will, hero worship; but its object was really a hero.”¹

The response of George contemporaries to his death testifies to the breadth of his influence. In an article for the *Independent*, William Lloyd Garrison (II) discussed George’s dual impact as an economist and prophet. “Into the inanimate body of political economy Henry George breathed the breath of life,” Garrison wrote, “It is a new science, no longer dismal. It throbs and pulsates with humanity. It has become a mighty instrument for the overthrow of oppression, delivered from the special keeping of a select few to become the broad possession of mankind.”² *Progress and Poverty* changed economic thought and discussion in the United States. Through his refutation of

¹ “Henry George,” *The Independent* 49 (Nov. 4, 1897), 13 and “The Funeral of Henry George,” *The New York Times* (Nov. 1, 1897), 6.

² William Lloyd Garrison, “Henry George,” *The Independent* 49 (Nov. 11, 1897), 1.

Malthusianism and attack on the wages-fund theory, George helped strip political economy of some of its doom and gloom.

In Great Britain, George's ideas had received immediate recognition due to the timing, Christian character, resonance with a British intellectual tradition that held private property in land violated natural law, and, perhaps most of all, because of the wide extent of land monopolization in England, Ireland, and Scotland. The London publication of *Progress and Poverty* in 1880 followed by several visits by George in the early and mid-1880s provided intellectual moorings for the Irish anti-landlord agitation and land nationalization movement. Quite unintentionally, George ignited the smoldering embers of modern British socialism. As the liberal British economist and statesman John Atkinson Hobson wrote a month after George's death, "The spirit of reform awakened by Henry George manifested itself, not in one, but in many movements directed to the redress of specific grievances and the attainment of specific aspirations in connection with the land."³ George revealed the centrality of the land question to other prominent social and economic concerns.

George's death did not signal the end of his influence or the spread of his ideas. George's supporters kept the single tax in public discussion through their efforts to municipalize streetcars in Cleveland and establish working demonstrations of land value taxation in Fairhope, Alabama and Arden, Delaware. In Britain, single taxers led by Chancellor of the Exchequer David Lloyd George forced the House of Lords to break a two-century old tradition not to veto money bills passed in the House of Commons when they included land value taxation in the 1909 budget.

³ J.A. Hobson, "The Influence of Henry George in England," *Fortnightly Review* 62 (Dec., 1897), 843.

The financial and administrative support of several organizations formed after George's death played, and continue to play, key roles in the effort to promote discussion of and action based on his ideas. In 1909, wealthy soap magnate Joseph Fels agreed to donate \$25,000 a year for five years and to provide matching donations for every dollar raised in support of the propagation of George's ideas. For the first six years of its existence, the Joseph Fels Fund of America raised nearly \$300,000 and supported a number of local and state political efforts, including the nearly successful attempt in Oregon led by Progressive reformer William S. U'ren to pass a statewide single tax measure. In 1908, the measure received 34.5 percent voter approval. Although subsequent attempts in 1910 and 1912 to passage a single tax measure also failed, U'ren and his allies successfully lobbied the electorate to pass direct legislation amendments including the initiative and referendum in the hope that such devices might be used in the future to enact land value taxation.⁴

Other examples of the extensive reach of the single tax, while outside the purview of this dissertation, warrant further study. In particular, the involvement of several single tax Congressmen in the drafting and passage of a federal income tax of 1913 and the Federal Revenue Act of 1916 poses several interesting research questions, not the least of which is why George's supporters would back a measure that would in due course make the income tax the prime instrument of federal taxation. Historical evidence suggests that single taxers, including Pennsylvania Congressman Warren Worth Bailey, played a crucial role in the Act's creation and passage.⁵ What accounts for Congressman Bailey and other single taxers support for federal income taxation? How did their involvement

⁴ Young, *The Single Tax Movement in the United States*, 163-164, 169-181.

⁵ See for example, Brownlee, "Wilson and Financing the Modern States" and Gaffney and Harrison, *The Corruption of Economics*, 35.

alter the contours of this critical piece of legislation? Finally, how did the Act's passage impact the cohesion and strength of the single tax movement?

Although the single tax was never fully implemented anywhere in the world, this dissertation has shown how George's concept inspired and animated many notable social and economic reform movements, including socialism, labor activism, and the Social Gospel. More than any other late-nineteenth century reformer, George reintroduced land and the concept of economic rent into political economic debates heavily focused on the interests of capital versus labor. This dissertation has uncovered the primary importance of land to individuals' social and economic lives and discussed why so many believed the single tax represented the best hope for protecting and preserving their natural right to the soil upon which freedom, justice, and democracy depended.

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The Fabian Tracts

The Free Enquirer

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