Examining the Role of Ethnic Identity in the Formation of the American Labor Movement

By

Emma Pearl Smith

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Abstract

The labor movement has faced a host of issues since its inception over 100 years ago. Government attacks and an indifferent population has placed union membership at an all time low. Looking back, these modern issues can be related to labor's inability to harness a strong identity during its formative years, the mid to late 1800s through the mid 1900s. In lieu of this, other identities took hold including gender, racial and ethnic. With the large influx of immigrants at this time ethnic identity among workers was strong. By examining the utilization of ethnic identity in the labor movement through various theories concerning group identity formation and case studies on the Irish and Jewish populations it has become evident that creation of an ethnic identity, or any for that matter, would have greatly benefited labor in the long term and ensured the strong survival of the movement. Ultimately, ethnic identity had a formidable impact on the formation of the movement, but that power was lost in the wake of business unionism and loss of common identity among working people.

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"Ten thousand times has the labor movement stumbled and bruised itself. We have been enjoined by the courts, assaulted by thugs, charged by the militia, traduced by the press, frowned upon in public opinion, and deceived by politicians. But notwithstanding all this and all these, labor is today the most vital and potential power this planet has ever known, and its historic mission is as certain of ultimate realization as is the setting of the sun." - **Eugene V. Debs**

The labor movement has continued to be bruised and battered. Time, democracy, openness and the like have not been able to protect the strength of the labor movement nor its members from continued attack. Eugene Debs had it right though, labor has continued to fight for the right to organize and protect the working people. The American labor movement has a long, exciting, and often painful history. No matter the current state of labor, its importance in the formation of American society and identity cannot be underestimated or forgotten. The waves of immigration from Europe in the 1800's and early 1900's were vital to the formation and early strength of the movement. Between the years 1815 and 1915 over 33 million immigrants[1] arrived in the United States with roughly three quarters of that group arriving in New York City. The immigration waves were not only important to the labor movement, but to the creation of white, American culture as it is known today. In order for *Americans* as we know to exist there was a period of assimilation and acculturation occurring with the first few generations living in the country. Concerning labor, immigrants were a cheap and steady supply of laborers from highly skilled to unskilled. Such a steady supply left ample space for exploitation of labor and abusive labor practices. In some cases, labor unions, guilds, or worker organizations were formed following the ethnic divisions of the workplaces and neighborhoods. The case of New York City while not entirely unique proves to be an incredibly viable case study on the intersection of labor and ethnicity at the turn of the century.

[1] http://www.ellisisland.org/

To begin, a comprehensive overview of the literature review is used to outline the various theories and sources of information used in this paper. The literature review begins with brief notes concerning the theories of identity and group formation to be utilized further in chapter three. The various historical texts are outlined with mention to how they relate to the theories. The case study specific texts follow, making specific mention of the Irish and Jewish histories in turn of the twentieth Century New York City. Other texts mentioned that have contributed to the formation of larger ideas throughout the paper.

The discussion will proceed with the various theories relating to group formation and ethnic identity all examined though the lens of the labor movement. The early strength of the movement was greatly influenced by the strong ethnic identification of many workers, but as that identification began to wane in later generations, the labor movement began to lose a crucial part of its identity as a whole. Instead of replacing the loss of ethnic identity with a broader working class identity labor simply shifted to business unionism, which avoids discussion about social issues in the way that the early movement did. The lack of cohesive identity in the labor movement is a possible factor contributing to labor's overall decline in strength.

In order to divulge deeper into the issues, a case study on the Jewish immigrant experience in turn of the century New York City will be utilized to showcase the unique trials and tribulations faced by the group. Many were fleeing from religious persecution abroad, which actually puts them in a position much more similar to that of the Irish then perhaps Italians and English immigrants. There remains much debate over the authenticity of American Jewish identity, especially since the creation of Israel, but Jewish history in the United States, New York City in particular, is rich with history and a unique take on the culture. The Jews, unlike many other groups, have continued to identify as a Diaspora group, which provides yet another angle

to analyze Jewish identity. The role of Jews in the labor movement is also quite measurable. The Jews were initially hesitant to the more individualistic tendencies of American society and were much more willing to align with the socialist ideology, stressing community of individual action. The Jewish Labor Council remains an active organization in the United States labor movement today as evidence of the long-standing history the Jews have in the movement.

Another group that faced unique challenges upon arrival to New York City were the Irish. The Irish present a special case despite being *white* they were classified as Irish, which was a level below being African-American at certain points of history. The Irish were eventually able to *become* white, contributing to the formation of a white working class and the overall creation of the white working identity. The Irish as a group were successfully able to overcome their Irishness in a way many other minority groups are not able to and leverage their new *white-American* power into politics.

There is an interesting intersection of the Jewish and Irish identities. Neither was seen as completely white enough upon arrival, as no immigrant group was. Both came from oppressed states, fleeing persecution, famine, or poverty. Both groups arrived with a strong sense of religious identity. Both groups have left an undeniable mark on the history of New York City. But the two groups differ in a variety of ways as well. The Jewish community remains vibrant to this day, where as the Irish community is more representative of Gans symbolic ethnicity theory.

There is no simplistic cut and dry way to explain the labor movement in its early stages. Immigrants arrived from across Europe ultimately to reside in ethnic enclaves for varied amounts of time. Many industrial professions (and non-industrial professions) were ethnically divided, a possible symptom of the split labor market theories. Jews and Italians dominated the textile

industry; where as English and German immigrants were largely employed by factory work. Advertisements would ask for a specific ethnic group due to the belief that all members of an ethnic group held similar traits. Irish workers were often portrayed as violent drunks, which led to vast employment discrimination. Gutman describes an English visitor overhearing an American say of the British employees, "drank excessively and figured as 'the most beastly people I have ever seen".[2] This is only a piece of the puzzle that is labor history. There is no way to have a complete discussion of labor with discussing the aspects of ethnic identity, discrimination, housing, Socialism/Communism, religious affiliation. Excluding these aspects is a disservice to the many people who have sacrificed in the name of workers rights.

Theory is also vital to the discussion. The various theories relation to group formation and identity construction can provide great insight into the structure of the movement, how ethnic identity assisted in building the labor movement, and how its dissipation associated with the decrease in union strength.

The American labor movement is not a constructed entity. Its existence has been solidified though the mobilization of workers in the context of strikes and the legislative battles won to hold employers accountable for their actions. The movement is not what it once was. Both as a result of attacks, but as a result of other socioeconomic changes. The changes in the labor movement are not only related to union density, but the overall identity of the movement. The lack of cohesive identity in the labor movement is great contributor to labor's overall decline in strength. The strength of Irish and Jewish communities, the ethnic solidarity evident within those groups, and multiple others provide examples of how the strength derived from ethnicity

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[2] Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-class and Social History* (New York: Vintage a Div. of Random House, 1977), 20.

might be useful today. Labor is not without criticism. It is not a fairy tale. The stories of union thugs beating up those who cross the picket line and union officials taking 'dirty' money are not unfounded. Other critiques come from her neoliberal system calling unions outdated and driving up costs for businesses among other economic critiques. At this interesting crossroad for labor, I intend to provide a different criticism, a lens in which to analyze the formation of the labor movement, the ethnic lens.

The labor movement is currently at an interesting crossroads. Union density is at its lowest in decades, registering at 11.8% for the year 2011 according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The peak of union density was recorded as being 1954 with 28.3% of all workers belonging to unions. History has presented that labor cannot fix everything. Although, history has also taught that change *is* possible. Labor was able to accomplish much without the immediacy of today's technology as evidenced by the 1919 General Strike in Seattle[3] in which 35,000 workers walked off the job and the city was effectively shut down for five days. Once more, the important part of this project is to attempt to fully realize what a pivotal role ethnic identity played in the formation of the labor movement as a whole and the ways in which ethnic identification and group formation assisted in holding the movement together. Through numerous attacks in recent decades, labor has managed to limp along, maintain a solid base of members and supporters. While this project ends in the middle of the 20th Century, there is ample space for continued research on the role that ethnic identity plays in the current organizing strategies of labor unions.

[3] http://depts.washington.edu/labhist/strike/gold.shtml

Ia. Methodology

Concerning the methodology of this project, research has shown history books mention labor and the role of immigrants in the formation of the movement, but that does not entail there is no space for a differing approach. Many of the labor texts appear to address only one part of the puzzle, which makes great for pointed reading, but in trying to construct a larger discussion the literature is lacking. The lasting effects of immigrants on the labor movement are still felt today. The Jewish Labor Council is still alive and well as are the newly found immigrant labor coalitions such as Union de Trabajadores Inmigrantes (Immigrant Workers Union). Immigrants founded multiple unions and some have worked diligently to maintain their ethnic identity, as is the case with UNITE-HERE[4]. It has appeared to me that the connection between the two is missing in the vast majority of the literature. The more cohesive discussions about labor identity, past and present, the better opportunity there is for a more complete understanding of the issues currently faced by the movement and the ways in which society can amend the current issues.

This research is focused on constructing a new narrative of ethnic identification in labor movement and the impact of such identification. Texts concerning the creation of white culture and Americanization of immigrants coupled with empirical data and relevant anecdotes of the time period construct a larger discussion of the importance of ethnic identity in the movement.

[4] To be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four, the Jewish case study

Chapter Two: Literature overview[5]

The literature available concerning American Labor history is vast, as in the history of immigrants to the United States in the late 1800s-early 1900s. Often times this literature intersects, describing the harsh work conditions faced by immigrants, along with the rampant racism faced by the new arrivals. The existing literature also points out the importance that the immigrants had on the formation of the labor movement during the time period. Where the literature seems to be lacking in the ways in which immigrant labor and the labor union movement continued to cross paths and the ways in which the end of that relationship affected the drastic decline in strength of the movement in the past half-century.

The theory of identity and group formation is vital to this project. The theories of Brubaker (2004) will be used to explain the complexities of ethnic identity and group formation. Along with those of Tajfel (1981), which explicates the importance of a strong group identity to the long-term survival of a group, in this case, the whole of the labor movement following the decrease in ethnic identification. Spencer (1994) frames the discussion of identity specifically around the American immigrant; an argument provides a different outlook on identity theory, incorporating ideas on nativism and multiculturalism as they relate to identity formation. Rose (1997) examines the formation of social movements and their intersection with class structures, which again, is incredibly important to the structure of the labor movement. When discussing labor, it is impossible to ignore the influence of class structure and the broader left undertones of the movement. This idea is especially prevalent in the organizing structure of the larger umbrella unions, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations

[5] The outlined literature is imperative to the understanding of the role of ethnicity in the construction of identity in the labor movement. While the broader text of this paper does not allow for ample discussion of all the sources, their contributions should still be noted.

(CIO). All of these theories tie into the notions of identity and structure of the labor movement, especially as it relates to ethnicity.

Brubaker, Tajfel, Spencer, and Roses' theories all relate to Roediger (1991)'s theories concerning the formation of 'whiteness', which is a vital aspect of the immigrant experience especially when considering McMahon and Ignatiev (1997)'s case study on how the Irish became white. The formation of whiteness is an important aspect to consider when discussing the role of ethnicity in the labor movement. The experience of the early immigrants is vital to the understanding of the creation of 'whiteness' and American culture.

Gans' (1979) theories concerning symbolic ethnicity relate to Brubaker (2004), concerning the individual's perception of the self and one's own identity as it relates to ethnicity. Symbolic ethnicity, especially in Gansian sense of the term, provides insight into organizing strategy of both the AFL and CIO in their earlier years. Gans' theory of symbolic ethnicity can be related to Yancey, Ericksen and Juliani (1976)'s writings on the convergence of ethnic community and workplace. Both theories discuss the influence of ethnicity on all other aspects of life. Yancey, Ericksen, and Juliani take a much more practical route of discussion where as Gans remains more theoretical.

Crain and Mathney (2001) write specifically about the identity crisis that has affected the labor movement in recent years. The relationship between labor and the left is discussed greatly, which is a theme that is reoccurring in all aspects of literature relating to the labor movement and ethnicity in the Untied States at that time period. Crain and Mathney's theories converge with Brubaker (2004) and Tajfel (1981) as they relate to the formation of identity within a group setting and the importance of a prolonged group identity to ensure the sustainability of the group's strength.

The rich history of labor organizing theory cannot be ignored. Biggert (1997) analyzes the major wins and losses in American labor history including the New Deal, Congress of Industrial Organizations purge of the communists, AFL-CIO merger, Taft Hartley and other milestones of the movement. Looking at labor through a legislative context, Biggert provides a more politicized critique of the movement. Various theories concerning labor organization are very much related to the entire American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) structure, as Zieger (1995) details. Zinn (1995) too details the issues relating to ethnicity, labor, and socialism also taking ample time to divulge into the racial issues of the AFL and CIO and the ways in which their organizing strategies differed based on race and ethnicity.

In terms of pure history of the labor movement and its convergence with immigrants/ethnic groups, Dinnerstien and Reimers (1999) start their history with a discussion concerning the reasons for immigration of the various groups arriving to the United States. The various lifestyle changes experienced in the *new* world are documented. Gutman (1997) writes extensively on the cultural clashes between new immigrants, 'Americans' and 'old' immigrants, often times through the lens of labor history. With this basis, the comprehensive history of Asher and Stephenson (1990) provides a cohesive historical examination of the role that race and ethnicity played in the formation of the early American labor movement. The text in detail describes the obstacles for ethnic workers. Babson (1999) uses the text to describe the organic way in which immigrant workers would organize utilizing the tenements in which they lived and the religious organizations in which they belonged. Organizing was vital to their very existence as working conditions were unsafe and wages were poverty level, which further prevented

workers from moving into safer building, keeping people trapped in a cycle of poverty. Zinn (1995) also provides a detailed history of the labor movement.

Bodnar (1987) dedicates ample time to discussing the delicate relationship that ethnic communities had with the labor movement. It would be unwise to only include literature that is fully supportive of my personal theories. Bodnar (1987)'s text provides important insight into the often-uncomfortable relationship between immigrants and labor. This relationship is relevant in today's society as well, yet another relationship that cannot be ignored.

Specific case studies provide important and detailed insight into the specifics of the time period. Freeman (2000) looks at the entire working class history of New York City, giving a strong framework of the time period and a detailed history of the intricacies of life. Freeman (2001) describes the formation of the Transport Workers Union, a largely Irish union upon its inception, which was initially radical and militant. Nadel (1990) writes specifically on the German case in New York City and the intersection of class, ethnicity and religion, a story which describes nearly all immigrant groups not only from hat time period but through the present day. Von Drehle (2004) chronicles the events leading up to the Triangle Fire of 1911, which was a factory that employed largely Jewish and Italian immigrant women. This fire marked a turning point in workplace safety. Way (1993) writes on the horrendously unsafe working conditions of Erie Canal workers. The workers were largely Irish. These abuses provide a concrete example of the ease at which immigrant workers were exploited. Bayor (1988) writes specifically about the Irish, Germans, Jews, and Italians of New York City, which at the time were the dominant immigrant groups in the area. The text takes a well-rounded look at the way politics, labor, housing, and ethnic relations all conflicted and converged from 1929-1941. Bayor's text offers somewhat of a vague prelude to the empirical data collected by Glazer and Moynihan (1963).

Gerstle (2002) while straying from the New York City focus gives important insight into the ethnic formation of the ethnic contributions and organizing strategies to the International Textile Union in Massachusetts.

The relationship between labor and communism cannot be understated. Cochran (1979) accurately describes this difficult relationship. Michels (2005) provides a detailed account of the Jewish communities ties with Socialism upon their arrival in the early 20th Century. Many new immigrants to the Untied States had strong communist/socialist ties and worked to continue to operate those systems in their new life. This process is evidenced by the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) and the 1947 Taft Hartley Bill, which mandated all communists be purged from the labor unions. This greatly affected the immigrant populations, as many of them, especially Jews, were communists. Zieger (1995) dedicates ample time to this issue, chronicling the rise and fall of the CIO, not only as it related to immigrants and ethnic labor, but also to communism. Kimmeldorf, Howard, and Stephen-Norris (1992) also consider this relationship by asking the question as to why socialism never took hold in the United States, despite the early presence of the welfare state, also returning to the question of a lack of cohesive labor identity following the communist purge.

Concerning empirical data, the website for the Bureau of Labor Statistics will prove to be a valuable resource. The seminal text of Glazer and Moynihan (1963) provides a vast amount of data concerning the demographics of New York City life in the 1960s among five minority groups (Jews, Puerto Ricans, Blacks, Irish, and Italians. The text includes empirical data concerning voting patterns and occupational distribution of parents and children broken down by ethnicity. Glazer and Moynihan also provide data on the complete ethnic makeup of New York City. Gerstle (2002) also provides empirical data relating to the unionization rates of the

International Textile Workers Union in Massachusetts; again, while focused outside New York City, this data can still prove useful in the larger scope of this project.

There was a study produced by Jeanne Ladortune and Jose Tessada[6] in 2010 concerning the migratory patterns of European immigrants form 1900-1930 and their choices of occupation. The data found that the bulk of immigrants would go to areas in which there is already a population of fellow countrymen and a system of labor in place. While this study was compelling and assisted in formulating this thesis, it does not quite fit for a larger discussion. Nevertheless, the empirical data collected is important as it successfully quantifies the locational and occupational choices of turn of the century European immigrants. Lafortune and Tessada also note the rate of return of various immigrant groups. The Portuguese, Italians, and Spanish immigrants at this time period were more likely to return to the homeland then their German, English, Scottish or Irish counterparts. This fact also points to the first three groups hesitation towards worker organizations as their interest in American society was purely economic and less focused on creating a home as other immigrant groups were.

While this is largely a historical project, it would be incorrect to dismiss the effects that past policies and organizing efforts had on the current landscape of the labor movement. Borjas (1995) examines the more recent relationship between ethnicity and geography, perhaps offering a mild update on Herod (1998), who also discussed the complex relationships between geography, ethnicity and organizing. Herod offers a much more expansive view then Borjas, who only concentrates on urban areas, but the connection is still relevant. Ness (2005) also discusses

[6]Jeanne Laturne and Jose Tedssada, *Smooth(er) Landing? The Dynamic Role of Networks in the Location and Occupational Choice of Immigrants*. Proc. of Applied Microeconomics Seminar UNC Department of Economics. (2010), <http://www.sole-jole.org/11314.pdf>.

the plight of more recent immigrants, of which many struggles are similar to those of their historical counterparts.

2a. Notes on the American Federation of Labor, Congress of Industrial Organizations, Industrial Workers of the World and the Knights of Labor

The Knights, AFL, and CIO are all vital to understanding the history of labor organizing. Their motives are referenced multiple times throughout this paper.

2b. The Knights of Labor

The Knights of Labor were founded in the late 1800s as more of a fraternal organization but soon evolved into a labor union. While not the most inclusionary organization, the Knights were open to the organizing of African-Americans and women, which was seen as quite liberal. Despite ultimately reaching a peak membership of 700,000 in 1886[7], the Knights lack of formal organizational structure hurt the cause in the end. The events of Haymarket[8], in which many Knights were involved was opposed to the tradition of not being heavily involved in strike activity. The strength of the Knights declined following the violent showing of Haymarket and many members were prompted to join the newly founded American Federation of Labor. In terms of the broader labor identity, the Knights are considered one of the first big unions.

[7] Biggs, Michael. "Positive Feedback In Collective Mobilization: The American Strike Wave of 1886*." *Theory and Society* 32.2 (2003<doi:10.1023/A:1023905019461>.

[8] The Haymarket Affair as it came to be known took place May 4, 1886. During what was expected to be a peaceful rally supporting workers striking for the eight hour day an unknown person threw dynamite into the crowd. Following the dynamite blast, police began firing. In total, seven police officers and at least four civilians were killed. Eight known anarchists were then tried for their possible affiliation with the dynamite throwing.

2c. The American Federation of Labor

Zinn provides the most concise description of the American Federation of Labor in the late 1800s,

> The AFL was an exclusive union—almost all male, almost all white, almost all skilled workers Although the number of women workers kept growing—it doubled from 4million in 1890 to 8 million in 1910, and women were one-fifth of the labor force—only one in a hundred belonged to a union. [9]

This statement sums up the issues with the AFL at the time. White male workers did not extend to immigrant workers. The AFL championed business unionism, intent on furthering the agendas of their members and those that fit the mold of white, male, skilled workers. Business unionism while not explicitly racist was more focused on what is commonly known as 'bread and butter issues' and less focused on creating a broader workers movement, which would have assisted in the creation of a labor identity.

2d. The Industrial Workers of the World

The Industrial Workers of the World[10] (IWW) stemmed out of the opposition to the AFL policies. The AFL was too conservative for the more radical aspects of some. Under the slogan *an injury to one is an injury to all*, the IWW was more focused on systematic change as opposed to the AFL's 'bread and butter' unionism. The IWW sought to organize all working people in hopes of providing fundamental change in society. The IWW was open to the inclusion of immigrant labor as they were able to see the untapped power in the large incoming population

[9] Howard Zinn. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-present*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1995).
[10] http://www.iww.org/en

that the AFL missed. The IWW was quite radical and not opposed to militant action. The group included many anarchists, socialists and communists.

2e. The Congress of Industrial Organizations

The Congress of Industrial Organizations was founded out of differences with the AFL structure. Like the IWW, the CIO was more interested in creating one big union to unite all workers. Also like the IWW, the CIO was not afraid of militant tactics. The CIO peaked at 5 million members[11], which is more then the IWW or Knights had achieved, but their time was short. The passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 proved detrimental to their membership, as many members identified as communists and Taft Hartley outlawed communists in unions. The AFL and CIO merged in 1955, creating the current incarnation of the AFL-CIO. Currently, the AFL-CIO is a proponent of the 'one big union' philosophy, but that is in part due to their monopolization of the movement. The AFL-CIO currently represents fifty-six unions[12].

While these are only brief overviews into each group, the main ideology of each is present. This is important when considering Brubaker's theories of groupism and groupness as an event. While the CIO and IWW saw the influx of immigrants as a positive aspect of organization, the AFL did not, which in the long term has proven hurtful to the movement as a whole.

[11] Robert H. Zieger. *The CIO: 1935-1955*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1995).
[12] http://www.aflcio.org/About

Chapter Three: Theoretical Outline

The American labor movement is oft romanticized as being a building block of United States industry and a unifier of the working class. While these labels sound pleasant they are quite far from the reality that the unions exist in today. Unions were almost undeniably a large part of the success of American industry. As far a unifier for the working class goes it was partially true in its initial inception based on different organizing strategies of the major umbrella unions the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations. Utilizing various texts describing the schisms that became evident in the labor movement and the theories concerning groupness and group identity produced by Rogers Brubaker and Henry Tajfel it is easy to see the decline in labor strength is a product of the lack of a cohesive group identity. Herbert Gans theory on symbolic ethnicity is also vital to the understanding of the devolution of the American labor movement as its roots are intertwined with immigrant portrayals of ethnicity. It is also important to note other theories relating to the creation of American identity including the melting pot theory and the more recent theory of the American mosaic or salad bowl.

3a. Historical aspects of ethnic identity in the labor movement and how it became a stronghold through the mid 1940s.

Ethnic identity was crucial to the early American immigrant experience. Freeman describes New York City in quoting Norman Podhoretz[13],

> 'Never thought of myself as an American. I came form Brooklyn, and in Brooklyn there were no Americans; there were Jews and Negros and Italians and Poles and Irishmen. The Americans lived in New England, in the south; alien people in alien
> (Spencer 1994) places.[14]

Podhoretz is saying is that it took time for American identity to develop, the immigrant identity

[13] Podhoetz is a neo-conservative pundit still alive today and commenting on the issues.
[14] Joshua Benjamin Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 26.

was incredibly strong, so much so that those living in New York felt separated form the *American* identity that was prevalent in the rest of the country.

Cities were divided upon ethnic lines; jobs were doled out according to ethnicity. New immigrants often came to the States with ethnic ties in place, transitioning into the ethnic enclave present in the new country from that of the old. This case can be evidenced in part by the early Italian experience in which *padrones*; Italian labor bosses would greet new arrivals at Ellis Island[15] then secure them with employment and housing. Freeman also writes on this saying

> In some industries, ethnicity served to unite the workforce. In transit, it was two-edged sword: the demographic diversity of the industry meant that ethnic subcultures often kept workers apart, but one ethnic group, the Irish, was so large and pervasive that it became a source of cohesion. Irish community life and Irish culture permeated the industry. Even the non-Irish were affected. Thus to the extent that any one culture imparted its character to the industry, and alter to the union that the workers in the industry formed, it was the culture of Irish immigrants.[16]

While Freeman in speaking largely of the Irish experience, it does extend to other ethnic groups. And while there was much tension between ethnic groups, it created solidarity within each group, which is what strengthened the movement in its early years.

Ethnic identity was inescapable for the first generation immigrants. Straddled with accents, different customs, and language difficulty were realities of daily life. These first wave immigrants were discriminated for these very reasons. One of the most famous cases of discrimination along ethnic lines during this period was the case of the Irish. Aside from vehement anti-Catholic sentiment, as Catholicism was seen as a threat to the Protestant way of life[17],(American identity was primarily White Anglo-Saxon Protestant), the Irish were seen as

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[15] Immigration processing station. This case is contingent upon the opening of Ellis Island in 1890.

[16] Joshua Benjamin Freeman. *In Transit: the Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966: with a New Epilogue*. (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2001), 30.

[17]Spencer, Martin E. "Multiculturalism, Political Correctness, and the Politics of

poor drunks incapable of doing proper work and becoming lost in drink. This anti-Catholic sentiment permeated to the workplace as famous pictures of 'Irish Need Not Apply[1819]' signs are still widely circulated. What this ethnic identity did and the way it alienated these groups from the larger culture was create strong communities. These established communities transcended into the workplace simply increasing the feelings of ethnic identity. Asher and Stephenson outline this phenomenon in their text *Labor Divided* in stating

> Immigrant workers strong sense of group solidarity, which was often accentuated by the phenomenon of chain migration that led to the clustering of immigrants from the same European village or group of villages, gave them great cohesion when they became militant in reaction to work place experiences in the US. [20]

The kind of ethnic differentiation can also be attributed to the theory of nativism as expressed by those already established in the United States at the time. Nativism, as described by Spencer "…was the expression of an identity-anxiety, which was the fear that the 'American' identity - however this might be conceptualized -was in jeopardy."[21] Hostile environments encouraged a certain level of ethnic segregation that kept identities within the community strong. Such hostile environments can also be attributed to ethnic antagonism and the creation of a caste system as described by Edna Bonacich. Bonachich continues to describe the two caste developments:

> In the one, an effort is made to prevent an ethnically different group from being part of the society. In the other, an ethnically different group is essential to the society: it is an exploited class supporting the entire edifice.[22]

Identity," *Sociological Forum* 9.4 (1994): 550. http://www.jstor.org/stable/685001

[18] The actual existence of these signs is still hotly debated. Either way, the cultural memory of them provides interesting insight into the historic strength of ethnic identification.

[19] This was a song that became quite popular at the time, documenting the struggles of the Irish to gain proper employment. http://memory.loc.gov/rbc/amss/as1/as109730/001q.gif

[20] Asher, Robert and Charles Stephenson, eds. *Labor Divided: Race and Ethnicity in United States Labor Struggles, 1835-1960*. (State University of New York Press, 1990). 11

[21] Ibid, 550

[22] Bonacich, Edna "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market" *American Sociological Association* 37.5 (1972) 548. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2093450 .

This theory is quite similar to the experiences faced by many immigrants. By excluding the group from society, it perpetuates the in-group/ out-group theories of Tajfel. The treatment of ethnics by the established peoples perpetuates the feelings of *otherness*, thus strengthening ethnic solidarity and the entire in-group/out-group structure on both sides.

The reliability of one group of workers was extended into the hiring process. Asher and Stevenson make note of this as well in stating that managers "…Hired very large number of workers from one ethnic group…created a mass of workers of similar national heritage and linguistic background who could be galvanized into vigorous action"[23]. People lived and worked together in ethnic communities. Ethnic identity remained strong because the majority of a person's time spent was with fellow ethnics. Asher and Stephenson reiterate the point stating:

> Over time, the realities of color in America remained far from subtle. Color denied the lodging that money might have bought. Color restricted employment to the most menial of jobs. Color defined the boundaries of friendship and of love. Color masked the differences of class. Yet color provided a common bond, as well, reinforcing the ethnic ties of heritage and language, obscuring provincial differences, lessening the impact of loneliness in an all too hostile world, and sustaining camaraderie in the workplace.[24]

This easily translates into the formation of unions and the fact they formed along ethnic lines in the early 20th/late 19th Centuries. Plant managers/factory owners allowed for the continuance of ethnic solidarity within the workplace as evidenced by the hiring process. It can be interpreted as the inverse of the *Irish Need Not Apply* signs that hung in doorways. It was accepted as common knowledge that the Irish were drunkards and could not be relied upon. Simultaneously, English workers were considered hard working and reliable, although militant. These hiring practices led to a strong sense of worker solidarity. Organizing was a simple task and issues of the shop floor

[23] Asher and Stephenson, 11
[24] Ibid, 63

could be discussed openly in the home. During this time period, the early 20th Century, people lived, worked and socialized together. These communities were anything but imagined.

Ethnicity and the ideals surrounding ethnic identity played a crucial role in the formation of the labor movement in the form of ethnic solidarity. Ethnic identities faded in favor of more symbolic ethnic identities[25] the strength of the entire movement faded as well. Maintaining a strong identity was simple when the bulk of the people in the movement were already committed to an identity. The group cannot continue without a strong identity to hold itself together and this is what happened to labor. The American Federation of Labor[26] (AFL) was the less progressive when compared with the Congress of Industrial Organizations[27] (CIO), but the AFL realizing the power of black labor began a campaign to organize the black workers. Crain and Matheny while recognizing the continued racist policies of the AFL did recognize that

> …While 'hardly paragons of interracial virtue' interracial councils that mediated disputes between segregated locals were able to accommodate racial differences and bridge the divide between groups of workers ensuring cooperation in times of crisis.[28]

Racism was rampant and limited to the modern white verses black paradigm but was extended to the white ethnics in the earlier years. It became less of an issue for the white ethnics as they became Americanized[29]. Locals were also organized along ethnic lines with separate locals for

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[25] Herbert J. Gans "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of the Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America." (1979)

[26] Founded by Samuel Gompers in 1886 after the dissolution of the Knights of Labor. Although initially founded by Socialists (Gompers) quickly became more conservative in its promotion of business unionism, which espouses that workers and management work together to enhance capitalism.

[27] Founded by John L. Lewis in 1932 in the midst of disputes between organizing strategies of craft and industrial unionism. The CIO was more militant then the AFL and more open to the inclusion of minority groups (African-Americans, immigrants, women).

[28] Crain, Marion and Ken Mathney. "Labor's Identity Crisis." *California Law Review* 89.6 (2001): 1777. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3481249

[29] *How the Irish Became White* explains this issue in larger detail. Ignatiev (1995) details the long arduous process of the creation of the Irish immigrants as white, chronicling their rise from

the Irish, Germans, Italians, and the like. Herberg explains this as it pertains to the Jewish community,

> Samuel Gompers[30] had his qualms about the UHT (United Hebrew Trades) because he did not believe in organizing workers along 'religious' lines; but he wisely saw that 'to organize Hebrew trade unions was the first step in getting those immigrants into the American labor movement.[31]

While Gompers appears to be hesitant to organize along ethnic or religious lines, he realized the strength that those communities and subsequent identities hold. Crain and Matheny reveal is that despite being segregated the members of the locals were able to unite under common causes when it was necessary. The failure to incorporate a new identity into the labor movement brings to light the failure of labor to encourage a stronger class based movement. Crain and Mathney touch upon this issue as well:

> These writers [class scholars and activists] treat class movements and identity politics as dichotomous. Class movements for improved working conditions are seen as having nothing to do with one's identity, dignity, or self conception, and identity politics movements are viewed as primarily concerned with 'symbolic' or cultural issues rather than as issues with real economic impact.[32]

This was the common mode of thinking, and in many ways remains such, but it is false as all of these facets are intertwined. Identity is very much intertwined with occupation and at the turn of the century, occupation was also very much tied to ethnicity. Zinn outlined this as

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angry, violent drunks into positions of political power. This point will be further explicated through the Irish case study.

[30] Gompers was born in London to Jewish parents and came to New York in 1863 when he was 13. His interest in the labor movement stemmed out of working in cigar factories to help support this family. He eventually went on to be one of the establishing members of the American Federation of Labor. He was conflict averse, working to avoid strikes. He was a more conservative labor leader.

[31] Herberg, Will. "Jewish Labor Movement in the United States: Early Years to World War I" *Industrial Labor Relations Review 5.4 (1952),* 80, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2519135

[32] Crain and Mathney, 1783

> A study of immigrants in New York between 1905 and 1915 finds that 32 percent of Italians and Jews rose out the manual class to higher levels (although not to much higher levels). But it was also true that many Italian immigrants did not find the opportunities inviting enough for them to stay. In one four-year period, seventy-three Italians left New York for every hundred that arrived. Still, enough Italians became construction workers, enough Jews became businessmen became professionals, to create a middle-class cushion for class conflict.[33]

Clearly, occupation and ethnicity were intertwined. The same is true for the heavy Irish presence in the transit industry. The horrendous working conditions faced by many immigrants coupled with tenement life were jointly soul-crushing, it is easy to assume the impact that such things had on ones identity and to look at these things as dichotomous seems to be an injustice to those who lived that life.

3. Theoretical Framework as it applies to identity in the labor movement

3b. Group identification and group formation from the theories of Henry Tajfel[34]

Tajfel writes on the necessity of defining oneself in a group in order to create a social identity. He mentions four categories vital to group identification and formation. They are social categorization[35], social identity[36], social comparison[37] and psychological group distinctiveness[38].

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[33] Zinn, 341

[34] Henri Tajfel. "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparison." *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology*. Cambridge Cambridgeshire: New York, (1981)

[35] "Considered a system of orientation which helps to create the individuals place in society." (Tajfel, 255)

[36] "Social identity will be understood as that part of an individuals self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." (Tajfel, 255)

[37] Tajfel quoting Festinger, "There exists in the human organism, a drive to evaluate his opinions and abilities " (Tajfel, 256)

[38] …"A group can fulfill its function of protecting the social identity of its member only if it manages to keep its positively-valued distinctiveness from other groups. In other conditions, this distinctiveness must be created, acquired and perhaps also fought for through various forms of relevant social action." (Tajfel, 259)

These four categories provide a solid working basis to explain the creation of the labor movement and organizations in general, especially as it relates to immigrant populations. Concerning the *psychological group distinctiveness* category, it can be interpreted that along with the cultural differences brought by immigrants to the states there was also a perceived psychological difference of the settled population. This was a time period in which it was a perfectly acceptable belief that one race or ethnicity was inferior to the white population. Gutman explicated this notion of 'otherness' in his analysis of factory work in New England in which he describes

> Contemporary betters could not comprehend such behavior. Worried over a three-day Slavic wedding frolic, a woman concluded: 'you don't think they have souls so you?' No, they are beasts and in their lust they shall perish.'[39]

This was not an unusual line of thought nor was it only limited to the Slavic community. The thinking of psychological distinctiveness is documented in the case of the Irish workers on the Erie Canal as well[40] along with the belief that Jewish workers were not suited for factory work. The psychological differences are similar to the social comparison, especially as low wage, unskilled workers are bearing witness to other successful immigrant groups in the vicinity.

The creation of the in-group allows for the creation of the out-group. Not to be interpreted as an 'us vs. them' dichotomy but looking at the working class and the union movement through the lens of Tajfel the movement has failed to create and *in-group* in recent years. This can be seen though analyzing the age break down of the current union membership. The age bracket with the highest rate of union membership is the 55 to 64 group with 15.7 percent membership. The lowest, the 16 to 24 brackets only measuring 4.4 percent[41]. This failure

[39] Gutman, 25
[40] Discussed in chapter 5, *The Irish Case*
[41] http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm

to recruit new members has proven detrimental to labor, as there is no new *in-group* to replace the aging in-group.

3c. In-group/out-group theories and the AFL, CIO, Knights of Labor and the IWW

There was the initial loss of ethnic identity was not replaced with a broader identity. This allowed for the groupness of the movement to fall apart. With no in-group there can be no out-group to consider. The larger umbrella unions the AFL and CIO were the initial answer to the waning ethnic solidarity in the movement. The two larger unions were originally theorized to unite the workers under a broader identity in the same vein that the Knights of Labor and the IWW did before they each met their demise. Crain and Matheny address the importance of the Knights of Labor as well, "Like the Knights and the IWW, the CIO advocated an inclusive labor movement that stretched across the boundaries of race, gender, and ethnicity"[42] with the final goal being to build a more class conscious society.

Returning to the CIO, the organizing structure differed greatly from the AFL structure following the precedent set by both the Knights of Labor and the IWW. The first major difference being the AFL focuses on craft[43] unionism and the CIO being a trade/industrial[44] union. This division was integral to the organizing structure of both unions and the openness to accepting African-Americans, women, and immigrants. The CIO structure differed greatly. The

[42] Crain and Mathney, 1779
[43] The theory of craft unionization is workers are organized by the skill set of the workers. This kind of organizing succeeds in alienating lower skilled workers from the higher skilled workers. The traditional motto of craft unionism is 'one craft, one union'.
[44] The theory of trade (or industrial) unionism is that workers are organized by industry regardless of skill level. The popular industrial unionism slogan is 'one shop, one union'. This method of organizing is more inclusive then craft unionism.

CIO was concerned with keeping a cohesive identity among members, outside of ethnic or racial identities. Crain and Matheny address this difference

> …The CIO unions that welcomed Black members urged them to 'forget they were Negroes' and instead to concentrate on being Marxists, or Democrats, or members of the United Automobile Workers (UAW)…" [45]

This idea is incredibly important. The CIO was working to create an identity among the union members, one that would unify all the workers across gender, race and ethnic lines. This was antithetical to the strategies employed by the AFL, which was working to build an identity through the promotion of white (male) interest. Crain and Matheny also make note of this point of weakness of the AFL in stating:

> The rise of the manufacturing economy and growth of unskilled jobs incompatible with craft unionism highlighted the AFL's vulnerability to race and gender based, divide and conquer strategies by employers". [46]

These early exclusionary policies are likely to have contributed to the fall of the movement in the long run. The policies of the AFL and rising tensions in the United States in the post World War II era surrounding the Cold War and the subsequent threat of nuclear weapons led to the purging of all communists by the CIO in 1947. The purge was ignited by the signing of the Taft-Hartley Act[47] of 1947, which required union members to sign off stating they were *not* communists. This act was crucial in the decline of the CIO and the eventual unification of the AFL and CIO in 1955. The importance of the communist purge is that it excluded an array of powerful union leaders but more importantly, it stripped the CIO and a large portion of the movement of their identities. Stemming out of the legacies left by the Knights of Labor and the IWW a mandatory

[45] Crain and Mathney, 1779
[46] Ibid, 1777/1778
[47] The Taft-Hartley Act continues to be a controversial piece of legislation. It was only passed in 1947 when Congress overrode President Harry S. Truman's veto. Truman called the bill a 'dangerous intrusion on free speech'. Union leaders referred to it as a 'slave labor bill' due the restrictions on secondary strikes and regulations concerning open and closed shop workplaces.

government regulated expulsion of a group was and remains a big blow to the strength of the movement. It is codified discrimination of a group based upon their individual beliefs.

3d. Groupness as an event and groupism from the theories of Rogers Brubaker

3e. Groupness as an event

The identity of the labor movement continues to play in to Brubaker's critiques of groupism. Looking at the labor movement through Brubaker's lens of *groupness as an event* it becomes incredibly easy to visualize where the movement lost its footing. Brubaker describes groupness as an event as

> Shifting attention from groups to groupness, and treating groupness as a variable and contingent rather than fixed and given, allows us to take account of-and, potentially, to account for-phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensely felt collective solidarity, without implicitly treating high levels of groupness as a constant, enduring or definitely present. It allows us to treat groupness as an *event*, as something that 'happens'.[48]

This theory can easily align with labor existence in the early to middle parts of the 20th Century. Yancey documents this specifically in terms of immigration stating, "Each of these factors-life, style, class interests, work relationship and common residential areas-facilitated the developments of group consciousness."[49] The massive European immigration to the United States facilitated the need for groupness. The collective experience of the new immigrants increased solidarity among co-ethnics and to an extent other ethnic groups present. This can very much qualify as groupness as an event. It can further apply to the labor movement in that co-ethnics were often employed in the same field a la split labor market theories. But as this

[48] Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity Without Groups." *Ethnicity without Groups*. Cambridge (Mass. Harvard UP, 2004), 12

[49] Yancey, William L., Eugene P. Ericksen, and Richard N. Juliani. "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation." *American Sociological Review* 41.3 (1976) http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094249

changed, and workplaces became less ethnically dictated, solidarity decreased, ending the *event* of groupness. Inversely, this relates to the current state of labor in which groupness as an event has not occurred. This would in turn characterize the first strong waves of labor and immigration as the true *event* and subsequent happenings occurring more as coincidence.

3f. Groups as categories

The classification of *groups and categories* that Brubaker provides also contains the ability to transition into the discussion of the changing strength of the labor movement.

> {Talk} about groups is obscured by the failure to distinguish between groups and categories. If by 'group' we mean a mutually interacting, culturally recognizing, mutually orientated, effectively communicating, bounded collectivity with a sense of solidarity, corporate identity, and capacity for concerned action, or even if we adopt a less exigent understanding of 'group', it should be clear that a category is not a group. It is at best a potential basis for group-formation or 'groupness'.[50]

What Brubaker's theories do is call into question is the very concept of unions perpetuating 'their' identity as the labor movement. In its early incarnations labor was ethnic thus able to properly subscribe to Brubaker's models of group/identity formation surrounding ethnic identification. Brubaker would potentially classify the CIO organizing structure as path to the creation of groupness/group identity. It is possible to extend the theory of groups and categories into the early formation of labor unions structured by ethnic ties. Looking at that time period through Brubaker's theories, one could classify the ethnic groups, as categories and groupness did not emerge until ethnicity became more fluid.

Considering Brubaker's theories on groupness it becomes easy to see where the declination of union strength came from. There was a lack of identity. Freeman accurately

[50] Brubaker, "Ethnicity Without Groups", 12

describes the vast amounts of immigrant labor present in turn of the century New York City, as it relates to the transit employment system

> …No comprehensive figures are available, but of 14,052 residents of Brooklyn, Manhattan, and the Bronx classified in the 1930 census as street railway conductors, motormen, or laborers, 62% said that they were foreign born whites.[51]

That is just one industry and one ethnic group, but it was the norm for multiple industries in New York City as the Jews dominated the textile industry, Italians were largely split between textiles and construction. Further, in Woonsocket, Massachusetts, there were harsh divisions between the French Canadian and Franco-Belgian workers in the Independent Textile Union (ITU). Gerstle describes this as "virtually every industrial union that arose in the US in the 1930s depended on the same alliance of radical and ethnic workers that propelled the ITU into being".[52] The strong groups that initially formed along ethnic lines were gone and there was no more progressive way to establish groups and thus create an identity to establish the strength of the movement to survive in the long haul. While many unions were able to survive past the event of groupness, some did not and many ultimately being absorbed into the larger AFL-CIO structure. Groupness as an event stands diametrical to the CIO theory of organizing which emphasized forming a greater identity as proponents of social justice and change.

3g. Split Labor Market theory and Middlemen minorities of Edna Bonacich

The discussion of split labor market theory[53] and middleman minorities[54] is beneficial to the larger narrative. Bonacich writes on the proliferation of *middleman minorities*, those who

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[51] Freeman, "In Transit: the Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966: with a New Epilogue", 26
[52] Gerstle, Gary. *Working-class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960 with a New Preface by the Author*. (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 2002), 13
[53] Edna Bonacich. "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market"

emigrate to an established societal or economic role. By virtue of ones ethnicity they are placed in the according labor market, the split labor market which is described as occurring when two groups are present and in pursuit of the same economic positions but the price of labor differs for each group. This theory is applicable to the American labor movement as various industries were dominated by different groups at various times in history, the Jews and Italians in the garment industry for example.

3h. Split Labor Market Theory

In the event of the split labor market though, Bonacich points out it can also be beneficial to the group members by enhancing the group solidarity though the exclusionary tendencies of the out-group. The immense poverty faced by many new immigrants also prompts the selling of excessively cheap labor, a situation encountered for many new immigrants. Bonacich notes the issues related to the selling of cheap labor in that it can exclude more established groups. This was a tactic often used by companies in the event of a strike, which was effective in creating ethnic tension. Black workers and/or white ethnics were used to cross picket lines in largely white work places. Which proved to only further exclude the minority populations from the white population, again increasing the group solidarity of both the in-group and out-group.

3i. Middlemen Minorities

The middleman minority theory is closely intertwined with the Split Labor Market theory. The middlemen minorities form their ethnic enclaves and ethnic business, which perpetuates the split labor market. With each group employing their own ethnic kin, it creates

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[54] Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Middleman Minorities." *American Sociological Review* 38.5 (1973). http://www.jstor.org/stable/2094409

ethnic competition in the industry, the split labor market. Theoretically, this can be extended to explain various gender pay disparities as men were seen as more valuable then women, traditionally, thus paid more, creating another split labor market.

3j. Intersection of Bonachich, Brubaker and Tajfel

Bonacich theoretically differs from Brubaker in that groupness as an event is just that, an event where as the split labor market and middleman minority theories are still prevalent in American society. The current split labor market exists somewhat between the established *American* society and the fear of new immigrants taking their jobs, which is not a new line of thought. It was the same reasons for the split labor markets that occurred in the early 20th century.

Bonacich's theories relate to those of group identity formation of Brubaker and Tajfel. Bonacich is stressing the ethnic segregation imposed by the out-group, which creates groupness and group identity for both parties. Tajfel's theories concerning the creation of social identity relate to Brubaker's groupness theories in this context as both stress the importance of an identity in maintaining groupness. Again, the labor movement failed to retain a consistent identity. The movement has survived various shifts in identity, from ethnic to vaguely political, to the proliferation of business unionism. Business unionism is not synonymous with identity. It is not and has not been enough to maintain the strength of the movement, especially considering the social justice roots of the labor movement. The CIO and the IWW had originally set out to create a broader labor/worker identity. One not dependent upon ethnicity or race but on everyone as equals. The ideology of these two organizations was quite similar to socialism. But this did happen. These groups in the end were deemed too radical for the populace. With that the labor

movement was forced to construct itself around identities that were already in place, ethnic, racial, craft, and the like. As these various identities faded so did the strength of labor.

Chapter Four: The Jewish Case

The Jewish Diaspora is one of the three *classic* Diaspora groups. The majority of Jewish immigrants to the United States ventured primarily from Poland and Russia. There was a sizeable settlement of Jews in New York City through out the late 1800's and early 1900's. The story of the Jews in New York is similar to the majority of other immigrant groups of the day. An intersection of poverty, oppression, famine, desire for freedom fueled many émigrés. While other ethnic groups assimilated eventually becoming *Americans*, no longer Irish, Italian, German, British and the like, the Jews remained Jews. Jewish identity was able to maintain itself in America with many traditions remaining intact. This fact could lead to the continuance of the *Jewish* Diaspora as opposed to merely the Jewish population becoming assimilated and dropped their ethnic identity as it occurred with so many other early immigrant/diasporic groups.

4a. Role of the Jewish community in the labor movement

The role of the Jewish Diaspora in the formation of the American labor movement is undeniable. Morris U Schappes wrote in 1950 about the role of Jewish identity in the labor movement the role that the Jews played in carving out their specific niches within the movement as radical militant/socialists. Schappes explicitly states "It was not until the 1880s that a distinct Jewish sector emerges in the general labor movement in the United States and maintains its identity for some half a century thereafter"[55]. Henry Feingold describes the labor movement as "the principal institution developed by East European Jewry in American"[56] which in itself is

[55] Schappes, Morris U. Jews and the American Labor Movement, 1850-1880. *Stories of Three Hundred Years:VI* (1954). http://jewishcurrents.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Jews-American-Labor-Movement-Schappes.pdf

[56] Michels, Tony. *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005), 16.

quite a loftily statement but one that holds a certain amount of truth. Some of the most famous and infamous early leaders were young, female, Jewish immigrants. Where some were more radical then others (Emma Goldman and Clara Lemlich) the two managed to emerge as powerful leaders of the times. Combining traditional Jewish/socialist traditions, both succeeded in making a measurable impact. Lemlich was one of the first to call for a strike in the garment industry, a call that would lead to the Uprising of 20,000[57]. What these women and many others succeeded in doing was unifying working people by utilizing the connections made within the Jewish community to gain support. According to Glazer and Moynihan the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (IGLWU), which kept track of the religious affiliation of its members, reported a drop in Jewish membership between the 1940s, at which Jewish membership was roughly 75 percent of the membership, dropping to just 44 percent in 1958. The issue here relates to the decrease of Jewish identification in the union, which further relates to the failing of a working class conscious. Although the Jewish membership decreased, the ILGWU leadership remained in the hands of the Jewish members, even as the demographics of the union changed following an influx of Puerto Rican members.

The stories concerning Jewish activism in the labor movement in New York City are numerous. This group accomplished so much in what was truly a very short period of time. As solidifying a new labor identity outside of the traditional ethnic incarnations, became difficult,

[57] 1909 strike called in part by Clara Lemlich demanding garment workers walk out in protest of unfair wages and poor working conditions. Many arrests were made. Lemlich herself was beaten into the hospital by enforcers hired by factory owners. She reappeared on the picket line the next day. The strike lasted eleven weeks.

the unions rooted in Jewish identity were able to survive, as Bruce Raynor stated shortly after his election as President of UNITE HERE[58] in 2001

> It's a Jewish union in terms of its beliefs and ideals. It views itself as much more than wages and benefits. It's deeply rooted in the traditions of social justice and concern for the least of us. When I say 'Jewish union,' that's what I mean.[59]

Raynor perfectly encompasses the original *idea* of unions and organizing. This train of thought was not unique to Jewish organizations, but it could be argued that a lot of the thought did originate with the Jewish organizations as evidenced by the socialist teachings to Russian immigrant Jews by the already present German immigrants in the late 1800s. Greenwald wrote:

> Protocol [of Peace][60]was almost entirely the creation of Jewish-Americans. The leaders of both industry and labor, as well as the middle-class reformers who crafted the Protocol shared a common religious, if not ethnic, identity and community. This fact, often overlooked by labor relations scholars, is of critical importance in understanding the development of modern labor relations. Anti-Semitism, a sense of a shared collective identity, and a common ethnic experience allowed labor, management, and reformers to come together in ways others had not been able to before.[61]

This document is telling in the nature of the Jewish involvement in the labor movement and just how strong the impact of the Jewish presence was. The protocol, while it did not save workers from catastrophe, was still an important step in reforming the factories and lives of all working people, not only the Jews.

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[58] Current incarnation of the ILGWU with an acronym representing (formerly) Unions *of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union*

[59] http://forward.com/articles/105010/from-our-archives-garment-workers-new-chief-says/#ixzz1r4PjjQqr

[60] Document singed following the 1910 'Great Revolt' in which 60,000 garment workers walked off the job in order to gain union recognition which guaranteed employees better wages, hours, working conditions, minimal healthcare and arbitration hearings for grievances.

[61]Greenwald, Richard A. "More than a Strike": Ethnicity, Labor Relations, and the Origins of the Protocol of Peace in the New York Ladies' Garment Industry." *Business and Economic History* 27.2 (1998), 318. http://www.hnet.org/~business/bhcweb/publications/BEHprint/v027n2/p0318-p0329.pdf

4b. Notes on Specific Jewish Contributions

There are multiple instances in which ethnic identity has come to light in the labor movement. One of the most notable events for the Jews in this context, after the uprising of 20,000 and the Peace Protocol was the culmination of two events, which was the 1911 Triangle Factory Fire. The fire was the deadliest workplace accident to occur in New York history in 90 years.[6263] The fire lasted only a half hour but in that short time claimed 146 lives. The bulk of those were young Jewish and Italian immigrants. This point was always stressed. There were not young *American* girls, these were Jewish and Italian girls, working to help their families. The Jewish girls were required to work on Saturdays, violating the Sabbath. An interesting twist in the Triangle story is that the factory owners, Max Blanck and Isaac Harris were both Jewish themselves. Ultimately, they were businessmen, and treated all their employees as such. Von Drehle recounts the stories of multiple girls working in the factory (the average age of death was 17). The stories all read nearly the same. *Living the Brooklyn/Lower East Side with a family member. Sending most of the earnings back to Russia or Italy to send for more family.* This provides an accurate and jarring picture of the demographics of factory employees. The difficult lives of these young women only made the story more horrific. It also brought a sense of humanity to the immigrant populations. Both of these groups, the Italians and the Jews were not *white* at this period of history. Accounts of the fire state that nearly half of the employees could not speak English or spoke very broken English. Following the tragedy, fire regulations were forcefully implemented and maintained. The ILGWU was also able to use this tragic event as a rallying point to build support and gain new members.

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[62] David Von Drehle, *The Fire That Changed America* (Waterville, Me: Thorndike 2004)
[63] This 'record' was broken in 2001 with the collapse of the World Trade Centers.

4c. Maintenance of Jewish Identity

The days of ethnically divided unions are in the past. The advantage provided by ethnically divided organizations was a strong sense of group identity and group solidarity, relating to Bonacich and the consequences of split labor markets. Which could be affiliated with the Jewish Disasporic identity. Other Diaspora groups have lost that unifying sense of identity and groupness, similar to Brubaker theory of groupness as an event. This mode of thinking is also aligned with the theories set forth by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*, in which he describes the decline of American civic culture. Putnam cites the decreasing membership of group organizations including fraternal organizations such as the Elks or Knights of Columbus Women's leagues, Boy Scouts, labor unions and the like.

Putnam's theories, the labor movement and the Jewish Diaspora converge at multiple points. As Raynor stated, the idea of the Jewish union extends far beyond the Jews. It is reminiscent of the ideology of the Knights of Labor, who did not only seek to protect workers rights but peoples rights including a large number of immigrants, Jews and other disposed diasporic communities. Putnam also relates the current state of American civic culture (or lack thereof) to Alexis de Tocqueville *Democracy in America*. de Tocqueville wrote:

> Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition,' he observed, 'are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types--religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and more associations in America."[64]

The union movement has a long-standing history in American culture. Even prior to the Industrial Revolution, there were worker guilds aimed at protecting workers. Diasporic communities often found it relatively easy to organize, as there was always a common thread

[64] Robert D. Putnam. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 1

within the ethnic groups merely by being co-ethnics. Hadassa Kosak writes "the immigrant community acquired a distinctive ethnic voice that differentiated it from the dominant national voice of American society"[65]. While Kosak is writing specifically on the Jewish population in this situation, this line of thinking can easily extend to most immigrant groups present in the United States not only historically speaking but also extending through the present day. This method of analysis is quite relevant to the formation of ethnic organizations. Unsurprisingly, it is much easier to organize along ethnic lies as the ties that bind you are already in place leaving out any need to create a new bond of new group identity.

> Returning to the issues of identity among Diaspora groups, Emma Goldman said
>
> Owing to a lack of a country of their own, [Jews] developed, crystallized and idealized their cosmopolitan reasoning faculty … working for the great moment when the earth will become the home for all, without distinction of ancestry or race.[66]

The fascinating aspect of this idea is that in terms of American society, this did largely play out. While many third and fourth generation descendants of immigrants happily tout their ethnicity, or in the words of Herbert Gans, symbolic ethnicity, it is essentially a non-issue. This sort of desire for a broader identity aligns with the early organizing strategy of the International Labor Union whose call to arms was, as stated by union President George E. McNeill "to band together Jew, Greek, Irishman, American, English and German, and all nationalities in a grand labor brotherhood"[67]. This sentiment was echoed by the Knights of Labor, which was formed after the deterioration of ILU in 1881. McNeill's vision never came to life as Greeks, Irish, English, Germans, etc all became American. Often times forgetting the struggles of the early days (an issue that would not arise for quite some time though). Once again, this was not exactly the case

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[65] Hadassa Kosak, *Cultures of Opposition: Jewish Immigrant Workers, New York City, 1881-1900*, (Albany: State University of New York, 2000),12
[66] http://www.ajhs.org/scholarship/chapters/chapter.cfm?documentID=208
[67] Schappes, Morris U

for the Jewish population. Jewish culture found a way to evolve and adapt in order to survive the strains of assimilation, which was the basis for the starting for the entire Reform Judaism[68] movement.

4d. Brief notes of socialism in the Jewish Community

Yet another crucial aspect of Jewish Diaspora identity is the prevalence of Socialist beliefs among the group[69]. Intense poverty conditions gave Jews a reason to speak out against their employers, strikes and campaigns were led against unfair employers, bakeries, Jewish housewives led an action in which they threw meat at butchers for increasing the prices of Kosher meat. Tony Michaels describes it "sooner or later just about every individual walked a picket line, marched in a parade, protested some injustice or knew someone who has"[70]. The desire to speak out became expected of Jewish immigrants. Popular journalist of the day, Ida Van Etten said "The Russian Jews are naturally radicals on all social questions…Thousands of the disciples of Karl Marx may be found among organized Jewish workingmen"[71]. This radical Jewish environment was easily maintained until the outbreak of World War I with the first red scare.

To contrast the idea that the majority of Jews quickly assimilated into the labor

[68] Many of the early Jewish immigrants were quite conservative or Orthodox in their religious practices. Orthodoxy was often difficult to keep to in industrialized times especially in poorer households in which the children were doing factory work, which required work on Saturday, violating the rules of the Sabbath.

[69] This is not an attempt to over emphasize socialism in the Jewish community. Judaism, like all religions is a spectrum. Obviously there were (and still are) a multitude of strong Orthodox and Hasidic communities present in New York but the inclusion of the early Socialist tendencies adds an interesting dimension to the Jewish experience especially the context of the labor movement, which has historically been fairly left of center.

[70] Tony Michels, *A Fire in Their Hearts: Yiddish Socialists in New York*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2005) 8.

[71] "Russian Jews as Desirable Immigrants," *Forum 15* (April 1893)

movement, Herberg presents the case that "the Jewish immigrant worker did not take to trade unionism easily. Indeed, the 'individualism' and 'unorganizability' of the Jewish worker were familiar complaints until relatively recent times."[72] Herberg was also quick to point out the readiness of Jews to strike. The ease of organization among Jews appears to have come after the initial wave of small, independent strikes eventually paving the way for more long lasting dedication to the union movement.

4d. The Jews and other Ethnic groups

The continuance of the idea of a Jewish Diaspora can easily be tied into Rogers Brubaker's theories on the '*Diaspora* Diaspora', in which he claims that 'if everyone is diasporic then no one is distinctively so'. Which raises a multitude of interesting questions. Brubaker also chooses to use the broadest definition of diasporas, including *Internet* diasporas among other more obscure terms. Yet his argument feels strangely valid in explaining the early influx of American immigration. Naturally, there were Americans present but the amount of self-identified immigrants and ethnics was high. New York City like most coastal cities at the time were accepting immigrants in droves. The new arrivals drifted to ethnic enclaves, which assisted in keeping the culture of the old country alive in the new country. Freeman deconstructs the ethnic makeup of these neighborhoods in the 1940s and 1950s

> In the 1940s and 1950s, most working class New Yorkers lived in neighborhoods that had a distinctly ethnic flavor: Brooklyn's Sunset Park for example, with its heavy concentration of Scandinavians, or Brownsville, Williamsburg, and Borough Park, Jewish neighborhoods in the same borough, or Harlem, with its African American, Puerto Rican, and Italian enclaves, or Chinatown, then emerging as the largest concentration of Asians in the Western hemisphere, Greenpoint, Brooklyn was Polish; Yorkville, on Manhattans Upper East Side, German, Irish, and Hungarian. Such clustering was to an extent voluntary. But also resulted from discrimination. New York State did not outlaw

[72] Herberg, 6

discrimination in public housing until 1955.[73]

The neighborhoods prior to the 1940s and 50s were composed differently but the idea of ethnic neighborhoods was the same. While neighborhoods did often have a distinctively ethnic feel, they remained mixed. Even in the most Jewish neighborhoods, the Jews only compromised roughly a third of the population. This action contributed in creating distinct ethnic groups in the United States, but also the melding of cultures.

The discussion of symbolic ethnicity raises a few interesting points in discussing the difference between the lasting identities of these early immigrant groups. Focusing on the early portions of Gans' discussion of symbolic identity, the Jews seem to be in quite a unique position. Gans points out the possible differentiation of the Jewish experience as a critique of the straight-line theory

> A second criticism of straight-line theory has centered on its treatment of all ethnic groups as essentially similar, and its failure, specifically, to distinguish between religious groups like *the* Jews and nationality groups like the Italians, Poles etc. Jews, for example, are a 'peoplehood' with a religious and cultural tradition of thousands of years, but without an 'old country' to which they owe allegiance or nostalgia, while Italians, Poles and other participants in the 'new immigration' came from parts of Europe which in some cases did not even become nations until after the immigrants had arrived in America. [74]

Gans' amendment to the straight line theory, assuming that there is no acculturation and less assimilation in the first generation continuing to certain levels of ethnic retention among the second generation and petering out with the emergence of the third and fourth generations appears to apply to the Jews a bit less then it does the majority of other groups. Again, Gans points to the secularity of religious culture,

> Third generation ethnics can join an ethnic organization, or take part in formal or informal organizations composed largely of fellow-ethnics; but they can also find their identity by 'affiliating' with an abstract collectivity which does not exist as an interacting

[73] Freeman, "Working-class New York Life and Labor since World War II." 29
[74] Gans, 2

> group. That collectivity, moreover, can be mythic or real, contemporary or historical. On the one hand, Jews can express their identity as synagogue members, or as participants in a consciousness-raising group consisting mostly of Jewish women. On the other hand, they can also identify with the Jewish people as a long-suffering collectivity which has been credited with inventing monotheism. If they are non-religious, they can identify with Jewish liberal or socialist political cultures, or with a population which has produced many prominent intellectuals and artists in the last 100 years.[75]

The role of ethnicity as adopted by the third generation enables the children of immigrants to identify easily with the aspects of their ethnicity that are convenient and available, partially eliminating the need for ethnic neighborhoods for if one wants to express their ethnicity it can be done with co-ethnics living anywhere.

Examining this in the context of the labor movement, the ethnic unions remained relatively strong into the second generation still utilizing aspects of their ethnic identity. Such was the case with the increase of Puerto Rican members into the ILGWU even as the leadership remained largely Jewish.[76] This ethnic identity extends to the Italian *Hod Carriers* [77](described as a common laborer of sorts), who following a 1909 takeover existed only in puppet form. This case extends also to the Irish with the initial formation of the Transport Workers Union[78]. Again, this was not the case with the Jewish population. Raynor is committed to the early ideals of Jewish unionism as espoused by ILGWU in the early 20th century. Not just maintaining ideals, the Jewish Labor Committee[79] is still active in the national labor movement. This is not to discount the current immigrant organizing efforts, but the idea that one group was able to maintain such a strong ethnic identity across generations is something to be noted, especially

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[75] Gans, 8
[76] Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan. *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negros, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City*. (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T., 1963)
[77] Ibid, 191
[78] Joshua Freeman, *In Transit: the Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966: with a New Epilogue*.
[79] http://www.jewishlaborcommittee.org/

when compared to the other groups of the time who fell in line with the Straight Line Theory.

The question of maintained of Jewish identity in the wake of assimilation is often answered harshly. The more conservative Jews remaining in Eastern Europe assumed once Jews arrived to the States intermarriage was inevitable and within two generations, the religion would be lost the country. This was not the case but the debate between Jews living in Israel and the Diaspora Jews still exists, as evidenced by the A.B. Yeoshua controversy[80]. Another aspect of the ability of the Jewish Diaspora to maintain such a title could be connected to the possibility that Jews were not ever fully accepted as being white. White is more often then not reserved for Protestants and Catholics or other Christian denominations; nowhere do the Jews fit into those classical representations of whiteness. Concerning the role of Yiddish in American Jewry, a literary critic in 1909 said

> When one ponders Jewish life on American soil and ask: what is actually happening here? A renaissance or an agonizing moment of death?...We see one big, silent, veiled question mark, how can one prophesize about out future when the present is so unclear, so insubstantial, so uncrystallized, so full of contradictions and contrasts?[81]

While this comment is explicitly about the survival of the Yiddish language, it feels very much relevant to the questions faced by early Jews concerning the maintenance of the religion and culture as a whole. Jewishness as it known today has been able to survive. The most orthodox sects of Judaism have too been able to stand the test of time.

[80] A.B. Yeoshua claimed all Jews living outside of Israel are not really Jews.
[81] Di konstitutsye fun der 'Arbeter tsaytung,'" in A. Mukdoyni and Yankev Shatski, eds.,Yorbukhfun Amopteyl, vol. 1 (New York: YIVO, 1938), pp. 341-342, 346.

4e. Concluding Remarks

Ultimately, it is difficult to address the many factors contributing to the survival of Jewish identity. By heeding the calls of people like Raynor, committed to upholding the traditional values of an old society in a new world, it is easy to understand the longstanding commitment to maintaining Jewish identity especially in the context of the labor movement. The idea is not to protect only the Jews, but all working people. The desire to construct a larger movement, as Emma Goldman, the Knights of Labor, the International Labor Union and others stated. This thought harkens back to de Tocqueville initial impression of the United States, his admirence of the associations formed by all Americans. In some ways these 'associations' still exist, the labor movement/trade unions being prime examples. de Tocqueville is alluding to world in which Bruce Raynor still believes. Putnam had faith in this but his research findings left him disenchanted. Organizations should not be divided by ethnicity or ethnic identity but at the time roughly the turn of the century, it was a logical step to take. Unfortunately, by following the Straight Line Theory, many groups appeared to have lost their sense of identity in the assimilation process Jews included, but it is not ethnic identity in the labor movement that needs to be re-created. There needs to be a movement towards a working class identity which is what was lost in the transition from ethnic identity to American identity. Once more returning to Kosak, she stated that Jews resisted the American philosophy of rugged individualism. While this trend did not continue into the modern day, it is important to remember the communitarian and socialist roots of the early Jewish immigrants.

Chapter Five: The Irish Experience

Race in the United States was not always confined to the current model of Black and White. During the early waves of immigration in the late 19th/early 20th centuries, the categorization of race extended the multiple ethnic identities of the peoples of Europe. Instead of simply being white, people were more often categorized as English, Irish, German, Jewish and the like. Each *race* was loaded with a certain stereotype and set of boundaries. Following Neil Sandberg's Straight Line Theory, as interpreted by Gans, "in which acculturation and assimilation are viewed as secular trends that culminate in the eventual absorption of the ethnic group into the larger culture and general population". The Irish present an interesting case. According to Glazer and Moynihan, the first wave of Irish immigration occurred between 1846 and 1850 with 133,730 residents of New York City being of Irish decent. By 1855, 34 percent of voters identified as Irish and by 1890, 80 percent of the New York City population was said to be foreign born with roughly a third of that number being Irish.[82] The Irish had a large presence in New York City and in many ways that impact is still felt today, especially in the union movement.

5a. The Whitening of the Irish

Ethnic groups gradually became less ethnic and more white. The lessening of accents, foregoing of 'old country' traditions in favor of new 'American' ways gave these groups the opportunity to overcome their ethnicity and be *white.* Roediger quoted Robert T. Devlin, the United States Attorney General at San Francisco as saying "There is considerable uncertainty as

[82] Glazer and Moynihan, 219

to just what nationalities come within the term 'white person'". [83] Roediger reiterates this idea in stating "Many groups now commonly termed part of the 'white' or 'white-ethnic' population were in fact historically regarded as nonwhite, or of debatable racial heritage by the host American citizenry".[84] This was precisely the case that Roediger has argued previously for the Irish and a case that is easily extended to the Jewish population among other immigrant populations. Gutman also wrote extensively on these issues of not being seen as *white* by the American *white* citizenry.

Although, this only worked if the group in question was already seen as white by the bulk of the population. The trajectory of overcoming race is radically different for those who emigrated from South American countries or African Americans who were already in the states and recently freed from slavery. [85] Nagel describes this point utilizing Roediger's explanations of whiteness

> An example is 'whiteness' which Roediger (1991: 13-14) argues emerged as an American ethnicity due to the efforts of working class (especially Irish) whites who sought to distance themselves and their labor from blacks and blackness; by distinguishing their 'free labor' from 'slave labor,' they redefined their work from 'white slavery' to 'free labor'.[86]

There were consequences to adopting this behavior though. Halley, Eshleman, and Vijaya point to the historical tendencies of white working class groups to align with other white groups and organizations that routinely exclude the black population, such as the American Federation of

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[83] David R Roediger *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness: Essays on Race, Politics, and Working Class History.* (London: Verso, 2000), 181
[84] Ibid, 184
[85] This discussion is completely lacking the unique issues faced by women, especially women of color, whose issues were often over looked by the white women. Looking at a time before suffrage was extended to women leaves a certain amount to be desired.
[86] Nagel, Joane. "Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture." *Social Problems* 41.1 (1994): 149. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3096847

Labor. These exclusionary practices have left the working class more vulnerable and unable to harness any true power.[87]

The majority of new immigrant groups experienced a certain level of racial/ethnic discrimination. This case is especially interesting when examining the evolution of the Irish in the United States. Following the traditional narrative of victim Diasporas, the Irish came (largely) escaping the crushing poverty forced upon them by the potato famine. The largest waves of Irish immigration came in the year 1840 with the height of the Potato Famine. By the year 1855 there were over 200,000[88] Irish living in New York City. The journey to the States was not a pleasant one. Unsanitary conditions and lack of adequate heat, water, and food led to numerous deaths. Those that were lucky enough to survive arrived to a hostile environment. An ethnic hierarchy was already in place. Due to this hierarchy, many Irish were often living in squalor in the Five Points district of New York City. In 1855, the Five Points district was 37% native Irish[89], which is not taking into account the American born children. Though in time, this ethnic hierarchy would disintegrate in favor of a predominantly American white culture. The Irish found a way to overcome their *Irishness* and achieve the 'American Dream'. The more interesting aspects of the story stem from the fact the Irish were often seen on a level lesser then that of African Americans, "My master is a great tyrant. He treats me as badly as if I was a common Irishman"[90], making ascension into the political realm that much more difficult. This sentence is telling of the harsh treatment faced by the Irish settlers. Again, this sort of treatment and hostility did not last forever. Ultimately, a *white* identity opposed to an *Irish* identity was

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[87] Jean Halley, Amy Eshleman, and Ramya Mahadevan Vijaya. *Seeing White: An Introduction to White Privilege and Race*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011)
[88] Kenny, Kevin. "Irish Immigrants in the United States." *e-Journal USA* 13 (February 2008)
[89] Dolan, J. P.. "Immigrants in the City: New York's Irish and German Catholics." *Church History* 41.3, (1972). 354. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3164221
[90] August Pleasonton diary, May 17, 1838. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

achieved and being Irish was no longer a hindrance. The most notable example being the election of President John F. Kennedy. This type of overcoming one's race can easily be related to the text of Henry Louis Gates Jr. about Anatole Broyard, who was so easily able to hide his *Blackness*, as Gates described it, "Broyard was black when he got into the subway in Brooklyn but as soon as he got out at West 4th he became white"[91]. The case of the Irish, it was not so easy as stepping off of the subway, but rather waiting generations for accents to fade and a group of new arrivals to discriminate against.

5b. Exploitation

The discussion of the Irish experience extends far beyond early racism, as the notions associated with Irish identity had radically changed. One could argue that there is a connection between those who are discriminated against and the subsequent exploitation of their labor at the advantage of the discriminator. Glazer and Moynihan state this point

> Around the turn of the twentieth century, American experienced a huge immigration from abroad (especially from Europe) to the United States. The arrivals were met in the cities by contempt and exploitation—but also by a rising sprit of progressivism[92]

Much of the progressivism can be witnessed in the formation of labor organizations and other organizations as Putnam mentions. The exploitation came in terms of overpriced housing for unsafe conditions, underpaid and hazardous work. The Irish were stereotyped as being large, drunken brutes only suited for heavy manual labor. Their value as humans was nonexistent, often seen as worth less than a slave. Ignateiv describes it as "In the South, they were occasionally employed where it did not make sense to risk the life of a slave."[93] This sort of exploitation was

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[91] Gates, Henry L. 1996 White Like Me, in The New Yorker, June 17
[92] Glazer and Moynihan, 3
[93] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White.* (London, Routledge 1995)

especially evident in the constructions of the Erie Canal in upstate New York. Workers were often paid in whiskey, which they drank on the job. Way describes their living via testimony by a British Traveler, James Buckingham

> I never saw anything approaching to the scene before us, in dirtiness and disorder…whiskey and tobacco seemed the chief delights of the men; and of the women and children, no language could give an adequate idea of their filthy condition, in garments and person.[94]

Buckingham continues to describe the Irish as drunken, brutish, filthy, nothing the nearby townspeople often feared them due to the frequency of violent outbursts (including setting fire to their living quarters). Way describes the life of the canaller as such:

> Canaller society was not some sort of freak. The social tensions at its hart, the vice and violence that seethed on the surface, and the impermanence that undermined its foundations manifested forces that were everywhere at work within North America's developing working class. Each canaller community struggled to contain the simmering pressures that periodically boiled over into violence, pressures fueled by exploitation and fed by social and economic marginalization.[95]

This was 1825, just before the industrial revolution truly took off. The amount of outside help for these workers was minimal as they were confined to the pathway of the canal.

Craft/artesian/skilled worker guilds were established, but the structure for these masses of unskilled immigrant laborers were still embryonic. The need for various forms of protection was evident. Again, one must not forget this was not a unique situation. These horrendous conditions were felt by the bulk of new laborers trying to incorporate themselves into a society that was not respective to anything other then what could be gained in capital. The canaller society can be seen as a classic case of split labor market theory.[96]

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[94] Peter Way. "Evil Humors and Ardent Spirits: The Rough Culture of Canal Construction Laborers." *The Journal of American History* 79.4 (1993): 1402 http://www.jstor.org/stable/2080210

[95] Ibid, 1403

[96] Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market"

5c. The creation of a 'new' Irish identity: Radical vs. Conservative

Examining at the whitening of the Irish it had grave effects of the structure of the labor movement and the entire notion of a *working class*. As it is described by Halley, Eshleman, and Vijaya,

> However, in spite of sharing many concerns, historically white working class people have organized against working class people of color by joining white working class movements and workplaces. And due to this, the working class in general has been less powerful and more vulnerable.[97]

This is exactly the thinking that perpetuated the business unionism structure of the American Federation of Labor and assisted in the failure of creating a new labor identity. But this is the track the Irish had envisioned, quite the opposite of the Jewish path. While the Jews were much more interested in the offerings of Socialism, there were two distinct tracts within the Irish community relating to the theory. On one side, there was the

> …Church's embrace of the 'pure and simple' unionism of the AFL helped pull the American labor movement in a more conservative direction and helped inoculate American workers against the 'virus of socialism'.[98]

Not only contrasted with the Jewish point of view, this is also opposed to the other aspect of Irish-American identity which was more aligned with the likes of Mike Quill and the other founders of the Transport Workers Union, who viewed themselves as

> …Heirs of James Connolly[99] and the combination of Irish nationalism, international socialism, and militant industrial unionism that he [James Connolly] had preached and died for.[100]

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[97] Halley, Eshleman, andVijaya, 73
[98] Bruce Nelson. "Irish Americans, Irish Nationalism, and the "Social" Question, 1916-1923" *boundary* 2, (2004), 158. 147-178; doi:10.1215/01903659-31-1-147
[99] Irish Republican Socialist leader, quite a rare combination. The British executed him in 1916 over his involvement in the Easter Uprising.
[100] Freeman, "In Transit: the Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966: with a New Epilogue" 47

This places the Irish in an interesting situation, one that likely multiple immigrant groups experienced. Either align with the more radical side or work towards building a more mainstream identity. Concerning the Irish, the mainstream won the ideological battle as the notion of traditional Irish-Catholic conservatives has prevailed with such sentiment as "…the argument goes, the Irish presence at the heart of the industrial working class served as a drag on the radicalism of the labor movement and of labor based political parties"[101]. This sentiment is quite unfortunate and can be seen again with Mike Quill and the TWU ultimate distancing from the early ties with the communist party.[102] In this sense, the Irish succeeded in creating groupness as an event. The perception of themselves by the rest of the population created a very strong sense of in-groupness within the Irish community as instead of forming two distinct Irish identities, one ultimately succeeded in defining the Irish-American culture.

The presence of the Irish in the labor movement is vast. Freeman details the expansive role of the Irish in the formation of the Transport Workers Union (TWU), but also their influence on TWU's predecessors[103], the Interborough Rapid Transit Company and Brooklyn-Manhattan Transit Corporation, and the whole of the transport industry. The Third Avenue Railway line is quoted as being built by over 90% Irish workforce[104].

The discussion concerning the differing ideologies of new immigrants in American culture can be seen in the Triangle Factory Owners as well, Blanck and Harris, while Jewish were intent on radical strike breaking techniques during the Uprising of 20,000, going so far are

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[101] Nelson, 148
[102] Freeman, In Transit: the Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966: with a New Epilogue"
[103] In the wake of mass layoffs from both IRT and BMT a group of workers began a new organizing effort, partially with the help of the Communist Party USA. The new union, TWU was ultimately faced by Mike Quill
[104] Ibid, 27

to hire people to violently attack the women (and men) on the picket line.[105] It can be theorized that behavior similar to this was and remains a defining factor in the decline of union strength.

The interesting aspect of the Irish case was not merely their transition from *Irish* to *white* but the true usurpation of political power. Jacob Riis first documented this change in *How the Other Half Lives* and continues to state

> The once unwelcome Irishman has been followed in his turn by the Italian, the Russian Jew, and the Chinaman, and has himself taken a hand at opposition, quite as bitter and quite as ineffectual, against these later hordes.[106]

This argument is crucial. In the early days, the mid 1800s, the Irish, as well as many other new immigrants looked to the Tammany Hall political machine for leverage in society.[107] The Irish were also able to dominate much of the labor leadership positions,

> They only constituting 7.5 percent of the labor force in 1900 but accounted for one-sixth of the teamsters, metal workers, and masons and nearly a third of plumbers, steamfitters, and boilermakers by the early 20th century, Irish Catholics headed more than fifty of the 100 affiliated national unions of the American Federation of Labor and were a major component of the unions' second level shop-floor leadership.[108]

These numbers easily point to the power the Irish held and the effect of Catholicism on the entire union structure. The Irish stance differed radically from the more socialist leaning Jews as referenced in chapter four.

Returning to the role of labor in this discussion, the whitening of the Irish, and the other immigrant groups in the United States did not pay any favors to organized labor. Becoming white took away the unifying factor of being an immigrant and trying to swell ones ranks in society, but again, that solidarity appears to have been lost once assimilation took place. This is

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[105] Von Drehle
[106] Jacob Riis *How The Other Half Lives (*New York. Dover, 1971)
[107] Glazer and Moynihan
[108] Nelson, 147

merely one part of the puzzle. There have been multiple legislative attempts (and successes) aimed at undermining the strength of the labor movement, some at the hands of these immigrant groups, but had there been a more unified working class identity in place, this possibly could have been avoided.

5d. Concluding Remarks

Society is at a different point then at the turn of 19th Century. Many groups have been able to overcome their *otherness* in the name of a more mainstream white identity. Few have been able to expand their ideas in the name of creating an identity that spans across race and ethnicity in the name of forging forward with a *better* society. As the Irish demonstrated to us in the midst of the 20th Century this is not typically a priority. The Irish appear to have fallen into Tajfel's in-group/out-group dilemma. Once ostracized as the out-group, and then able to work their way to the *in-group* only to create a new out-group to experience the same lifestyles they had previously experienced. The whitening of one group involved harms the broader community, imagined or real. Marx accurately pointed out the importance of the black role in the strengthen of the working class:

> In the United States of North America, every independence movement of the workers was paralysed so long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour cannot emancipate itself in the white skin where in the black it is branded. But out of the death of slavery a new life at once arose. The first fruit of the Civil War was the eight hours' agitation, that ran with the seven-leagued boots of the locomotive from the Atlantic to the Pacific.[109]

[109] Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Samuel Moore, and Karl Marx. *Capital,*. (Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, 1955), 12

Although, as it with more ideas that would have led to stronger working class consciousness, these sort of ideas were ignored in favor of a more individualistic attitude that has maintained itself though the present day.

The connections between class and the formation and structure of race are undeniable. This is one specific case of the Irish, which is often used as an example of becoming white and overcoming ones race but the narrative extends to other immigrant groups including the Jews, Poles, and Slavs.

Chapter Six: Conclusions

Weather or not in actuality ethnic identity is important, it is perceived as important thus making it so. The importance of identity especially ethnic identity is directly correlated with the formation of and imposition of Irish identity on the Irish immigrants and their eventual ability to transcend that identity in favor of a more Americanized identity. This case plays out in a much different fashion when discussion the retention of the ethnic Jewish identity which unlike the Irish identity did not fade. Although Jews are assimilated, it is in a way much different then their European counterparts, seen by the maintenance of the Diaspora identity. Jewish identity remains practiced and diligently maintained as a conscious effort by community members.

The relationship between these two groups is especially intriguing. The Irish came over here as just that, *Irish* but were eventually able to shed that identity and become accepted into mainstream America even flourish in the political realm. While there has been major political and economic achievement on the part of the Jews, but the idea that *Jewish* has remained a practiced identity where as Irish, Italian, and the like have become versions of symbolic ethnicities. There is still much debate over what Jewish identity actually entails, as evidenced by the A.B. Yeoshua[110] controversy, which claims there are no *real* Jews outside of Israel. Interestingly enough, many industrial towns near the turn of the 20th Century, including the pop-up towns built along the Erie Canal as Way discussed, were often appointed a *labor priest* tasked with essentially living among the workers to better understand their struggles. Much like the Jewish Labor Council, there was the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, although ACTU only lasted through the 1960s.

[110] http://www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25925B85EAF%7D/Yehoushua_Controversy_2006.pdf

The large umbrella unions, specifically the Congress of Industrial Organizations and the Industrial Workers of the World, were more focused on changing the system of capitalism entirely by unifying all working people and creating a strong working class identity in place of any ethnic or racial identities. Crain and Mathney emphasized this point in stating:

> So long as business unionism continues to be the dominant ideology of the labor movement, race, ethnicity, and gender issues will be marginalized in movement priorities and policies. Unionism's challenge to class exploitation will be deradicalized by employers' ability to exploit racial, ethnic, and gender hierarchies one another.[111]

The continued need for a new identity in the labor movement is evident, but the various identifications of members have changed. The domination of business unionism truly undermines the initial communal spirit of the movement. While the various identifications of union members have radically changed, there is still a need for identity politics within the labor movement. Ethnic identity remains a strong factor is organizing. The ethnic identities have shifted from European to other identifications. Currently, African American workers are the most likely to be union members at 13.5 percent, followed by Caucasians (11.6 %), Asians (10.1%) and Hispanics (9.7%)[112]. The Bureau of Labor Statistics and Center for Economic Policy Research also cites that the minorities included in this list are the most likely to benefit from union membership, much in the way historically minority groups benefited from unionization.

Labor was historically a group geared towards radical change. It can be interpreted that the lack of identity and proliferation of business unionism has hindered the ability of labor to achieve the sort of radical change the early leaders had initially set out to achieve. This returns to Brubaker's theory of *groupness as an event*. Labor has seen a great resurgence in the recent year.

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[111] Crain and Mathney, 1787
[112] http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm

The AFL-CIO is actively recruiting younger workers and minority groups, including recent immigrants, in order to rebuild the strength of the movement. This sort of newly revived labor identity has attracted not only new union members but many young people seeking out change. This line of thinking is clearly evidenced by looking at the protests in Madison, Wisconsin in February/March of 2011 against the governor's anti-union bills. The large-scale protests and occupation of the state house were organized by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Teaching Assistants Association[113], a graduate student organization. Recapturing the youth has long been an issue in the labor movement as the under 40 demographic has the lowest rates of unionization, which can also be attributed to the decline in manufacturing and factory position in the United States. Although, that decline has prompted unions to organize historically unorganized industries, such as restaurant workers and hotel employees.

This project demonstrates that labor needs an identity. Weather it be ethnic or class based, there needs to be an agreed upon group identity. Today's labor leaders need to learn from the past and ensure that a broad identity is established in order to maintain the long-term strength and identity of the movement.

[113] http://www.thenation.com/blog/158688/students-are-soul-wisconsins-protests

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