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# The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era

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## **Alan Dawley (1943–2008): Memorial and Assessment**

*[Editor's Note:* The journal requested the following two essays to commemorate and assess the career of Alan Dawley, who died suddenly while on a study trip in Mexico in March 2008. First, Ann Marie Nicolosi, a colleague and former student, provides a personal remembrance. Then, editorial board member Ian Tyrrell, an authority on the intellectual history of United States history writing, explains why Dawley's books and essays offer excellent examples of the intellectual concerns and development of his generation of United States historians.]

### **Alan Dawley: A Personal Remembrance**

*By Ann Marie Nicolosi, The College of New Jersey*

Alan Dawley was many things to many people. He was a prolific and important scholar whose work has helped to define and shape the study of American history. He was a committed activist, a loving family man, a world traveler, and a man whose intellectual capacities were matched only by his generosity as a teacher and mentor. It is in this latter role that I write about Alan and in this role that Alan left his mark in a very personal sense for me.

I had the pleasure of knowing Alan in many capacities. He was my colleague, my fellow activist, sometimes my battle companion, and my friend. But it is as my teacher and mentor that I will remember him best. Indeed, even as we became colleagues and friends, there still remained the element of the wise teacher and mentor and, perhaps, the adoring student who recognized the towering accomplishments of her teacher, accomplishments greater than what she, or very few others in the profession for that matter, could ever hope to achieve.

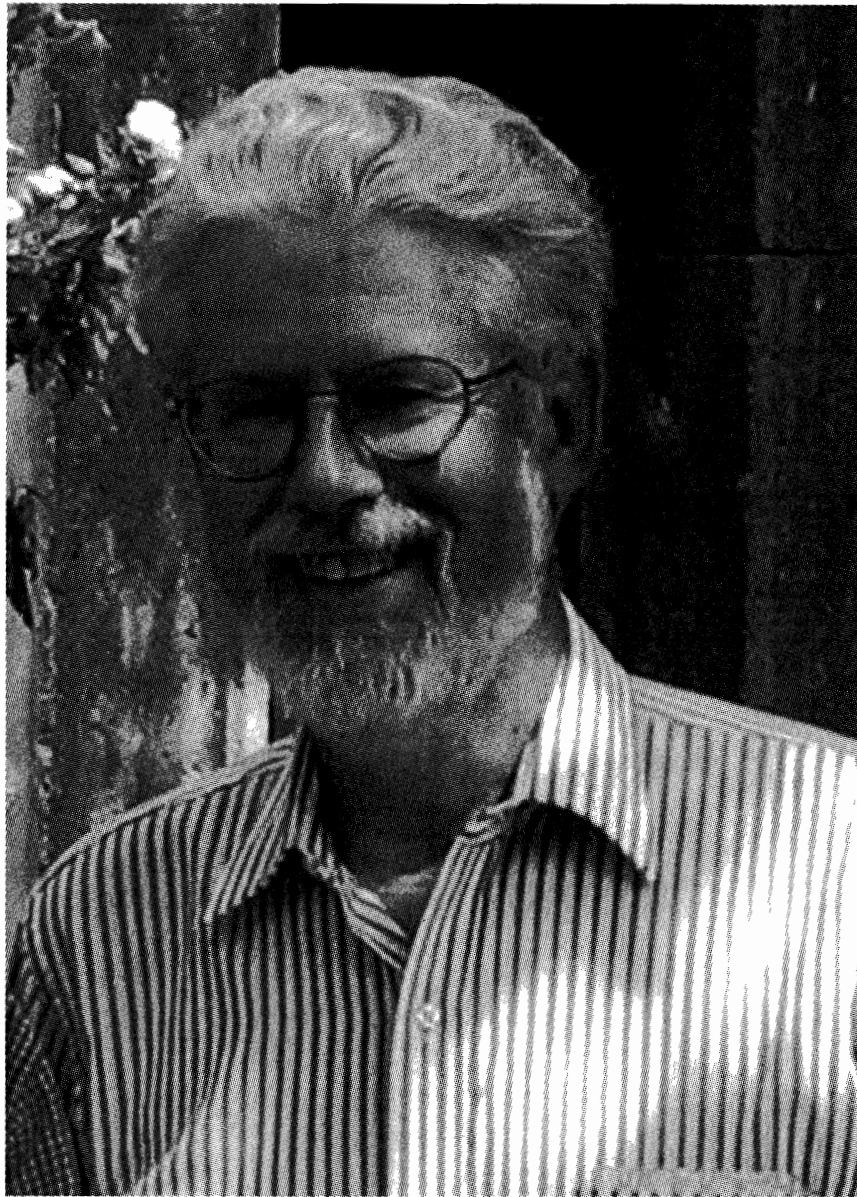
I met Alan some eighteen years ago when I transferred from Brookdale Community College to what was then Trenton State College. As a student a few years older than the traditional undergraduate, I was closer to Alan's generation than to my peers. To Alan's delight, when he asked if anyone knew who Big Brother and the Holding Company were, I shouted out, "Ball and Chain." Now, for the life of me, I cannot remember how Big Brother and the Holding Company fit into a class focused on the early years of twentieth-century America, but I guess it reveals the eclectic nature of the man.

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Although I had done very well in community college, I was ill-prepared for the rigors of a four-year institution and got my first and only C from Alan. Work that would have earned me an A in community college only garnered a C at Trenton State College. I went to Alan's office, which at that time was in Forcina Hall, a classic example of mid-twentieth-century institutional architecture. As a working-class person, I was still in awe of academics (I quickly got over that) and could not believe that this windowless, airless room with cinderblock walls was his office. And of course, to his amusement, I commented on that fact. After our discussion about his accommodations, Alan sat with me and explained what was missing in my essays and why, although detailed, they were lacking in substance. I never got a C again.

After that, Alan was there for the rest of my academic career—until the day he died. Alan wrote every letter of recommendation that I ever needed and asked for, and I asked for everything to which I applied: graduate school, job applications, fellowships, and grants. He was Alan Dawley, and as his student I cashed in on that, with his permission of course. Some years after I was admitted to the Rutgers Ph.D. program, my advisor, Ginny Yans, who was the graduate vice-chair at the time of my application, told me that Alan had not only written a letter but made a phone call. He told Ginny that Rutgers, as a state institution, needed to put its money where its mouth was, so to speak, and admit a student who did not have the benefit of a middle-class upbringing and education but had the potential and determination. I saw Alan's letter when I worked in the history department office at Rutgers, and in it he stated that I had "moxie," which would enable me to overcome any other shortcomings in my education and preparation. Again he was my teacher, as his letter provided a model for writing letters of recommendation that do not effusively praise candidates but provide solid information assessing a student's strengths and weaknesses. Alan wrote his last letter for me in the fall of 2007, when I applied for an NEH grant.

Although Alan taught many things that an academic needs to know in order to survive and flourish, he taught me perhaps the most important lessons of my life—social justice and activism—and that you *can* make a difference. I was an undergrad in Alan's twentieth-century "Race, Class and Gender" course when the police beating of Rodney King occurred. When the police officers were acquitted of using excessive force, there was an outcry. Alan and I talked about it, and I expressed my anger and dismay. He asked me what I was going to do about it. "Nothing," I told him—I wasn't one for doing things like that. He looked me squarely in the eye and asked, "Don't you think it's about time you started?" Later that week, I joined with the college's Black Student Union to gather signatures for a petition to try the officers for violating Rodney King's civil rights. It was an enlightening



Alan Dawley. Courtesy Evan Dawley.

experience that opened my eyes to the realities of white privilege and the deep-seated racism of the white community.

In September 2005, Alan, John Landreau, and I went to Washington, D.C., to protest the war in Iraq. We committed civil disobedience, and we draped yellow crime-scene tape on the White House fence. My bravado was intact while I was with Alan and John. As there were some three hundred people participating in the civil disobedience, I thought that we would be there for

hours. But my bravado quickly evaporated when I was swept up in the first wave of arrests—they started with the women in the area where we were sitting—and I was separated from Alan and John. I panicked, and Alan saw that and walked alongside me, as near as the police would allow. He kept his eyes locked on mine to give me courage and strength, and he mouthed the words, “I am so proud of you.” I knew that I had finally earned the respect I craved from the teacher I so dearly loved.

As the months go by, the magnitude of Alan’s loss is only beginning to reveal itself. As his student and colleague, I know that my own scholarship and work will suffer from the absence of his keen intellect and the probing questions that always forced me to dig deeper and think more critically. But there will always remain the image of Alan’s nodding head and the sound of his “mmhmm” when you got it right, or his looking to the ceiling when he was thinking and probing as he was pushing you—and that will forever inform my work. I miss Alan terribly, but I am grateful for having had the privilege of knowing such a world-class scholar and human being.

## **The Scholarly Odyssey of an Activist Historian: Alan Dawley in Historiography**

*By Ian Tyrrell, University of New South Wales*

It would be tempting to see the late Alan Dawley as an intellectual product of the 1960s, a decade that has attracted considerable attention among historians and that shaped the political and intellectual preoccupations of a generation. To be sure, Dawley played a part in that era's social-protest movement that shaped his career as a scholar-activist. Katy Weschler Dawley spoke recently of a young man "with a purpose," who "became committed to achieve goals of justice, civil-rights and antiwar movements."<sup>1</sup> These were indeed abiding commitments that would have made the separation of activism and scholarship difficult for any historian, and there is no doubt that Dawley was such a writer driven at the outset by political ideals.<sup>2</sup>

Yet it was the far less attractive 1970s that held another key to Dawley's intellectual odyssey. Caught in the middle of this little-understood decade, radicals who cut their teeth on the social protests of the sixties had to rethink. They had to reassess positions that assumed a correlation between activism and social change. They had to work out a deeper understanding of the relations of state and society. They had to explain why political and social institutions had not come tumbling down in response to social protest, and why so many of the American people (Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew's silent majority) did not respond to telling critiques of the warfare state. Marxist class struggle was always a part of 1960s radicalism, but the theoretical and scholarly study of class had taken a back seat to the assertion of popular history and activist concerns. By the 1970s, more and more of the student activists of an earlier decade turned to the academy for reflection and to the study of class to explain changed circumstances.

Class was integral to the intellectual agenda in which new ideas about the relationship of Marxist theory to history took hold. These ideas were liber-

<sup>1</sup>*Philadelphia Inquirer*, Apr. 7, 2008. His activism began as an eighteen-year-old in the midst of the civil rights turmoil of the Deep South. "In the summer of 1962, he helped rebuild a church that had been burned outside Jackson, Miss., and in 1964 he helped African Americans register to vote during the Mississippi Freedom Summer."

<sup>2</sup>This commitment continued in his publications as well as in his overt activism. See the contribution to *In These Times*, reprinted in Alan Dawley, "Paths to Power after the Civil War" in *Working for Democracy: American Workers from the Revolution to the Present*, ed. Paul Buhle and Alan Dawley (Urbana, 1985), 41-51.

ating for those who took part in the scholarly activism of that time; the historical debates among the graduates of the New Left generation centered on the impact of the so-called British Marxists. American historians seeking ways to explain the trajectories of social conflict had looked back to Beardian and broader Progressive Era concepts of struggles between the people and elite interests, and found these dissatisfying and incomplete. They knew that the consensus theorists of the 1950s portrayed the United States as a liberal society in which basic agreement occurred over ideology, and knew equally well that such theories did not explain their own experience. They therefore looked across the Atlantic for more sophisticated and intellectually satisfying formulae. Among the ideas crossing the Atlantic westward in these years, none was more influential than the work of historian E. P. Thompson. Thompson was attractive to American radical historians not so much because he used class analysis, but because he dealt with Marxist concepts with a liberating degree of openness. Spurning Old Left shibboleths such as the determining role of productive economic forces, Thompson focused not on the institutional politics of trade unions or labor parties, but on workers coming to class consciousness in their own political, cultural, and social lives. This insistence on the agency of the working class corresponded to the instincts of the New Left. The structural relations of class had to be given life through the experience of struggle, defined by the cultural inheritance that workers brought to the making of class. Thompson's work was addressed to just this point, particularly through evocative accounts of preindustrial cultural and political traditions, working-class versions of Methodism, and political radicalism in the era of the French Revolution.

From this intellectual well, a new generation of historians drew astonishing creativity in the study of American working-class history. The old institutional analyses derived from University of Wisconsin labor economist and historian John R. Commons that equated American labor with "pure and simple" unionism gave way to the world of the workers. Historians such as Paul Faler and Bruce Laurie developed new ideas of an artisan working-class culture. Herbert Gutman used Thompson's insights on the millenarian and egalitarian potential in Protestant religion to understand working-class protest in the Gilded Age, and then examined how the preindustrial cultures of immigrant America were mobilized in labor protest from below. Instead of workers being treated as individuals aiming at personal or family mobility, historians showed how class and ethnicity overlapped and became mutually reinforcing in an immigrant working-class culture.

<sup>3</sup>E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963; New York, 1966), esp. chs. 4–5.

A revision of his Harvard dissertation of 1971, Dawley's first book drew upon this intellectual ferment, but it also included the first evidence of his critical scholarly reflection on the conjuncture of intellectual and political issues taking place around him. It was published in 1976 as *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* and won the prestigious Bancroft Prize. Dawley openly attached the label of class analysis to his work, attacked the tradition of institutional union history, and argued that preindustrial ideals of Equal Rights drawn from revolutionary-era republicanism constituted a cultural tradition that informed radical protest through the first generation of industrial workers. This emphasis upon radical, though not socialist, strains in working-class activism was reminiscent of Thompson's work on the "Tree of Liberty" of free-born English artisans, field laborers, radicals and others whose traditions and experiences shaped, in Thompson's view, the making of the English working class.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Dawley approvingly cited Thompson's idea of class as a process and critiqued the ideas of the Commons School. Writers in that tradition had argued that industrial workers rejected backward-looking, artisan-based protests and favored pragmatic unionism over radicalism.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Dawley saw preindustrial traditions from the early republican period influencing the industrial-era workforce. As shoemaking's industrial processes were in transition to mechanization from the 1830s to the 1880s—and Dawley's analysis of the workforce showed that both artisans and workers associated in the same factories at the same time—it was relatively easy for the Equal Rights tradition to pass "from artisans to industrial workers."<sup>5</sup> In a 1976 article in the *Journal of Social History*, Dawley collaborated with Faler, the historian who most emphasized the cultural artisan traditions. Unlike Faler, however, Dawley did not dwell upon worker self-activity.<sup>6</sup> His interests were already more structural and analytical than descriptive.

Rather than celebrate the cultural achievements of the artisan shoemakers of Lynn, Massachusetts, Dawley sought to understand the analytical structures that channeled workers' class activism. Having taken on this larger objective, Dawley faced the problem of needing to explain why the political and organizational manifestations of worker activism did not develop strong continuities, even though labor traditions could be transferred from generation to generation. Though the Equal Rights tradition culminated in the formation of the Knights of Labor in the 1880s, Dawley conceded that the tra-

<sup>4</sup>Alan Dawley, *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn* (Cambridge, MA, 1976), 180.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 147–48, 227 (quote).

<sup>6</sup>Alan Dawley and Paul Faler, "Working-Class Culture and Politics in the Industrial Revolution: Sources of Loyalism and Rebellion," *Journal of Social History* 9 (Summer 1976): 466–80.



dition eventually mutated in second-generation factory workers, as workers split between pure-and-simple unionism on the one hand and socialist political parties on the other.<sup>7</sup>

Dawley found the immediate answer to the limits of labor activism in reexamining the idea of the safety valve. His book was a community study, a genre popular at the time, in which he followed a range of historians, including one of his Harvard University teachers, Stephen Thernstrom. But Dawley rejected the tendency of social-mobility studies of individual communities to emphasize a safety valve, either as part of Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, or as an ascent up the industrial "ladder" from unskilled to skilled labor as a form of individual mobility. Dawley's research showed workers living, striking, and organizing collectively, not as atomised individuals. Instead of deploying static theories of American social science, Dawley pointed to the peculiar development of the American state as the key variable. It was the early establishment of political democracy following the American Revolution that spawned the Equal Rights tradition. American workers were attracted to political movements that promised to square the anomaly of inequality in a land of professed egalitarianism. Thus "the ballot box was the coffin of class consciousness."<sup>8</sup> Of particular importance to Dawley was the apparent draining of class conflict in the Civil War and Reconstruction eras.

This "safety value" operated on two levels. The first was the argument of national politics in American democracy as a kind of elaborate diversion from class politics. Thus "an entire generation was sidetracked in the 1860s because of the Civil War."<sup>9</sup> This treatment of national politics competed with Dawley's simultaneous deployment of a more sophisticated Marxist interpretation. Here, he fused political and class activity in a distinctive social politics of the 1850s and 1860s. The class conflict of the antebellum period had been superseded by the antislavery and Free Soil movements, which asserted the political and ideological hegemony of free labor. Lynn artisans "saw the expansion of the slave labor system as the expansion of monopoly over the soil."<sup>10</sup> Due to the circumstance of the American Civil War, the Republican Party exercised in Lynn a political and cultural ascendancy that channeled class tensions into a conflict over sectional supremacy. Though Dawley portrayed the myriad ways in which this process occurred, he tilted more toward the distraction argument because workingmen's politics and that of the Republican Party remained in tension in Lynn in the 1860 city elections. It was the Civil War that smoothed over class conflict, because

<sup>7</sup>Dawley, *Class and Community*, 192.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 2–3, 70.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 238.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 68, 65 (quote).

“the Republicans were running the country in a patriotic war against secession.”<sup>11</sup> The whole effect of national politics was to defuse class consciousness and encourage interest-group politics in a pluralist society. The workers had been contained (just as 1960s social activism had been).

Yet the problem inherent in the model of a political safety valve was its metaphor of a machinery of society, where steam needed to be let off. Contradictory impacts could not be explained in such a model. The conditions of liberal democracy continually encouraged workers to struggle against inequality in a land ostensibly dedicated to freedom. The safety valve belied the repeated surges of discontent that led in the post-Civil War period to even greater industrial unrest. Dawley himself documented these conflicts. Much later Dawley conceded the point, characterizing his earlier interpretation as the “right answer to the wrong question” and one that presumed orthodox socialist politics as the normal path of human development under industrialization.<sup>12</sup>

Dawley did not articulate a convincing answer to this conundrum of radicalism’s ideological trajectories at the time, but he was moving toward the study of how political hegemonies could explain the cooptation of the working-class challenge. Ideas along these lines were becoming fashionable in radical and Marxist circles at the same time. The writings of Antonio Gramsci had been compiled in the 1930s in an Italian prison<sup>13</sup> but had only become widely known outside the Soviet bloc after their translation into English between 1957 and 1971, with the key *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* only being accessible in the latter year.<sup>14</sup> In the historical profession in the United States, these writings were little known (except for the work of John M. Cammett, whose *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* had been published in 1967).<sup>15</sup> Only when Eugene Genovese applied them in 1974 to the study of the slave plantation in *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* did the idea move to prominence within American historiography.

The scholarly conjuncture of a new historiography of the American working class and the concept of hegemony prompted Dawley to seek ways out of the intellectual impasse. Some of the seeds of Dawley’s later work concerning hegemony were visible in *Class and Community’s* treatment of the

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>12</sup>Alan Dawley, “Preface 2000: Lynn Revisited,” *Class and Community: The Industrial Revolution in Lynn*, 25th anniv. ed. (Cambridge, MA, 2000), xiv.

<sup>13</sup>1929 to 1935, to be precise.

<sup>14</sup>Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, trans. with intro. by Louis Marks (London, 1957); *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London, 1971).

<sup>15</sup>John M. Cammett, *Antonio Gramsci and the Origins of Italian Communism* (Stanford, 1967).

Republican ascendancy in the Civil War, but it was an obscure publication that truly revealed the rethinking that was going on in Dawley's mind. The key to Dawley's continuing scholarly pilgrimage is found in his "E. P. Thompson and the Peculiarities of the Americans," published in *Radical History Review* in 1978.<sup>16</sup> This was a *tour de force* in the intellectual history of American history for its discussion of his generation's assimilation of British Marxism to American circumstances. Here, Dawley dealt with three themes—class as a cultural phenomenon; how class was contained in patterns of political and cultural hegemony; and the role of the state. Dawley pinpointed the intellectual inheritance of Thompsonian Marxism among American radical historians but showed how Thompson's work became Americanized and in effect diluted in its application. Dawley was careful to acknowledge the strengths of Thompsonian Marxism and did not (at least openly) side with the then-fashionable structuralism of British Marxist theory evident in the pages of *History Workshop* and other English journals where Thompson faced savage attacks. Yet Dawley did recognize that the stress upon culture could, in the American context, become fragmented in community studies or detached from the discussion of class in the workplace. Dawley still correctly judged that historians such as Gutman and his students were documenting the history of working-class culture, but they were in his view not explaining the limits or the channels of its activism, nor the structure of its activities.

The idea of hegemony was theoretically more promising, but Dawley found little evidence of exemplary studies in the United States using this idea except in the work of Genovese. Like many other American historians, Dawley rejected Genovese's argument that the practice of paternalism (a direct expression of the more analytical and abstract idea of hegemony) among planters described or explained either their behavior or the responses of slaves. Coercion rather than implicit consent prevailed, Dawley concluded. Hegemony required negotiation and concessions on the part of rulers. While slaveholders conformed to this practice as individuals in many instances, the structures of slavery suggested otherwise. The economic power of the marketplace and the physical coercion that governed slavery meant that hegemony could not work as a theoretical framework in the case of the slaveholding South. Dawley understood that the theory of hegemony did not rule conflict out and that hegemony did not mean the pure domination of force, but he professed a growing skepticism about any industrial, capitalist hegemony over American free workers as well. His knowledge of the persistent industrial violence of the postbellum period seemed to

<sup>16</sup>Alan Dawley, "E. P. Thompson and the Peculiarities of the Americans," *Radical History Review* 19 (Winter 1978–79): 33–59.

suggest limits to, or the absence of, consent on the part of industrial workers.

If the theme of hegemony had been perverted by Genovese, at least Genovese had been alive to a significant current within western Marxism that might illuminate American history. In comparison, the history of the state lacked any such work approaching European sophistication or Marxist standards. Thompson's collaborators in Britain on the legal structures of the state in *Albion's Fatal Tree* had no match in the United States.<sup>17</sup> While clearly impressed by British Marxists' work on this subject, Dawley recognized the peculiarities of the American state. The United States was a civil society based on formal equalitarianism, yet one in which state repression of radicalism was common alongside promotion of an elaborate brand of mass electoral politics. The trick was to show how class forces contended over and became represented in the political structures of the state. *Class and Community*, and the work of Eric Foner in *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*,<sup>18</sup> pointed the way through the role of free-labor ideology, but the postbellum American scene offered greater and more challenging opportunities. This was to become Dawley's main field of interest, and the ideas debated in his "E. P. Thompson and the Peculiarities of the Americans"—class, hegemony, and the state—became the controlling analytical concepts of his future work.

Dawley could not rest on this Marxist trilogy alone, however. By the 1980s, another intellectual inheritance of the New Left decade challenged the coherence of the new Marxist historiography. The 1970s witnessed the rise of "new" social history, a subfield in which many of the themes of protest thrown up by the New Left—including race, ethnicity, and gender—found academic reflection. Dawley and others of Marxist persuasion had to accommodate the rise to prominence of women's and black history in American historiography. Radical historians began to realize that class might not be the only source of conflict or popular mobilization. How could these new specializations be accommodated within Marxist class analysis?

Yet the problem ran deeper still. The rise of social history promoted greater fragmentation in the historical discipline as a whole. Dawley later recalled that "the study of American history was coming apart at the seams." With increasing scholarly attention to "everyday life," as in "women's experience, slave culture and industrial labor," the central narrative of national political and economic history bequeathed by earlier historiography seemed to be "turning into a loose patchwork of separate subjects." It was "as if the

<sup>17</sup>Douglas Hay et al., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1975).

<sup>18</sup>Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (New York, 1970).

whole was less than the sum of its parts.”<sup>19</sup> While New York University historian Thomas Bender drew upon Jürgen Habermas and championed the role of a “public culture” as the way out of this morass,<sup>20</sup> Dawley dismissed Bender’s approach as neither new nor effective. It served “to accept the very exclusion of subordinate groups from public life that is a basis for the rule of the elite.”<sup>21</sup> Instead, Dawley recommended in “A Preface to Synthesis” (1988) an approach to social politics that would recognize the political in the private realm. The workplace, home, and other “seemingly a-political” [*sic*] sites were arenas where, Dawley contended, “social forces contest for power in everyday life.”<sup>22</sup> Synthesis for Dawley was not to be achieved by merely adding new categories and stirring. It was necessary to “envision how the dynamic elements of the social process interact to form the whole” and, at the same time, “to explain the dynamics of change.” Any historical approach to synthesis should show “how human agency drives whole societies through seemingly interminable sequences of unstable equilibria.”<sup>23</sup> His approach continued the emphasis upon the forces of class and power in both dividing history and driving historical change.<sup>24</sup>

To answer the question of how to conceive of a new social politics of the American state incorporating class, gender, and race, Dawley sensed that the analytical achievement could not be effected through structural functionalism, since that approach was invariably an ahistoric one unable to explain change.<sup>25</sup> He was more attracted to Eric Hobsbawm’s suggestion of moving from social history to the history of society.<sup>26</sup> It is significant that Dawley cited a British Marxist other than Thompson as the underpinning for his work, and one for whom the structures of society were more important than cultural studies of class activism along Thompsonian lines. Dawley was moving beyond Thompson in practice, though not in profession. The American interpreted Hobsbawm’s approach as fundamentally one of historical materialism understood as a social system in change, not as a reduc-

<sup>19</sup>Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice: Social Responsibility and the Liberal State* (Cambridge, MA, 1991), vii.

<sup>20</sup>Thomas Bender, “Wholes and Parts: The Need for Synthesis in American History,” *Journal of American History* 73 (June 1986): 120–36.

<sup>21</sup>Alan Dawley, “A Preface to Synthesis,” *Labor History* 28 (Summer 1988): 363–77, (quote, 369).

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 369–70.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>24</sup>See also Alan Dawley, “Workers, Capital, and the State in the Twentieth Century” in *Perspectives on American Labor History: The Problem of Synthesis*, ed. J. Carroll Moody and Alice Kessler-Harris (DeKalb, IL, 1989), 152.

<sup>25</sup>Dawley, “Preface to Synthesis,” 371.

<sup>26</sup>E. J. Hobsbawm, “From Social History to the History of Society,” *Daedalus* 100 (Winter 1971): 20–45.

tionist economic explanation. He reacted against what he believed to be the superficial use of Thompson by others to produce a culturalist interpretation of the American working class or slavery but recognized the place of Thompson as a thinker using the dialectical method. To Dawley, Thompson remained a font of wisdom because his dialectics focused on the “dyad of social being and social consciousness.”<sup>27</sup> Dawley noted the static quality to much social history and believed that “dialectical analysis [was] a logical step” toward explaining how societies were driven through “successive states of equilibrium” by internal contradictions.<sup>28</sup> But Dawley added that this analysis was not achievable within a simple formula of conventional class conflict. To bring the separate realms of social conflict in the form of race, gender, and class into “indissoluble connections” within a single social formation whose “dynamic tensions impinge on all its parts,” was Dawley’s ambition.

Aware that Marxism was not the only system of thought that could employ dialectics, Dawley pointed to examples within American historiography where dialectics had been used. He was particularly attracted to Edmund Morgan’s work in *American Slavery, American Freedom* showing how a slave system underpinned the very idea of egalitarianism in America. Eric Foner’s magisterial achievement in interpreting Reconstruction provided another model,<sup>29</sup> but Dawley also praised Genovese, whereas a decade earlier he had sided with those who found Genovese’s use of Gramsci’s theory of hegemony static and anything but dialectical in a Marxist sense. Now, in 1988, *Roll Jordan Roll* was “a textbook of historical materialism” because of its treatment of slavery as the “key to a social formation whose inner contradictions are extruded through all its parts.”<sup>30</sup> The important elements were relations of production (between planter and slave), law (between property and person) and culture (“the reciprocal demands of slave and master under paternalism.”)<sup>31</sup> In addition to this shift in his evaluation of Genovese’s impressive but flawed account of slavery, uncertainty remains as to how seriously or successfully Dawley had incorporated gender and race in this formulation. When he interpreted gender and women’s history, it was in terms of social reproduction alone.<sup>32</sup> Dawley thereby showed his tendency to define the new field of women’s history in terms not of social process

<sup>27</sup>Dawley, “Preface to Synthesis,” 372.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 375 (1st quote), 374 (2nd quote).

<sup>29</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975); Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York, 1988).

<sup>30</sup>Dawley, “Preface to Synthesis,” 373.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 376.

but of structural relationships to the economy. Nevertheless, this 1988 statement was a down payment on the book of 1991 that would attempt to bring class and other forms of radicalism, hegemony, and the state into a fruitful alignment to illuminate a whole arena of American history, the Progressive Era.

Before he could undertake this project to restructure interpretations of Progressive Era America, Dawley faced another theoretical challenge that the revolution in Marxist historiography posed. The Marxist reassessment of the role of class in American life necessarily involved judgments on the topic of American exceptionalism. Recall that Dawley's work on Lynn endeavored in part to explain why the United States did not have socialism and found the answer in the peculiarities of American political history. This emphasis upon national distinctiveness paralleled that of New Left theorists and historians in Britain such as Perry Anderson, who argued that England itself had not conformed to Marxist class orthodoxy because it lacked a thoroughgoing bourgeois revolution in the seventeenth century, or because, as Thompson insisted, the national traditions of freeborn Englishmen had deeply informed the content of English class struggle.<sup>33</sup>

The discovery that Marxism's analytical framework had to be applied diversely in different historical contexts led American labor historians to dismiss stark contrasts of "Europe" and "America" on the matter of class consciousness. Thus, in 1984, prominent younger historian Sean Wilentz argued "against exceptionalism" in the journal *International Labor and Working Class History*.<sup>34</sup> This was one of two important pieces in the early 1980s by American labor and radical historians to engage with the problem of exceptionalism. At a colloquium held at the École des Hautes Études in Paris in 1983, Eric Foner delivered the other. Foner suggested that the deflection of class consciousness in the United States was a harbinger of an industrial future that Europe later shared, not a throwback to the past of classical liberalism. Dawley joined the Paris colloquium to agree with Foner and others whose work, Dawley stated, showed American exceptionalism "interred by a growing body of scholarship."<sup>35</sup> *Class and Community* itself could be marshaled to Dawley's argument that "every country is different" and that comparative history was the way forward. At the Paris colloquium, Dawley acknowledged that "variations in capitalist structures and the timing of cap-

<sup>33</sup>Perry Anderson, "Origins of the Present Crisis" (1964) in *English Questions* (London, 1992), 17–47, for the former; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, for the latter. See also E. P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English" (1965) in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978).

<sup>34</sup>Sean Wilentz, "Against Exceptionalism: Class Consciousness and the American Labor Movement, 1790–1920," *International Labor and Working Class History* 26 (Fall 1984): 1–24.

<sup>35</sup>Eric Foner, "Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?" in *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*, ed. Jean Heffer and Jeanine Rovet (Paris, 1988), 55–67; and

italist development would be significant.”<sup>36</sup> One must merely apply Marxist principles to the United States and its “sister societies” while acknowledging “variations in the structure of state power” in each. In the United States, pragmatic politics developed from a relatively “‘open’ [political] system”;<sup>37</sup> Dawley noted the salience of the non-Marxist Barrington Moore’s view that each society developed particular social formations. The social composition of the working class by race and ethnicity in the United States produced precisely this outcome, concluded Dawley.<sup>38</sup> The question then became not why did the United States fail to experience a major socialist movement, but why did American progressivism “win such a large role in translating working class needs into social policy.”<sup>39</sup> The answer to these questions took root in the comparative history sections of *Struggles for Justice* (1991) that looked at how the class system’s articulation in the social order differed from a “loose coupling” of class and the politics of the state in the United States to a “tight coupling” in Germany.<sup>40</sup>

The formula of studying American national variations produced, in *Struggles for Justice*, Dawley’s most intellectually satisfying book. It did so by putting emphasis upon the articulation of social forces through the state. But the strategy assumed the need to compare more or less self-contained entities, in which the nation-state was the dominant site of social interaction between classes, races, and genders. This move did not work so well for the nineteenth century, when open immigration, heightened international flows of capital, and a relatively laissez-faire political economy impinged upon both state and society. When the strengthening of the nation-state began in the Progressive Era, the process was not a product of internal influences alone.<sup>41</sup> Given that the nation-state’s boundaries have been challenged in the era of new globalization from the 1970s on, the perspective of the nation-state as the articulation of internal class forces within the society lacks something in an explanatory sense for at least some other key periods of U.S. history. Dawley admitted as much in his twenty-fifth anniversary retrospective on *Class and Community* in 2000.<sup>42</sup>

Attention to the role of the state as a key element in the Marxist arsenal

Dawley, “American Exceptionalism: A Comment” in *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?*, 315.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 312.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Alan Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 134.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 132. These terms came from Arnold J. Heidenheimer in *The Development of Welfare States in Europe and America*, ed. Peter Flora and Arnold J. Heidenheimer (New Brunswick, NJ, 1981), 275.

<sup>41</sup>Eric Rauchway, *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America* (New York, 2006).

<sup>42</sup>Dawley, “Preface 2000: Lynn Revisited,” xxiv.



downplayed the role of the global marketplace, which, thanks to old-fashioned classical imperialism, was pervasively influential in the late nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Marx did not neglect the world market, but one does not find in Dawley reference to Immanuel Wallerstein's theories of a "world system," nor to uneven development or underdevelopment. Such ideas were missing from his footnotes to *Struggles for Justice* and in his "A Preface to Synthesis." Even as comparative history, the units chosen for analysis were not likely to draw attention to the world beyond Euro-America. The comparisons made were between Germany and the United States. In *Struggles for Justice*, Dawley portrayed the rise of American imperialism conventionally as an "outward thrust" and devoted just five pages out of five hundred to it.<sup>44</sup>

Rather, his narrative told how the progressive movement was born in internal American struggles surrounding the rise of capitalist power. Progressivism came from outside the political elite—in the agitation of feminists, labor radicals, suffragists, and other social-justice reformers. The structure of the analysis was broadly Marxist. Progressive reformers represented the thesis to which the political elite's response would be the antithesis in a dialectic that produced the liberal and reformist American state by the 1930s. Unlike Germany, the United States' social structure was not starkly torn between socialist and bourgeois camps, since reformers straddled the division in a "cross-class alliance."<sup>45</sup> These forces "from below"<sup>46</sup> had before World War I "gained the political initiative, challenging elites to remake the liberal state in accord with emergent forms of social life."<sup>47</sup> Reformers produced political changes in the structure of the state, making it more democratic. Dawley was aware of the irony that "by diverting socialist ideas into safe channels, and then posing as the only alternative to cataclysm," the "progressives succeeded in outflanking socialists." Nevertheless, these struggles prepared the ground for the reformers' push "towards social equality." The elite's response came in the form of progressive legislation under the administration of Woodrow Wilson, then a "managerial liberalism" of wartime, but these elitist visions "foundered on the shoals of social conflict."<sup>48</sup> Unable to go further due to fear of Bolshevik revolution, managerial liberalism and mainstream progressivism fell to "liberal reaction."<sup>49</sup> This

<sup>43</sup>Ian Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation: United States History in Global Perspective since 1789* (Basingstoke, UK, 2007), ch. 2.

<sup>44</sup>See also Dawley, "Workers, Capital, and the State in the Twentieth Century," 175–78, where imperialism is seen as an outward thrust and as a product of post-1945 America.

<sup>45</sup>Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 134.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, viii.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 136 (1st quote), 139 (2nd quote).

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

response took the form of force, since the laissez-faire system could not otherwise be restored, so unraveled and challenged had it become. Dawley interpreted prohibition as well as the Red Scare and more obvious forms of industrial class conflict as part of this reaction. This was an unstable system with the state out of "tune" with society. The New Deal lurks in the background as the true (though still imperfect) resolution by introducing modified and pragmatic forces that combined managerial liberalism and social-welfare progressivism. Though far from British Marxism in content and detail, Dawley's history of American progressivism echoed Thompson's concern both with agency from below and the egalitarian potential of social movements. "Keeping the balance between egalitarian and hierarchical forces in mind" would, Dawley asserted in Thompsonian fashion, "shield posterity from the self-satisfied complacency of its own hindsight."<sup>50</sup>

There are many problems with this analysis. Historians have chastised Dawley for often restating and summarizing the obvious about progressivism; alternatively, the interpretation strains to fit within its elegant bounds the details of social history. Cryptic coverage of complex movements left some specialists dissatisfied, but it is the analytical choices that give cause for most concern. In particular, women's reform movements in the years before World War I are not only given rather short shrift; they are also forced into an interpretation privileging as progressive those women's movements that conformed to the primacy of economic issues such as wages, as if their only importance was to contribute to the attack on the capitalist state. The prohibition movement cannot be ignored, but it is treated as a purely class phenomenon. Working-class people resisted it. Prohibition was "condemned to become in equal measure an exercise in repression" because it "cannot be understood apart from the class field of force."<sup>51</sup> This judgment does not take into account the role of lower-middle-class and working-class Protestant women in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) or the many church people across the classes in the South;<sup>52</sup> nor does it account for the fact that, beginning in the mid-1920s, the chief flaunting of prohibition came from the urban middle classes and college youth; nor that prohibition was abandoned by big business and rich philanthropists of the elite before it was abandoned by American voters. National prohibition was not purely a class matter, even though it both reflected and exacerbated class tensions.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 138; Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 12.

<sup>51</sup>Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 213.

<sup>52</sup>Dawley does note the role of southern whites favoring prohibition but does not draw the obvious conclusion that the appeal of the dry laws crossed class lines in that region. Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 163.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 479–80n81, completely neglects the most recent historiography on prohibition in

Dawley did not treat the fate of progressivism in complete isolation. “Given U.S. imperial involvements and strong European ties,” he conceded, “no amount of twisting and turning could have allowed the United States to escape a role in the fighting”<sup>54</sup> of World War I. The forces of war and world revolution could explain why the coming progressive triumph did not succeed in the 1914–1920 period. Yet there is something fundamentally unsatisfactory about this treatment of the wider world’s impingement upon national politics. The failure of class consciousness is no longer seen as explicable within the liberal state entirely; it is partly the result of extraneous events beyond the legal boundaries of the nation. The appearance of an external crisis leaves his analysis uncomfortable and unfinished, for nowhere is there acknowledgment of the extent to which “inside” and “outside” forces were intimately connected long before this point. This subordinate treatment of the international context goes along with his skimpy coverage of imperialism in which the American variety is seen as a projection of American business and commerce and a story that need not be followed in the narrative with the depth and consistency of coverage given to domestic reform.

A book on the subject of the American state and society written on the cusp of a world-historical change so immense as the end of the Cold War would inevitably need revision. The late twentieth century once more changed the intellectual context, and so did Dawley himself change once more. The rise of the United States to a position of single-power hegemony in the world system and the growing importance of new globalization theories called into question the overriding focus on the nation as a frame of reference for the Progressive Era. New historical interpretations, notably that of Daniel Rodgers, drew attention to the transatlantic and even global nature of progressive reform movements from the late nineteenth century. Comparative history as practiced in *Struggles for Justice* pointed the way toward dealing with those questions, but comparison was not sufficient to the task. Cross-national fertilization of what American historians called progressivism indicated that something more organic was at work than was implied in self-contained national histories.<sup>55</sup> The stimulus had to have come from outside Dawley’s preexisting problematic of the state and its hegemonies. Dawley addressed this deficiency twelve years later when he published his

favor of the dated and inaccurate works of Richard Hofstadter, Andrew Sinclair, Joseph Gusfield and James Timberlake.

<sup>54</sup>Dawley, *Struggles for Justice*, 139.

<sup>55</sup>See, for example, Ian Tyrrell, *True Gardens of the Gods: Californian–Australian Environmental Reform, 1860–1930* (Berkeley, 1999); Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); Peter J. Coleman, *Progressivism and the World of Reform: New Zealand and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Lawrence, KS, 1987).

*Changing the World*. “[G]lobalization,” he announced in 2003, “has brought back laissez-faire with a vengeance, helping to create global polarizations within and between nations.” Yet Dawley saw this globalization as being “on a scale the founding generation of progressives could not have imagined.”<sup>56</sup> This statement reflected a lack of historical imagination concerning the impact of imperialism on the colonial world of the nineteenth century, or the profoundly unsettling effects of capital and labor flows upon national sovereignty in the same period and earlier. Nonetheless, *Changing the World* treated the foreign reform initiatives of those whom he labeled progressives as indissolubly linked to domestic reform. The “dual quest for improvement at home and abroad was at the heart of what it meant to be a progressive,” he announced. To “winning social and economic justice” and “revitalizing public life”—topics traversed in *Struggles for Justice*—he added “improving the wider world.”<sup>57</sup>

Dawley chose his examples once more from the Progressive Era. Yet the vehicle of using the progressives in this study had the problem of deciding just who were the progressives. It would be difficult if not impossible to contain within the boundaries of the new book a satisfactory analysis of all forms of progressivism and yet simultaneously handle those same connections transnationally. Dawley astutely narrowed his view to center on the people whom he regarded as the true progressive reformers. The international framework gave him the opportunity to study more deeply the fate of the internationalist and left-leaning wing within the more amorphous and sometimes contradictory coalition of forces that historians called progressivism. Nevertheless, without analysis of moderate, elite, and managerial reformers, the work would lack dialectical consistency. The new book enabled Dawley to address this perennial problem and to assert that changing historical circumstances actually forged true progressivism out of competing traditions when progressives “threw out the moralism of Prohibition and adapted ideas of economic justice and cooperative internationalism.”<sup>58</sup>

The crucible of change occurred for Dawley in the period of the First World War and just after. The action begins with the American intervention in the Mexican Revolution in 1914, an event that coincided with the Ludlow massacre in Colorado against striking workers and their families. Dawley did not impose this coupling upon the subjects of his study. Radicals believed these events were interconnected parts of the capitalist class’s bid for world domination. Empire, a topic almost completely neglected by Dawley in 1991, therefore became central to his argument in 2003. Dawley had as early

<sup>56</sup>Dawley, *Changing the World: American Progressives in War and Revolution* (Princeton, 2003), 10.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 2–3.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 341.

as 1989 realized the importance of foreign relations to the domestic post-World War II capital-labor compromise, but he did not extend this view to a more thoroughgoing examination of the role of American empire over the much longer haul.<sup>59</sup> By 2003, Dawley realized that the American empire was critical to the development of the American state and society long before 1945. In *Changing the World*, he wisely did not limit his treatment of imperialism to formal empire, and he included state aggrandizement through patriotism and militarism of the type championed after 1900 by Theodore Roosevelt. This broad brush enabled him to include not only the informal coercion of the Caribbean nations and dollar diplomacy under the rubric of imperialism, but also World War I and the abortive drive toward an American-led international hegemony in its aftermath.<sup>60</sup>

In treating Americans' responses to the interconnected foreign and domestic turbulence, Dawley divided those interested in engagement with the world into two groups: those who were "unilateralist and imperialist" on the one hand, and those who were "multilateralist and truly internationalist" on the other.<sup>61</sup> The divisions drawn here are far too stark, as illustrated in Dawley's use of the category "messianic" progressivism. The desire to change the world was initially not the monopoly of the Left, but also of many progressives who, influenced by American exceptionalism and Protestant reform, sought to redeem Europe and achieve a new millennium through state action in moral reform. In this formulation, it is difficult to see precisely where the class boundaries lay. The description fails to capture just how deep "messianic" roots went within progressivism across the political spectrum; and the label appears strained as an application to political positions on a left-right spectrum.

That is not to disagree with Dawley's characterization of a "millennial moment" for American progressivism surrounding Woodrow Wilson's role in the Versailles treaty-making in 1919, but more recent historical interpretation stresses the transnational significance of this moment.<sup>62</sup> To Dawley, the war transformed and ultimately consumed the "messianic" message, severing it from progressivism. War's repressive aftermath "drowned out progressive internationalists, while firing up conservative nationalists."<sup>63</sup> It raised xenophobic fears of foreigners and radicals, and its economic effects stimulated class conflict among American workers. Fearing an extension of European Bolshevism, an American elite retreated from progressivism at

<sup>59</sup>Dawley, "Workers, Capital, and the State in the Twentieth Century," 175–78.

<sup>60</sup>Dawley, *Changing the World*, 75–104.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>62</sup>Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

<sup>63</sup>Dawley, *Changing the World*, 134.

home, while the hope of internationalism in the League of Nations was also dashed. Dawley noted the flawed nature of the Versailles Treaty itself, yet he made the interesting suggestion that it was the unsettling turmoil of labor conflict and the Red Scare that undermined the treaty and propelled Americans away from genuine internationalism toward the “Wasp republic” of the Klan and immigration-restriction laws.<sup>64</sup> Once again, the course of politics was deeply affected by the mismatch of state and society and by the interplay of transnational and domestic forces.

Despite the dashed hopes, leftist progressivism underwent a renaissance in the mid-1920s. Shorn of the “messianic” impulses of wartime militarists, prohibitionists, and imperialists, the progressive movement was in effect reborn, refined of its impurities. It was now pro-labor, pro-civil liberties, pro-small farmer, and internationalist in sentiment. This would be “more or less” where it “remained for the rest of the twentieth century.”<sup>65</sup> To be sure, Dawley had to admit that progressivism stalled without its broader life-support systems—after all, the candidacy of Robert M. La Follette failed in the 1924 election. Though progressivism became a narrower and less successful movement than in pre-World War I days, for Dawley its achievements still deserve celebration. Its record looks better both in posterity and against the record of its opponents. Whereas elite and mainstream progressivism could not maintain the hegemony of a coercive state in the aftermath of the First World War, in the 1920s progressive internationalists fueled the “strongest peace movement of the twentieth century.” Moreover, the travail hardened the movement for the more propitious crises of the Great Depression and World War II, when progressive ideals would once again be important. Progressives had learned much that would aid them in later crises of the twentieth century, too. The U.S. peace movement was not all moral sentimentalism, since interwar pacifists viewed Americans not as a chosen people destined to convert the world to the American way but rather saw the United States as a nation among nations. The progressives’ “sense of interdependence”—now firmly cast in terms of the need for government action rather than moral reform—would be timely in the context of the 1930s and beyond.<sup>66</sup>

Dawley’s purpose in writing *Changing the World* can be found in the final section dealing with the “Legacy” of his subjects, and it reveals his continuing activist motivation. He sought a genealogy that would rescue the tradition of left-wing progressivism, which had since the 1920s more or less consistently opposed American intervention in wars with imperial overtones

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 283.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 297.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 298.

and favored mutual cooperation with the wider world through peace and social justice. In the Clinton years, “ideas of civic engagement and social justice made something of a comeback,” Dawley argued, “against the idea that the market automatically produces the best of all possible societies.” Contemporary progressive causes had in the 1990s come out of the shadows of the Cold War, and it is to that conjuncture that Dawley’s book was addressed. Yet modern progressives faced the possibility of having their concerns drowned out in the hypernationalism of the George W. Bush administration after 9/11.<sup>67</sup> The relationship between the nation-state and the forces of globalization remained unresolved in the book, and for this reason, the legacy remains contingent upon circumstances.

Rhetorically, Dawley remained faithful to the end in his assertion of class as crucial to American life, and *Changing the World* actually pronounced the United States a more class-divided society than Britain in the Progressive Era. The class gap between the bottom and the top of the social structure was, Dawley argued, greater in the American case than in Britain because only in the former did “a mostly white Protestant establishment of north European descent [look] down on an impoverished working-class population” of Jews, Catholics, African Americans, and immigrants.<sup>68</sup> In comparison to class, gender remains secondary in *Changing the World*. Dawley persisted in attacking middle-class feminists who sided with the Republican majority and enforced prohibition, for instance, while praising those like Jane Addams and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, who sided with the left, even though both types were essentially middle-class. Yet class could not consistently be the theme; the changing nature of American historiography had seen to that. Dawley now talked about “class and culture” in a vague mixture. Class analysis is something that Dawley slipped away from at many points to emphasize broader cross-class coalitions and contrary tendencies and allegiances.<sup>69</sup>

If feminism strained Dawley’s class categories almost to the breaking point, race even more deeply complicated his analysis. As Dawley noted in 2000, the field of American history transformed in the 1990s into one in which race trumped class “as the center of attention.” Dawley agreed that race was enormously important in American history and accepted criticism that *Class and Community* had failed to comprehend the role of race and the social construction of whiteness in class formation. But he balked at joining the growing trend toward an identity politics in which race became a thing in itself, rather than “an ideological consequence of other factors.”<sup>70</sup> In

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 357–58.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 276.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 290.

<sup>70</sup>Dawley, “Preface 2000: Lynn Revisited,” xix.

Dawley's estimation, racial identities should always be connected to the "larger matrix of social, economic, and political power."<sup>71</sup> At times this insistence made Dawley play down the elements of racism present among even his progressive protagonists, but it also introduced fuzziness to the hardness of his radical analysis. Power certainly included class relations, but was not limited to class. And the relationship between the different "fields of force" was not entirely clear in the finished product. Dawley could not treat American race relations during the period in class terms alone, even though he insisted on relating race to the power conflicts in society. *Changing the World* attempted to do the latter while giving greater acknowledgement to the problem of race than Dawley's earlier studies had.

The conflicts of World War I and the 1920s fused race and other cultural conflicts into the class mix, in Dawley's view. Yet at other points, race understood as racial identity is acknowledged, as in the treatment of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association. Garveyism was the product of a ghettoized proletariat newly uprooted from the South, noted Dawley in a 1994 paper.<sup>72</sup> By 2003, however, Dawley emphasized its transnational dimensions as a movement of diasporic identity paralleling liberation movements in the colonial world. Among many other highways and byways, *Changing the World* compares the search for promised lands among the oppressed Irish, Jewish, and other diasporas of North America.<sup>73</sup> Putting American race and class relations in this context heightens the sense of turbulent change and aspiring struggle, but there is nothing recognizably Thompsonian about Dawley's position. Rather than seeing workers as developing a common class consciousness through a fusion of cultural traditions, Dawley shows workers divided by race and, implicitly, by region as well.

In the end, the narrative is kaleidoscopic and overly complicated in its architecture. Its attempt to fit so much into a polarized class struggle over the state seems forced. Dawley recognized the importance of external events in unsettling the balance of state and society in the era, but this insight is not new in the detail. Historians as far back as William Preston showed the impact of fears of the foreign inspiring state repression during the Red Scare;<sup>74</sup> the fear of Bolshevism has long been known to have influenced the politics of Woodrow Wilson and his cabinet. The fate of progressives such as Jane Addams has since the time of Allen F. Davis's biography

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., xxiii. Here, he is critical of whiteness studies as an aspect of the cultural constructionist view of race.

<sup>72</sup>Alan Dawley and Joe William Trotter, Jr., "Race and Class," *Labor History* 35 (Fall 1994): 486–96.

<sup>73</sup>Dawley, *Changing the World*, 231–36.

<sup>74</sup>See, for example, William Preston, Jr., *Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903–1933* (Cambridge, MA, 1963).



been tied to the international fate of left-wing and progressive ideals.<sup>75</sup> The survival of progressivism in the 1920s revives older lines of work.<sup>76</sup> Not only is there little that is new in the detail, the overall perspective is a narrow one of a minority of the American population. A relatively small number of activists come to stand as those who have the more worthy intellectual claims as progressive internationalists. Yet in practice, the women of the WCTU, the supporters of such “class” legislation as prohibition, were also strong supporters of the peace movement in the 1920s. The straightjacket of Dawley’s categories becomes unduly strained. Moreover, the transnational perspective is limited to the ways in which Americans reacted. As Christopher Capozzola has argued in this journal, “Dawley views global revolutionary events through resolutely American lenses.... John J. Pershing and Pancho Villa cross the Mexican border, but a full history of this global age of revolution would account not only for Villa, but for as many as one million other Mexicans who crossed the border (in both directions) during the Mexican Revolution.”<sup>77</sup> The original objectives of Dawley’s scholarly odyssey were to understand the transformation of the American state and to trace the origins of left-wing politics. While *Changing the World* addresses the latter question, the transformation of the state requires a more resolutely transnational perspective than that found in this work.<sup>78</sup>

Even more so than *Struggles for Justice*, this synthesis does not fulfill the expectations of Dawley’s astute and analytically impressive articles of the 1970s and 1980s. Some of Dawley’s best work was done there, in manifestos in which theories were sketched, analyzed, and dismissed or synthesized into bold programs of work. Implemented in detailed social histories, Dawley’s syntheses duplicate his theoretical strengths, but the products seem sketchy, abstract, and unwieldy. Retracing the scholarship of Alan Dawley has been a trip down memory lane for this writer. It is surprising to note the extent to which the ideas that he espoused were transcended by new debates that left older scholarship forgotten and marginalized. Yet repeatedly Dawley tried to keep abreast of the newest trends in historical scholarship. His work registers the major intellectual shifts of American historiography since the 1960s—the “new” social history, Marxist analysis, the search for synthesis, cultural studies, the rise of race scholarship, and the quest for a transnational perspective on American history.

<sup>75</sup>Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine: The Life and Legend of Jane Addams* (New York, 1973).

<sup>76</sup>Arthur S. Link, “What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920s?” *American Historical Review* 64 (July 1959): 833–51.

<sup>77</sup>Christopher Capozzola, “Progressives on a Global Stage,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era* 5 (Jan. 2006): 71–74 (quote, 72).

<sup>78</sup>Tyrrell, *Transnational Nation*, chs. 9–12.

Dawley's contributions show him to have been one of the most theoretically attuned historians in the United States, and one for whom the intellectual project was more important than personal advancement. "Every generation is forced to make decisions in circumstances not of its own choosing," he observed in *Changing the World* in a statement steeped in Marx's language.<sup>79</sup> As the world changed around him, Dawley did likewise. He swam in the tide of American historiography—sometimes against it, sometimes with it—seeking not to be the intellectual above society but one organic to the social connections of a society in flux; he immersed himself in its struggles, and thereby became a successful proponent of the historian as engaged citizen and intellectual. Gramsci might well have nodded in approval.

<sup>79</sup>Dawley, *Changing the World*, 6.

