

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: SEX AND SOLIDARITY: CLASS AND
 GENDER IN THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR AND
 THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE
 WORLD

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This work examines women's involvement in the Knights of Labor in the late nineteenth century and the Industrial Workers of the World in the early twentieth century. Through analyzing each organization's perspective on working-class women, the lives and writings of their most prominent female leaders, and the interactions female leaders had with the rank and file women, this thesis aims to show that the KOL and IWW respectively held conflicting ideas about women members based on their class ideologies and shifting gender structures during a time of great change in American society.

SEX AND SOLIDARITY: CLASS AND GENDER IN THE KNIGHTS OF LABOR
AND THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

By

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my parents, Mike and Blenda McVey, and my grandparents, Raymond and Betty Hollis, whose support made my graduate career at the University of Maryland possible.

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List of Abbreviations

AFL	American Federation of Labor
ALU	American Labor Union
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CPUSA	United States Communist Party
ILGWU	International Ladies Garment Workers Union
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World
KOL	Knights of Labor
UMW	United Mine Workers
WDU	Workers Defense Union
WFM	Western Federation of Miners
WTUL	Women's Trade Union League

Introduction

At the 1886 General Convention of the Knights of Labor, held in Richmond, Virginia, sixteen women attended as delegates, out of a total of 660 Knights. Three served on a special committee on women's work, which had been proposed by Delegate Mary Hanafin at the previous General Convention, in 1885. The women of the committee, Mary Hanafin, Lizzy Schute, and Mary Stirling, presented findings collected via a circular sent to the Knights' women's assemblies throughout the country.

Their findings demonstrated the many difficulties faced by women workers during the latter half of the nineteenth century. They found that the average working day was ten hours long, the average wage was five dollars per week, and that despite child-labor laws in place in many states and municipalities, girls worked longer hours for less pay than did boys. At the end of the report's delivery, Mary Hanafin addressed the Assembly about the purpose of the women's committee. The committee, she asserted, "felt there was something needed to arouse the women of our Order to the fact that they were not availing themselves of the opportunities held out to them by the noble Order of the Knights of Labor, the first organization that ever gave woman a voice and vote in her own affairs."¹ Indeed, the committee's report and Hanafin's speech marked the first time that the women in the Knights of Labor specifically addressed concerns of wage-earning women to the General Assembly since their admission to the order in 1881.

¹ Knights of Labor, *Record of the Proceedings of the Ninth General Assembly of the Knights of Labor of America*, October 1886, 163.

Almost twenty years later, the Industrial Workers of the World held its inaugural convention in Chicago in 1905. A handful of women delegates participated in founding this new industrial labor union, including such luminaries and labor veterans as Mother Jones and Lucy Parsons. Parsons, the only woman delegate to deliver a speech on the convention floor, gave an impassioned argument in support of women's full participation in the new union. She pointed out women's lack of political and economic power, saying, "We are the slaves of the slaves. We are exploited more ruthlessly than men. Wherever wages are to be reduced the capitalist class use women to reduce them, and if there is anything that you men should do in the future it is to organize the women." She went on to reflect on her many years of experience in the labor movement, the nature of Socialism, and the economic aims of the working class, addressing men and women alike. Other delegates attempted to get Mother Jones, the United Mine Workers organizer famed for her fiery oratory skills, to speak, but she refused.² Though they spoke to two very different organizations almost twenty years apart, these women all recognized that for female wage laborers, gender played a fundamental role in shaping the experiences, opportunities, and challenges that they faced in class-conscious labor organizing.

While the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World were very different groups in terms of organization, political motives, and class ideologies, both held a radical moral vision that sought to change not just workers' living and working conditions, but society at large. The Knights used the language of republicanism and the labor theory of value to critique the practice of wage labor in

² *Proceedings of the First Convention of the Industrial Workers of the World*, (New York Labor News Company, 1905), 167-172.

capitalism, and the IWW aimed to completely overthrow capitalism by organizing workers as a class and seizing the means of production. As part of these visions, they advocated for working-class solidarity and welcoming women into their ranks on an equal basis with men.³ Importantly, the way both organizations perceived and treated women held certain similarities despite their differences in ideology and organizational structure. For working-class women, ideals of class solidarity in radical labor organizations intersected with the larger “Woman Question” that proved pervasive throughout American life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁴

Working-class women laboring in industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries faced significant challenges, as both wage earners and homemakers, in conceptualizing their roles in labor activism and in American society at large. These struggles played out in radical labor organizations as well in as trade unions and woman-centered reform groups. Women’s involvement in trade unions is well documented and has been studied in depth by numerous scholars who have made invaluable contributions to labor history and gender studies, including Alice Kessler-Harris, Annelise Orleck, and Ardis Cameron. Other scholars, such as Leon Fink,

³ Preamble and Declaration of Principles of the Knights of Labor, Broad sides and Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, North Carolina; “The I.W.W. Preamble,” *Solidarity*, Philadelphia, PA, January 29, 1910; Susan Levine, *Labor’s True Woman: Carpet Weavers, Industrialization, and Labor Reform in the Gilded Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1981), 103-104; Meredith Tax, *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880-1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980), 125.

⁴ For more on the late nineteenth and early twentieth century conceptions of the Woman Question, see: Mary Jo Buhle, *Women and American Socialisms, 1870-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981) and T.R. Smith, ed., *The Woman Question* (New York: The Modern Library, 1918).

Melvyn Dubofsky, and Howard Kimeldorf, have studied the political and cultural contributions of the KOL and the IWW, and have conceptualized a continuation of the class-conscious spirit of radical solidarity that embodied both movements. However, the current scholarship does not adequately address how class formation and the Woman Question intersected and shifted throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly in the context of labor organizations that sought to enact radical societal change. Studying women's involvement in the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World brings questions of class and gender intersections to the fore in a period of significant social and economic shifts.

As the Gilded Age dawned in the late 1800s and progressed throughout the nineteenth century, the working class in America experienced a fundamental change from a mostly agrarian-based economy to an industrialized system that brought tens of millions of workers into factories and the wage labor force. Between 1870 and 1910, the number of workers employed in industrialized jobs increased dramatically from 3.5 to 14.2 million. Economic growth also brought millions of immigrants to the United States; approximately 12 million men, women, and children immigrated to the United States from 1865 to 1900, and approximately 14 million immigrated from 1900-1919. Many of these migrants flocked to cities and industrial towns to find work.⁵

Many of these booming industries came to employ women workers, frequently immigrants or daughters of immigrants, with the textile and clothing

⁵ David Montgomery, "American Labor, 1865-1902: the Early Industrial Era," *Monthly Labor Review* 99, no. 7 (July 1976): 10-11. Ellen Carol DuBois and Lynn Dumenil, *Through Women's Eyes: an American History with Documents*, Appendix A-20, "Immigration to the United States, 1900-2013."

industries the most common industries for women to find paid work. Though the feminine ideal of the late 1800s, based in white, native, middle-class culture, called for women and men to exist in separate spheres and for women to provide domestic care to their families while men earned a living, this societal model of the family wage ideology did not prove realistic for a significant percentage of working-class women. As the economy industrialized and working-class families experienced economic uncertainty, more women moved into the wage workforce. In *Out to Work*, Alice Kessler-Harris argues that by the late nineteenth century, many women participated in the labor force out of necessity. In her study, Kessler-Harris notes that unskilled workers and their families simply could not subsist on the wages of a single person. She provided an example from Lawrence, Massachusetts, where in 1875 the average male worker earned \$500 per year but basic essentials cost at least \$600 for a family.⁶

According to Claudia Goldin's study of women workers from 1870 to 1920, single women comprised the majority of white women workers, the majority of whom worked either in manufacturing or in service positions. Most worked in unskilled or semiskilled positions where they learned their trade through on-the-job training, and many working in the manufacturing sector often earned wages based on the piece-rate system, in which they were paid according to production rather than by the hour. Goldin also found that women's manufacturing work was often highly segregated by sex, and that women were much less likely than men to perform skilled

⁶ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*, 20th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 121,142; Montgomery, "American Labor, 1865-1902," 11.

labor. Instead, they were often bound to task-oriented jobs that held little opportunity for advancement or significantly higher pay.⁷ Women workers were also often bound by societal constraints. Alice Kessler-Harris points out in *Gendering Labor History* that women working in industry often had very little choice about which jobs to take, because they were bound to certain locations by their male family member's likely higher-paying jobs and were generally expected to marry and have children, making women's employment largely transient and replaceable.⁸

Like their male counterparts, wage-earning women increasingly turned to labor organizing to help address low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions as the nineteenth century progressed. Trade unions and other forms of labor organization existed locally and regionally as early as the 1830s in America's industrializing areas, but most tended to be restricted to skilled workers and were overwhelmingly male. A few skilled women workers formed unions as early as the 1830s, such as seamstresses in Philadelphia in 1833 and Lowell factory workers in 1836, and achieved some success, though their victories proved fleeting.⁹

As the economic landscape continued to change and industrial capitalism came to dominate the urban work environment throughout the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the workforce itself continued to change. Waves of immigration to the United States brought workers of diverse ethnicities into various industries, and industrialization changed the nature of many jobs from artisan crafts to discrete tasks

⁷ Claudia Goldin, "The Work and Wages of Single Women, 1870-1920," *Journal of Economic History* 40, no. 1 (March 1980): 82-88.

⁸ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 24.

⁹ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 39-43, 151-56.

performed by separate people, often segregated by skill and gender. As wage work increasingly became the norm for the working class and the number of wageworkers increased, class relations among working people shifted and led to new, more radical forms of labor organization based on ideals of cross-industrial solidarity and mutualism.

Founded in 1869 by shoemaker and Knights of St. Crispin member Uriah Stevens and a small group of other craftsmen, the Knights of Labor was the first major American labor organization to reach across industrial and skill lines to embrace a class-conscious vision of producers working together to ameliorate the disadvantages industrial capitalism placed upon workers. While initially a secret fraternal organization open only to men, the Knights expanded its ranks in the early 1880s to include women wage workers in their ideal of a “workingmen’s democracy” where producers would have power to moderate the excesses of capitalism and participate in a fair market.¹⁰ While women constituted only about ten percent of members in the Knights of Labor at their height of participation in the mid-1880s, which Leonora Barry estimated as up to 65,000 women total, they did play a unique role in the organization through the 1880s and 1890s. Women often organized into separate locals and by 1887 the KOL formed the Department of Women’s Work to focus on specific issues facing women workers and other working-class women.¹¹

¹⁰ Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism: The Knights of Labor and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 21-35; Robert Weir, *Beyond Labor’s Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 2-8.

¹¹ While women in the Knights of Labor typically organized in separate locals from men, many women joined mixed-gender, mixed-trade locals in areas that could not support a large degree of separation. For more information on women’s

The Knights' ideology of worker solidarity and egalitarianism encouraged female membership and even leadership. The KOL's ethos of solidarity also helped to bolster women's labor activism by encouraging cross-industry and cross-skill support, in which skilled workers would recognize and support the strike activities of unskilled workers, thereby lending their status and power to those without it.¹²

As labor activism and industrial conflict grew along with the power of industrial capitalism, the labor movement continued to undergo political and ideological shifts. By the mid-1880s, another strain of labor activism entered the national stage as a group of craft unions split from the Knights of Labor over political differences. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) grew out of the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions in 1886 in order to continue fighting for economic parity on a national level. As new waves of immigration reshaped the semiskilled and unskilled labor force in the 1890s and early 1900s, social distance between skilled craft workers and the new immigrant groups who made up the vast majority of less-skilled workers widened, remaking the meanings of solidarity in the working class. Over time the AFL came to favor a "bread-and-butter" approach to labor organization that primarily focused on protecting skilled, white workers.¹³ The AFL mainly concentrated on "pure" labor issues, such as wages, the length of the

organizing in the KOL, see Helen L. Sumner, US Bureau of Labor, *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States in 19 Volumes: Volume IX: History of Women in Industry in the United States*, 61st Cong., 2nd sess., Senate Executive Document 645 (Washington, DC, 1909-1911), 113-132. Hereafter referred to as the *Bureau of Labor Report*. Susan Levine quotes Barry's estimate in *Labor's True Woman*, but the actual number may have been much lower.

¹² Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 103-127.

¹³ Julie Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics: The American Federation of Labor and Political Activism, 1881-1917* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 22-30.

workday, and working conditions, and elected to focus on a trade unionism that admitted skilled workers and protected skilled jobs for trade union members to the exclusion of others. While the Knights of Labor declined rapidly throughout the latter 1880s and 1890s due to many internal and external factors, the AFL quadrupled its numbers between 1897 and 1903 and, by the early twentieth century, began to embrace a business unionism that often worked more closely with capital to meet its members' demands for better conditions. Alice Kessler-Harris notes in *Out to Work* that women's unionization fell with the collapse of the KOL, and that only 2.2 percent of union members were women by 1900. As Kessler-Harris states, the AFL "sacrificed the larger issues of working-class solidarity for a piece of the capitalist pie."¹⁴

One such sacrifice was the role and condition of women in the industrial workforce. The AFL generally opposed the presence of women, arguing that they took jobs that men could be occupying instead, and that they drove down wages for everyone. Though the trade unionists of the AFL did reluctantly organize women, their main goal was to ensure that employers could not use women as a low-wage, exploitative alternative to male labor. Despite this prevailing attitude, workingwomen activists in trades such as the garment and textile industries, retail, and office work

¹⁴ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 5; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 86; Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History*, 25; The AFL was, in its own way, as complex an organization as the KOL, and historians debate the complexities of the AFL's nature as a social and political force, as well as its perceived radicalism, conservatism, or the insufficiency of any one label for the organization. For more about the AFL during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas*, Volume 10, Issue 4, December 2013.

did organize, and were sometimes recognized by the AFL but were often ignored by their unionized male counterparts. Even when predominantly male unions included them, women often had to fight to have their voices heard.¹⁵ Other organizations, such as the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), formed cross-class alliances between working-class women and middle-class women that promoted workingwomen's participation in trade unions, provided strike support, and lobbied for protective legislation for women and children workers. The WTUL and similar women's unions often worked alongside the AFL to organize women, and held a feminist ideology that pushed for female solidarity to benefit women's social and economic justice.¹⁶

As the AFL expanded the influence of craft unionism, other social and political forces fomented to form a new wave of working-class radicalism committed to directly opposing capitalism instead of finding ways to negotiate relationships between capital and the worker. Miners in the Western United States joined together in labor unions such as the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) to resist increasing oppression by corporate mining interests in the late nineteenth century and eventually developed a radical vision of worker solidarity. WFM leaders Ed Boyce and Bill Haywood, along with radical labor leader and Socialist Eugene Debs and other western union leaders, formed a radical, militantly industrial coalition directly in opposition to Samuel Gompers and the AFL. They specifically welcomed unskilled and semiskilled workers, women, and most immigrants (like the KOL, they showed

¹⁵ Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History*, 25-31.

¹⁶ Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History*, 21-28. Elizabeth Anne Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreier Robins and the Women's Trade Union League* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 1-5.

bias against Asian immigrant workers) into their vision of industrial unionism, which was first represented by the short-lived American Labor Union (ALU) and then was developed into the Industrial Workers of the World in 1905.¹⁷

The meeting that resulted in the founding of the IWW, termed by Bill Haywood as “the Continental Congress of the Working Class,” convened in June 1905 in Chicago. Mary Harris “Mother” Jones, famous organizer of coal miners as well as their wives and children under the banner of the United Mine Workers (UMW), was the sole woman present at the initial meeting of radicals and labor reformers. The secret convention committed to industrial organization and repudiated the “wage slavery” that craft unionism accepted in favor of revolutionary class struggle; these founding principles became the guiding values of the IWW.¹⁸ From its beginning, the IWW included women as organizers and rank and file members in the organization’s overall goal of enacting a revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist class in favor of working-class control of the means of production. The group did not choose to create a separate women’s department or to directly address issues specific to working-class women, arguing instead that resolving the working class’s economic struggles would solve inequality for women as well as men.¹⁹

Though the KOL and the IWW had significant ideological and organizational differences, both organizations expressed strong, class-conscious ideologies as the basis of their organization. The Knights came into existence during a time when class and economic structures in the United States were undergoing major shifts.

¹⁷ Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 58-80.

¹⁸ Dubofsky, 71-80.

¹⁹ Tax, 125-130.

Industrialized capitalism was not yet entrenched and for the KOL, definitions of the “working class” proved extraordinarily malleable. The group’s organization reflected this elasticity, categorically excluding only those the Knights saw as social parasites or agents of corruption, and including any other type of person who actively respected labor and supported producers. While this expansiveness encouraged greater women’s participation, especially on moral grounds, it also ultimately produced an organization with little central cohesiveness. As a fast growing, sprawling organization defined as much by its local iterations as the ideologies and rules of its central leadership, the KOL saw frequent conflicts between more militant and politically active local organizers and the more cautious and reform-minded central leadership of Grand Master Workman Terence Powderly and his allies. For women, these conflicts could sometimes cause dissension and conflict in determining what women’s roles in the KOL should look like. The IWW, by contrast, was developed as a direct repudiation of the business unionism practiced by the AFL, and held a very clear idea of who comprised the working class and stated that its overall mission was to seize the means of production from the capitalist class. This strict economic vision of revolutionary thought both made room for working-class women to participate in the IWW’s activism and disregarded the structures that contributed to their oppression. The connected yet disparate natures of the KOL and IWW, particularly in relation to the intersections of class and gender, make these organizations a productive field in which to explore the ways class conscious organizing and changing gender structures affected working-class women’s activism.²⁰

²⁰ Leon Fink, *Workingmen’s Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American*

Studies focusing on the Knights of Labor's powerful role in late nineteenth-century working-class society have contributed to our historical understanding of the development of industrial capitalism and its effects on class formation. Kim Voss's *The Making of American Exceptionalism* argues that the industrialization of the economy resulted in class shifts that pushed skilled craft workers toward semi-skilled and unskilled workers they previously did not share a class identity with, resulting in labor organizations like the Knights of Labor that formed based on ideals of solidarity and producerism. In *Workingmen's Democracy*, Leon Fink argues that the Knights held an ambivalent attitude toward politics and capitalism, and participated in the remaking of class identities and social structure in the late nineteenth century through political action on local levels through their language of solidarity. While these scholars both make valuable contributions to understanding the Knights' class-consciousness, neither analyzes the presence of women and their roles in shaping class structures. Susan Levine's *Labor's True Woman* studies carpet-weavers in Philadelphia and discusses both rank and file women's organizing with the KOL and the organization's inherent conflicts of interest in organizing women, but she does not fully interrogate the gendered nature of class-consciousness in the Knights. Together, these scholars examine the Knights' decentralized nature and many facets as a labor organization, a reform society, and occasionally a political booster for grassroots electoral politics, but there is no scholarship on the KOL that explores the organization's struggles with changing class identities as well as its interactions with

Politics (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 8-14; Tax, *The Rising of the Women*, 28-29.

the Woman Question that together shaped working-class women's participation as Knights.²¹

By the early 1900s, the American labor movement's shift toward the craft unionism of the AFL was met with resistance from the Industrial Workers of the World. Melvyn Dubofsky's *We Shall Be All* explores the origins, rise, and eventual decline of the IWW and placed them in the populist and radical tradition of Western miners' unions that pushed back against the capitalist oppression of workers, who held little economic power. Dubofsky argues that the IWW's ideology was disorganized and fragmented, which led to their inability to create a unified working-class consciousness in America. In contrast, Howard Kimeldorf frames the IWW as an organization that tapped into an extant industrial syndicalist, class-conscious segment of the working class and "drew strength from the rank and file's spontaneity, creativity, and emergent solidarities."²² Kimeldorf argues that the practical nature of the IWW's form of organizing drew rank and file workers more so than their revolutionary ideology, and that the Wobbly ideology often catered to the material circumstances of the least economically powerful workers they reached out to

²¹ Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism*; Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy*; Susan Levine, *Labor's True Woman*; For other studies on the Knights of Labor see Jason Kaufman, "Rise and Fall of a Nation of Joiners: The Knights of Labor Revisited," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 4 (Spring 2001): 553-579; Steven Bernard Leiken, *The Practical Utopians: American Workers and the Cooperative Movement in the Gilded Age* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2005); Richard Schneirov, *Labor and Urban Politics: Class Conflict and the Origins of Modern Liberalism in Chicago, 1864-97* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Robert Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil: The Culture of the Knights of Labor*; Robert Weir, *Knights Unhorsed: Internal Conflict in a Gilded Age Social Movement* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2000).

²² Howard Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor: Wobblies, Craft Workers, and the Making of the Union Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 16.

organize. While Kimeldorf and Dubofsky analyze both the ideological and practical nature of the IWW's organizing, neither addresses how these ideologies and organizational methods affected working-class women. Helen Camp's biography of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recounts Flynn's ten years as the most prominent female organizer in the IWW, and argues that the IWW's "deliberately gender-and-race-blind" ideology and methods of organizing made more sense for unskilled immigrant women who, like their men, were often left behind by the AFL's craft union organizing. However, Camp's characterization of the IWW and focus on Flynn does not explore how the IWW's ideologies played out in reality and affected rank and file women.²³

Several scholars have contributed to the historiography of working women and labor organization in the early 1900s, but most of those works are focused on women's involvement with the AFL and the WTUL. Annelise Orleck's *Common Sense and a Little Fire* studies the life and work of four female leaders and the cultural roots of their labor radicalism, and argues that their actions and beliefs were based in "industrial feminism," which prioritized women's needs and desires within a class-conscious framework. Alice Kessler-Harris's essay collection *Gendering Labor*

²³ Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*; Howard Kimeldorf, *Battling for American Labor*; Helen Camp, *Iron in Her Soul: Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the American Left* (Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press, 1995). For other works in the IWW, see David R. Berman, *Radicalism in the Mountain West, 1890-1920: Socialists, Populists, Miners, and Wobblies* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2007); Eric Thomas Chester, *The Wobblies in Their Heyday: The Rise and Destruction of the Industrial Workers of the World during the World War I Era* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2014); Steve Golin, *The Fragile Bridge: Paterson Silk Strike, 1913* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1988); Anne F. Mattina, "'Yours for Industrial Freedom': Women of the IWW, 1905-1930," *Women's Studies* 43, no. 2 (Feb/March 2014): 170-201.

History analyzes the ways gender influences class formation and how gender is interconnected with economic transformations such as the industrialization of capitalism in the late nineteenth century. She explores women's unionization in the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) and interactions with the WTUL to understand the tensions wage-earning women faced between largely male-dominated craft unions and upper and middle-class dominated women's organizations. Ardis Cameron and Jennifer Guglielmo respectively illuminate the cultural background of immigrant workingwomen's networks of mutuality outside the workplace that provided a framework for their activism in Lawrence, Massachusetts and Paterson, New Jersey in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sometimes in conjunction with the IWW. By exploring how women in immigrant communities interacted with class-conscious political ideologies and the Wobblies' variety of organized labor, Cameron and Guglielmo offer valuable contributions to understanding how rank and file women played a part in radical labor activism.²⁴

²⁴ Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History*; Ardis Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort: Laboring Women in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1860-1912* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Jennifer Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution: Italian Women's Resistance and Radicalism in New York City, 1880-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010). For further works on women in the American labor movement, see Ava Baron, *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States*; Ruth Milkman, ed., *Women, Work and Protest: A Center of U.S. Women's Labor History* (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1990) Elizabeth Ann Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism: Margaret Dreier Robins and the Women's Trade Union League* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Meredith

While all of these works are significant contributions to the historiography of labor organization and radicalism, working-class political and class ideologies, and gender intersections with class and labor activism, there is still a gap in understanding how concepts of gender and class ideologies interacted in the nineteenth century radical activities of the KOL and those of the IWW a generation later, particularly in regards to the Woman Question. Broadly conceived and decidedly non-monolithic, the Woman Question constituted an ongoing debate about where, how, and when women belonged in the public sphere. As society deliberated gender roles, the overall construct of gender underwent significant changes, shifting from the Victorian ideal of separate spheres for men and women to new norms opened greater space for women in the public realm. Conceptions of class and class-consciousness also shifted during this period, as industrialized capitalism gained predominance over the American economy and fundamentally changed the structure of labor. Workers and labor organizations responded to these shifts in different ways, some abandoning working-class solidarity and radical ideals for the relative security and protection of craft unionism, while others embraced Marxist ideologies of class struggle and revolution.

Examining both of these organizations reveals that the changing gender constructs and class structures that allowed working-class women's participation in the KOL and the IWW also led to conflicting approaches to workingwomen and perspectives on the Woman Question. By studying these two organizations together, we can understand more clearly how class identities and ideologies intersected with

Tax, *The Rising of the Women: Feminist Solidarity and Class Conflict, 1880-1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

concepts of woman's place in society, and how concepts of class and gender changed over the course of a generation. As the Knights and Wobblies organized working-class women, class ideologies, practical realities, and the Woman Question all combined to shape how female members participated in these radical organizations and how they experienced solidarity and class-consciousness.

This study will analyze the ways in which the Knights of Labor and Industrial Workers of the World interacted with female members, both rank and file women and prominent organizers, on the basis of ideologies that affected and were affected by concepts of class and gender. The first chapter will analyze the respective perceptions of working-class women in each organization. Studying these perceptions allows us to further understand the attitudes, challenges, and opportunities women encountered in each organization. The second chapter will examine the lives and respective leadership roles of the two most prominent female organizers in each organization, Leonora Barry of the KOL and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of the IWW. By interrogating their writing and ideas as well as their and personal lives, we see how these two prominent women organizers each expressed complex and sometimes conflicted viewpoints on class and gender. Chapter three will explore the actions taken by Barry and Flynn in their roles as organizers to reach out to female members of the KOL and IWW, and will discuss the successes and failures of each organization to meet rank and file women's needs. Exploring these three facets of the KOL and IWW's relationship to working-class women shows that their class ideologies, along with shifts in gender structures, often resulted in conflicted visions of women's roles in the labor movement.

Chapter 1: Perceptions of Women in the KOL and IWW

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the “Woman Question” was present in nearly every facet of public life. What was woman’s place in American society, specifically in the public sphere? Conventional wisdom throughout much of the nineteenth century placed women at the center of domestic life and characterized them as the moral center of the home and family. The rise of industrialization in the early to mid nineteenth century fueled a new “domestic code” that prized separate notions of work and home, particularly for middle-class and elite women but which pervaded the lives of working-class women as well.²⁵ This doctrine of separate spheres for men and women permeated ideas about women’s place, or lack thereof, in politics, economics, education, and of course the workplace. In *Out to Work*, Alice Kessler-Harris argues that these new ideas about women’s roles of domesticity and motherhood eroded possibilities of respectability and independence for workingwomen, including immigrants and black women who worked to contribute to a living family wage, and recast wage earning women as toilers and drudges. The new domestic code for women, along with deteriorating factory conditions, also led to greater discrimination and resentment of female workers among male wage earners. Ultimately, the rise of industrial capitalism and the

²⁵ For more on the effects of industrialization and wage labor on women’s work in America in the first half of the nineteenth century, see Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, Part I, 1-74 and Jeanne Boydston’s study of housework and labor ideology, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

normalization of wage labor alienated women even more than men from their roles as producers and economic contributors to society.²⁶

By the 1880s women's workforce participation expanded rapidly as part of the massive industrial and bureaucratic expansion that came to characterize the Gilded Age economy, although the ideal of Victorian "True Womanhood," expressed through commitment to domesticity and motherhood, held sway. However, as Kessler-Harris and other scholars point out, for working-class women the assumed clear divisions between work life and home life had never been so clean-cut. Even as society at large debated the Woman Question and saw significant changes in women's perceived societal roles and place into the twentieth century, workingwomen experienced different versions of debates about education, work, motherhood, suffrage, and activism. For working-class women and labor organizations, the "Woman Question" was deeply imbued with class implications as class and gender structures both shifted during the 1880s to the 1920s.²⁷

For both the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World, the Woman Question encompassed economics, suffrage, education, and sexuality as part of the ongoing conversation about women's roles in the workplace and in organized labor. This chapter explores how each organization respectively perceived their female members by analyzing each of their official publications, the KOL's *Journal*

²⁶ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 50-72.

²⁷ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 142-79; For more on ideals of womanhood in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, 17-46; Susan M. Cruet, "Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement," *American Transcendental Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (September 2005): 187-204; Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 207-42.

of *United Labor (JUL)* and the IWW's *Solidarity*. Though these journals do not, of course, cover every aspect of women's involvement in each organization, they do allow for important insight into the ways the Knights and the Wobblies broadly conceived of the women within their ranks, and the ideas they transmitted to their members via these publications. They also reveal that though the KOL and IWW operated under significantly different class ideologies, the overarching gender constructs of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries intersected with these class ideologies to produce unique and often contradictory viewpoints of women as workers and activists.

In the Knights of Labor, women's organizing took place on two main fronts: local women's assemblies that formed after the KOL opened its ranks to female members under Grand Master Workman Terence Powderly in 1881, and the national Department of Women's Work that formed permanently at the KOL's General Assembly at Richmond, Virginia in 1886. The local assemblies, which represented the base-level unit of the Knights' organizational structure, were an important way the organization reached most of its rank and file women workers, while the national Department of Women's Work focused much of its energy on creating nationwide programs for women to join and on educating working women who were outside of the protection of organized labor.²⁸

The Knights' ideologies heavily invested in the notions of brotherhood, the noble and manly nature of the worker as producer, and the importance of mutualism in alleviating the circumstances of all working people. The organization grew under

²⁸ *Bureau of Labor Report*, 108-32.

the direction of Terence Powderly, whose influence ultimately moved the Knights from of their origins as a secret fraternal order into an organization that expanded its reach and, to paraphrase historian Robert Weir, began to replace artisanal fraternalism with an industrial solidarity that drew members from a vast variety of industries. This increased openness in the 1880s included African-Americans and women, though the KOL (particularly in the West) still held deep prejudices against Chinese immigrant workers. The KOL recognized pragmatically that under unchecked industrial capitalism, many working-class women would have no choice but to enter the workforce, due to circumstances that rendered women the sole supporters of their households, or due to low wages paid to unskilled men that forced entire families to work in order just to survive.²⁹

The Knights' producerist ideology extended to include women as valuable members of not only the workforce, but also of the working class itself, and led to greater female rank and file participation in organized labor than the United States had seen previously. This inclusion of women in producerism, which since the early nineteenth century was largely coded as male, encompassed women wage earners, domestic servants, agricultural workers, and housewives in a radical moral vision of working-class solidarity. As Susan Levine writes, "Defining productive toil by a moral rather than a strictly economic yardstick, the Order offered women a role in the movement not directly dependent upon their status in the labor market."³⁰ A list of KOL women's locals compiled in the U.S. Bureau of Labor Report on Women and Children workers, which excluded the mixed-gender local assemblies that many

²⁹ Weir, *Beyond Labor's Veil*, 10-13; Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 103-10.

³⁰ Susan Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 108-09.

women belonged to, listed almost two hundred all-women's local assemblies founded between 1881 and 1886, with the vast majority formed in 1886 at the height of the Knights' national influence. The majority of the women's locals were listed as consisting of "various" trades, indicating that women in many areas did not have the numbers (or the interest) to organize en masse. However, some of the industries listed, such as sewing, factory work, housekeepers, laundresses, washers and cooks, and ironers indicate that the Knights did manage to organize unskilled and semi-skilled female workers as well as those who earned more working in skilled trades. There were also ten listed all-women's locals designated as "colored" in Little Rock, Arkansas, Raleigh, North Carolina, and several cities in Virginia, revealing the Knights' reach even to women who remained largely unorganized by national unions far into the twentieth century.³¹

Though the Knights welcomed women into their membership, their ideals of domesticity and women's moral duty heavily influenced the approaches they took to advocating for women workers. While they strongly lobbied for equal pay for equal work, women's educational rights, and woman suffrage, they also maintained a utopian vision of society in which all men would earn a wage high enough to support the entire family. Susan Levine argues in her study of women carpet weavers in the KOL that the Knights' ideology was inherently paradoxical. She asserts that the KOL believed that wage work demeaned women and took them from their rightful place in the domestic sphere, but if and when the Knights achieved their goals of male producers gaining societal respect and fair wages, women could not achieve equality

³¹ *Bureau of Labor Report*, 129-32.

in the workforce. This contradiction, Levine posits, only allowed women an equal voice in the labor movement in the interest of creating a world that would mainly place women in the domestic sphere.³² However, this limiting ideology and paradox of gender equality did not appear to uniformly apply to all women in the KOL. Instead, attitudes and approaches to women tended to differ on the basis of class and specific types of participation in the public sphere.

Once the organization opened membership to women, the Knights displayed a general enthusiasm for organizing women workers. In a column answering a query about the KOL's stance on women's labor rights, the author declared, "When we speak of the rights of man, those of woman are implied every time, truly and fully—her right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The article went on to state that the KOL was committed to equal rights for women, both in the field of industry and in their own organization. The Knights, the author claimed, not only advocated equal pay for equal work, but also opened its own ranks to female members on an equitable basis. Women, the author wrote, "are eligible to election as delegates to the highest legislative tribunal of the Order, the General Assembly, where they are entitled to speak and vote, equally with their brethren, upon all questions that concern the policy, the business, or the action of the Order."³³ A later article reaffirmed this commitment to women's value in the organization, even though the KOL was not originally founded as a mixed-gender group: "Possibly the founders, guided by higher wisdom, builded broader and better than they knew." The article went on to forcefully

³² Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 132-149.

³³ "Knights of Labor and Women's Rights," *Journal of United Labor*, Marblehead, MA, January 8, 1887.

castigate male members who might not welcome women's participation in the Knights, closing with, "The man, who, to-day, denies woman because of sex still feeds at his nursing-bottle and rocks in the cradle of ignorance and bigotry."³⁴ This particularly strong denunciation of men who discriminated against women's involvement perhaps points to a controversy over this topic in the Knights; as a largely decentralized organization, it is likely that not all men in the KOL welcomed women in the struggle for producers' rights.

Though some male members of the KOL may have been opposed female membership, others felt that women's involvement would bring unique strengths to the organization. One letter from the Lake Superior region to the *JUL* lamented a lack of interest among women in the Local Assemblies there and sent out a plea for women to join, arguing that, "Their presence in our Assemblies would tone up the nature and earnestness of our discussions and infuse new life into the cause. While men are coldly calculating and discussing the pros and cons of a subject, women could decide by their hearts and carry the project into execution before the brothers had their thinking caps on."³⁵ Another article in 1888 praised the wives of miners and workmen for supporting the Reading, Pennsylvania miners' strike: "Through all conflicts that have attended the advancement of the race woman has signalized herself in loyalty and devotion to the objects of her affection... It is her mission to encourage, sustain and strengthen the weak, the despondent and the hopeless."³⁶ These articles and letters point to a certain understanding of women's nature as inherently different

³⁴ "Woman's Right to Representation," *Journal of United Labor*, April 30, 1887.

³⁵ "Lady Knights," *Journal of United Labor*, October 15, 1887.

³⁶ "Woman's Heroism," *Journal of United Labor*, January 28, 1888.

from that of men; the Knights valued women specifically for their perceived nurturing and emotionally-driven dispositions. By praising women's work in the Knights as compassionate and focused on familial devotion, the *JUL* displayed a definite conception of women as inherently different from men, and idealized womanhood as a moral, caring influence.

The *JUL* also occasionally included articles that showcased prominent women members to demonstrate that women did, in fact, engage in the organization's leadership at local, district, and national levels. One such article profiled Elizabeth Rodgers, who became the first woman Master Workman of a District Assembly, the Knights' mid-level organizational apparatus. In addition to enumerating Mrs. Rodgers' career as a labor leader in Chicago, the article also touted her credentials as a wife and mother: "The mother of twelve children, she went a Delegate to the Richmond Convention bearing in her arms a babe two weeks old."³⁷ Another woman, Mrs. Alzina P. Stevens, was profiled in August of 1888 as the "epitome of the labor movement in this country during the last 20 years." Stevens, a tradeswoman in the printing industry, served as the first president of the Workingwoman's Union of Chicago, and also led an active career with the Knights as a District Organizer, a judge, and a delegate to the General Convention. In addition to her labor credentials, the article showcased her "distinctly American blood," and recounted her family's history in the United States: "Her father's father was Colonel Parsons, who commanded a Massachusetts regiment in the Continental Army, Revolutionary War, and received from the government the land grants in the then wilds of Maine, on

³⁷ "Our Women," *Journal of United Labor*, January 8, 1887.

which, with some of the soldiers of his regiment, he formed the town that bears his name.”³⁸

These profiles reveal that although women did have some level of influence in the KOL, certain kinds of women held that influence. The women that were held up as exemplars of KOL “true womanhood” held distinct class and gender traits that the organization prized. Rodgers was portrayed as an example of Knightly motherhood, a woman who cared for her children even as she cared for her fellow Lady Knights. Stevens was depicted not only as a successful tradeswoman and hard worker, but also as a native white citizen with no small amount of class distinction. If the articles in the *JUL* are any indication, women’s leadership roles in the KOL were largely reserved for women who met certain expectations for womanhood based on perceptions of behavior and class.³⁹ This ideology of producerism that elevated certain women also wielded influence upon how men and women Knights alike viewed women in the workforce and their duties toward them as a labor organization.

Throughout the mid-1880s, when discussion of women workers and “the Woman Question” in the *JUL* was at its height, the *Journal’s* articles indicated a class-based ambivalence toward women’s roles in the workforce. Several articles

³⁸ “Mrs. A.P. Stevens,” *Journal of United Labor*, August 16, 1888.

³⁹ Rodgers and Stevens, though both upheld by the KOL as upstanding women leaders, both subverted societal norms. Rodgers’ husband, also a union member, initially supported her role in the Knights but later opposed her involvement due to the turmoil surrounding labor organizing. Rodgers refused to resign her position based on “duty to my sex.” (47) Stevens came from a wealthy landowning family that descended into poverty after her father’s death in the Civil War, which drove her to factory work in Lowell, Massachusetts. Stevens became involved in labor organizing at Lowell and later moved to Chicago, married and quickly divorced, and taught herself the printing trade, eventually joining Typographical Union No. 16, possibly as the first woman member. See Tax, *The Rising of the Women*, 41-47.

praised women's entrance into skilled trades and professions while also condemning employers for hiring women to do heavy manual labor considered too masculine and physically taxing, or low-paid piecework that was more in keeping with women's traditional roles. These articles suggest that the Knights held a bifurcated view of women and their participation in the workforce depending on whether they fell into the class of educated and independent "women" or the class of exploited "girls" in need of uplift and protection.

An article in February 1887 addressed the issue of equal pay for equal work and the ability of women to perform traditionally masculine work in business and professional settings. The article pointed out several instances in which women excelled in business, including a woman who owned and ran a leather manufactory and a widow who successfully took over her husband's publishing house, turning it around from a bankrupt concern to a thriving business. The article went on to give examples of woman farmers and medical doctors that illustrated female successes in assumed "male" fields. The writer concluded these assertions by expressing confidence in women's ability to succeed in the workforce: "Predictions as to what she can and can't do are very unsafe until she has tried her master-hand at it."⁴⁰

Another article published in 1888 opined, "That woman has a perfect right to engage in any honest pursuit to earn a livelihood no one of good judgment and nineteenth-century ideas will for a moment attempt to deny." The author asserted that women were equal to men in performing office and business duties, from bookkeeping and clerking to working as bankers and businesswomen, and that women had proved

⁴⁰ "Equal Pay for Equal Work," *Journal of United Labor*, February 19, 1887.

successful in the fields of science, medicine, and law, among others. The author even argued, “She performs her task as well, often better than her male competitor, and nearly all people have come to recognize her as the equal of man in all respects—socially and politically.”⁴¹

However, an article from 1888 registered concern that women working in trades requiring heavy manual labor would undermine male independence because employers could pay women less for their work than they could pay men. The author asserted that the KOL could ameliorate these wrongs to women and men, implying that if equal pay for equal work were enforced women would never be hired to work in manual jobs. He wrote, “If the women of America themselves took as great an interest in our Order as the Order takes in them, there would be no occasion to record the fact that women are on strike in the iron and lumber industries in this boasted ‘land of the free and brave.’” The author closed the article by declaring that “Woman is peculiarly fitted for some kinds of labor, but we do not believe that the All-Wise Creator ever intended that she should feed shingle bolts into a circular saw, or pound sand on the moulding floor of a stove foundry.”⁴² A previous article submitted to the JUL in 1886 similarly lamented that employers were replacing men and boys with girls and women, writing “They have found that women and girls can be driven, while men and boys cannot; more work can be forced from the female, and, therefore, by degrees, the weaker (physical) sex are gradually supplanting the stronger.” The author expressed sympathy for women in these positions, claiming, “these poor souls wear out their lives in such positions; and if some poor girl is lucky enough to interest

⁴¹ “Woman’s Work and Wages,” *Journal of United Labor*, June 30, 1888.

⁴² “Woman’s Work and Wages,” *Journal of United Labor*, June 30, 1888.

some one who, seeing she is killing herself to keep herself, takes her to share in his small earnings, it is too late. After one year she dies, or, worse, lives to take care of her sickly children.”⁴³ While both of these articles indicate that some types of female employment that supplanted male workers harmed men as well as women, women doing hard physical labor were subjects of pity in ways skilled women were not.

This ideology that embraced a philosophy of separate spheres for men and women intersected with paternalistic attitudes about class and gender. Many of the Knights’ actions and initiatives revolved around protecting women workers and ensuring that they were well cared for by organized labor. Several articles in the *JUL* reveal the attitudes of the Knights toward the rank and file working women that they wanted to reach. One article entitled “The Present Need of Woman,” addressed the perceived major problem facing workingwomen and their powerlessness in labor-management relations. The author wrote, “The recent revolt against licentious overseers by the young women employed in a Brooklyn factory, and their appeal for protection to the Knights tells but one story of thousands forever buried in the hearts of desolated womanhood.” The article continued that this problem was widespread throughout the country and that industrialism had reduced the market value of women’s labor so that she had little choice regarding how her employer treated her. The author wrote, “Organization has done much to ameliorate the hard condition of woman, and would do much more if woman herself could be made to realize its benefits. In the Brooklyn incident mentioned above, what could these girls have

⁴³ “Another Question,” *Journal of United Labor*, March 10, 1886.

effected without the protection of organized Knights? Nothing, as was proved.”⁴⁴

Another article in 1888 pointed to organization by the KOL in empowering shoe workers in Carlisle, Pennsylvania to strike against “a disreputable foreman,” and claimed that “a short time since such a revolt would not have been considered. The girls would have suffered in silence, and dared not to make complaint.”⁴⁵

Other articles discussed the ill effects of low wages on female workers, a major concern of the Knights. One addressed the women clerks in department stores in Chicago whose low wages reportedly forced them to choose between starvation and virtue: “Many a pure-hearted, innocent young woman, after suffering for years the privations and insults of her poverty, has been forced through circumstances to surrender herself and her virtue, sell her honor for bread, and has thus been led astray into the paths of doubtful virtue whose steps lead down to hell.” The article continued to lament the loss of “true womanhood” and to claim that organizing through the Knights of Labor could end this moral decay: “When the workingwomen and girls of America learn that their best friends are the Knights of Labor and evince a willingness to help themselves by joining with our Order in its efforts to help them, then, and not till then, can we hope to very materially benefit the workingwomen of the land.”⁴⁶ A circular from a Local Assembly in Pittsburg called for cooperation from female workers in organizing. The call, which likely came from an all-women’s local, pointed out “It is a well-known fact that in various establishments in the cities,

⁴⁴ “The Present Need of Woman,” *Journal of United Labor*, November 24, 1886.

⁴⁵ “Organized Protection to Woman,” *Journal of United Labor*, January 28, 1888.

⁴⁶ “Chicago Workingwomen,” *Journal of United Labor*, August 16, 1888.

work upon which men are paid ten and twelve dollars per week, girls are paid only two and a half and three dollars, and are subjected to indignities degrading to our sex from those who are placed over us.” It went on to appeal for the importance of women’s “physical, mental, and moral condition” and the necessity of labor organization to protect them, “especially those who are destined to be the mothers of future generations.”⁴⁷ These attitudes toward working “girls” displayed a paternalistic outlook and portrayed the Knights as the only real force between female workers and complete helplessness, while also placing their value directly in the domestic sphere as future wives and mothers whose virtue must be protected. Though the KOL, in most instances, urged women and girls to take the initiative in organizing themselves, these articles suggest that the Knights believed strongly that workingwomen needed their influence and protection in order to successfully resist exploitation.

In addition to labor organizing, the KOL strongly supported woman suffrage and encouraged workingwomen to lobby for access to the ballot. This political stance, while advantageous for Knights who realized that women voters would mean more working-class people influencing politics overall, also spoke to the KOL leadership’s perspectives on class: while they believed workingwomen as well as men would have a positive effect on their goals of social reform, they also expressed some amount of condescension when discussing women and the vote. For example, a January 1887 article on the topic of woman suffrage in New York was addressed to workingmen rather than women in arguing for woman suffrage. The author quoted German Socialist thinker August Bebel to argue that women also had an interest in economic

⁴⁷ “Organization for Women,” *Journal of United Labor*, January 22, 1887.

as well as social legislation and asserted that educated voting was essential to saving working people “from the consequences of class rule.” Finally, he wrote that, “Our friends in the Empire State will do well to consider carefully this question of woman suffrage. The influence of proletarian women enfranchised would be powerful in labor legislation and social reform.”⁴⁸

Other authors recognized the Knights’ endorsement of woman suffrage and argued for the vote from a woman’s perspective. A *Woman’s Tribune* article reprinted in the *JUL* attributed a savior-like stance to the KOL, asserting, “The horny-handed sons of toil are the evangels of justice to whom women may safely confide the ark of their hopes. Moreover, in economic reform lies the cue to the best that can be done for and by woman in the field of political action.” The article also argued that the vote was the best way for the working class, and women in particular, to escape oppression: “...the uprising of the people against unjust systems, the impulse toward political righteousness...all make the hour propitious for woman’s active entrance into political life. She can help swell the tide of governmental reform, and in such participation secure a higher education for herself.”⁴⁹ An editorial from an anonymous Knight of Labor in Kansas praised the municipal enfranchisement of women in the state, emphasizing that woman suffrage had not caused the collapse of society as some feared and that, “Suffice it to say that the female vote was cast for those candidates who represented the best municipal and social interests of the city.” The writer concluded, “...I would say that my observations have led me to believe that women *do* want the ballot, and that they *can* and *will* use it intelligently and

⁴⁸ “Woman Suffrage,” *Journal of United Labor*, January 29, 1887.

⁴⁹ “Labor and Woman Suffrage,” *Journal of United Labor*, February 12, 1887.

effectively,” and encouraged women nationwide to continue agitating for the vote.⁵⁰ The Knights generally placed confidence in working-class women’s ability to act in the best interests of their class and themselves as society’s moral guides, and indicated a belief that the ballot was one of the best ways for women workers to contribute to working-class solidarity and uplift.

The malleability of class during the Knights’ heyday, combined with changing norms regarding women’s roles, produced a conflicted perspective on workingwomen that encouraged some women to challenge gender stereotypes in the workforce and others to rely on the Order’s advocacy and protection. While the KOL actively committed to organizing working-class women, its perceptions of women and their abilities varied greatly depending on their positions within the working class. Articles in the *JUL* expressed great confidence in and enthusiasm for women who held positions of influence and skill, but displayed paternalistic and patriarchal attitudes toward female workers who toiled in unskilled or unprestigious positions. Leon Fink argues in his political study of the Knights that their leadership came from, and indeed conceived itself as, “a middle social stratum, balanced between the very rich and very poor,” which he and others refer to as the “labor aristocracy.” Fink also asserts that these labor aristocrats used their status and ideals to protect and uplift less skilled and powerful workers, and that this attitude toward the rank and file signaled, “a measure of the real social distance among the members of the Order.”⁵¹ Therefore, it is unsurprising that the KOL, as viewed through the lens of its journal, largely

⁵⁰ “Female Suffrage in Kansas,” *Journal of United Labor*, December 17, 1887.

⁵¹ Fink, *Workingmen’s Democracy*, 13-14.

perceived skilled and educated women as more capable than their toiling counterparts. If Fink's analysis is correct, the Knights' egalitarianism did extend to women, but it rested largely on the pillars of class.

The IWW AND PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN

The Woman Question still raged in American society in the early 1900s, as women progressively became more visible in public life. Greater access to education and the expansion of women's moral duties into the public sphere through reform efforts had afforded upper and middle-class women greater public influence, and the 1890s and 1900s saw the rise of the New Woman, an ideal that asserted women's rights to work and gain greater personal independence as individuals.⁵² However, for working-class women changing gender structures and modern womanhood often looked quite different. Susan Glenn's *Daughters of the Shtetl* addresses "immigrant New Womanhood," and notes that at least among young Jewish women from immigrant families, the New Woman ideal not only sought more independence from families, but also pursued militant labor activism and a more public role in labor organization.⁵³ This evaluation of young Jewish garment workers could likely apply to other young, mostly immigrant women in the industrial workforce in the same era, particularly those drawn to class-based, politically conscious labor activism. However, shifting ideals from "True Womanhood" of the nineteenth century to "New Womanhood" at the century's turn often met with other, often class ideology-based ideals for working-class women, even in the radical world of the IWW.

⁵² Cruea, "Changing Ideals of Womanhood During the Nineteenth-Century Woman Movement," 198-202.

⁵³ Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 207-12.

In 1870, approximately 14% of women sixteen and older worked for wages, and by 1900 that number had increased to over 20%. Though more native-born white women participated in the workforce than any other demographic, black women and daughters of immigrants worked in greater percentages, at 43.2% and 25.1% of their respective populations. By 1920, around 9% of married women worked for wages (equaling 23.4% of total wage-earning women), compared to a little over 3% in 1890, and approximately 24% of all women were employed in gainful occupations.⁵⁴

Though more women participated in the wage workforce, their numbers in organized labor dipped, with only 3.3% of women in industrial occupations participating in unions in 1900; women's union membership hit a low in 1910, with just 1.5% of workingwomen enrolled before a boom in garment-worker's organization in 1910. Many trade unions affiliated with the AFL, which expanded in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries to become the most powerful force in organized labor by the 1910s, accepted female members but did not prioritize their needs as a part of their labor ideology. Cross-class initiatives for women workers started by middle-class and elite women, like the WTUL, actively worked with the

⁵⁴ *Bureau of Labor Report*, 12; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistics of Women at Work: Based on Unpublished Information Derived from the Schedules of the Twelfth Census: 1900* (Washington, DC, 1907), 9-10; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Women in Gainful Occupations, 1870 to 1920: A Study of the Trend in Recent Changes in the Numbers, Occupational Distribution, and Family Relationship of Women Reported in the Census as Following a Gainful Occupation*, by Joseph A. Hill (Washington, DC, 1929), 10-12; 75.

AFL and in many ways carried on the labor reform tradition aimed at uplifting working-class women that was begun by the Knights of Labor.⁵⁵

The IWW, however, took a radical stance that included women as equal members based on a class ideology that sought to include all workers regardless of skill, race, ethnicity, or gender in “One Big Union.” As stated in the IWW Preamble, the Wobblies organized under the idea that “the working class and the employing class have nothing in common,” and that they would struggle until “the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the earth and the machinery of production, and abolish the wage system.”⁵⁶ In the eyes of the Wobblies, social revolution would solve the problems of women’s oppression as well as men’s; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn summarized this perspective in writing, “To us, society moves in grooves of class not sex. Sex distinction affects us insignificantly and would less but for economic differences.”⁵⁷

Thus, the Wobblies embraced a “gender-blind” policy that organized workers based on complete class solidarity. In this vein, the IWW urged women to organize, picket, protest, and otherwise agitate for workers’ rights. However, gender blindness did not equate to gender equality, particularly in the IWW’s perceptions of working-class women. While the IWW supported women’s involvement in labor activism and occasionally publicly recognized specific women’s efforts to work for the cause of

⁵⁵ Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 152-57; Payne, *Reform, Labor, and Feminism*, 104-05. Payne specifically links the WTUL to the Knights through women leaders such as Leonora O’Reilly and Alzina Stevens, both of whom were active in the KOL in the 1880s and later joined the WTUL.

⁵⁶ “The I.W.W. Preamble,” *Solidarity*, Philadelphia, PA, January 29, 1910.

⁵⁷ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “IWW and Women,” Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Papers, Series II on Microfilm, Reel 2, Taimament Library and Robert F. Wagner Archives, New York University, New York.

the worker, their class ideology frequently perceived women and girls as the most oppressed members of the working class due to their added economic burdens. Moreover, gender structures that still often privileged women's roles as mothers and homemakers influenced Wobbly portrayals and perceptions of working-class women, even as they argued for female workers' equal responsibility in bringing about a class revolution.

Because the Wobblies prioritized the class struggle in their organizational ideology, the IWW rejected wholesale attempts of women reformers to ally with working-class women with organizations such as the WTUL, and scoffed at the idea that woman suffrage could do anything substantial to change the situation of working-class women for the better. The organization largely rejected the utility of the ballot for men as well as women, arguing that the American political system of representative democracy in reality represented only the capitalist class, not the worker. A *Solidarity* article about the 1909 shirtwaist strike in New York City expressed skepticism about the motives of "female representatives of the ruling class" and suffragettes in assisting working-class women and their strike efforts. The article warned, "The capitalist class have quarrels among themselves and it may be to satisfy some grudge or other against some of the employers. It may be a desire for notoriety, the love of adventure, or a desire to pose as philanthropists." It was crucial for workers to remember, the article cautioned, that workers could not rely upon other classes to fight their battles: "Labor must emancipate itself. So far as the Mrs. Belmonts and the Miss Morgans from their high pedestal mix in labors battles and

respectabilize them, so far do they weaken the revolutionary fibre of the workers.”⁵⁸ According to the IWW, even if elite women offered solidarity in sisterhood, workingwomen who wanted true freedom could not pursue it outside of the working class.

A later article written in 1913 contrasted two May Day parades in New York City, one supporting woman suffrage and the other supporting labor. The article criticized the pageantry and pomp of the suffrage parade, noting that among the great wealth displayed, the economic argument for woman suffrage was belied by the poor showing of working-class women: “The socialist workingwomen were absent from the parade, though they had taken part in the previous one. The Women’s Trade Union League, dominated by society women, was represented by a small delegation, whose poverty was more impressive than their wealth.” The article contrasted this labor participation with women marching in the labor May Day parade, asserting, “While not representative of all industries, it was principally, almost solely, economic. On this basis, women took part in it, on an equality with the men. They were such in evidence, not apart from their fellow wage slaves... and aspiring, with them for something more than the ballot; to wit, industrial democracy.”⁵⁹ The IWW carefully contrasted workingwomen who allied with middle-class and elite women with those who remained steadfastly loyal to the class struggle, emphasizing their belief in the inherent differences between classes rather than between genders.

⁵⁸ “Mrs. Belmont and the Shirtwaist Strikers,” *Solidarity*, January 1, 1910.

⁵⁹ “Class Lines Clearly Shown in Two New York Parades,” *Solidarity*, May 10, 1913.

Wobblies not only disdained women's suffrage for its middle-class and elite origins, but also rejected arguments from Socialists and other groups in the radical milieu. A *Solidarity* editorial responding to a Socialist Party thinker's argument that the "woman problem" was part of the social problem and that enfranchisement benefited workers vehemently rejected the notion that workers had any real political sway. The author wrote, "Has the workingman with a vote any political power outside of his labor union, and can he with his vote emancipate himself? He can via the industrial union ballot box, but not through the capitalist ballot box." She went on to argue that workingwomen exercised their political voices through direct action:

Mr. Cohen doesn't know it but working women already have the suffrage, where it will count the most for them, in the industrial union which will ultimately expand into the Industrial Republic. If they want to exercise that right all they have to do is to organize in the Industrial Workers of the World, where they will have full equality with man...All these things women can do to assist in freeing themselves from economic slavery, and many others—talk, write, distribute literature, educate other women, in fact anything the male wage slave can do to assist in his emancipation, the female wage slave is not prevented from doing to assist in hers, Mr. Cohen to the contrary notwithstanding.⁶⁰

The IWW press, when it did recognize women's specific contributions to direct action struggles or working-class women's choice of industrial unionism over cross-class women's alliances, tended to praise women's agency and assert their equality with men. Another columnist responded to a suffragist attempting to convince workingwomen as well as men that equal pay for equal work was only possible through achieving the vote for women. As in the first editorial, the author

⁶⁰ Anna Tewksbury, "Woman and Industrial Unionism," *Solidarity*, February 12, 1910.

pointed out that women in the IWW agitated for their rights through direct action: “In other words, the practical demonstration of women’s activism in their own behalf, in matters of wages and living conditions that directly concern them, is of less moment than the ‘lever’ of the ballot with which to appeal to lawmakers!” The second article did not as vehemently reject fighting for woman’s suffrage, but argued that industrial unionists believed that direct action was more effective than the vote. The author concluded, “as long as woman can be made the prey of the employing class, in the shop, her possession of the ‘vote’ will not in the least free her from bondage. On the other hand, it might tend to delude her...that some power outside of herself (for example, ‘lawmakers’) can save her and her class.”⁶¹

Solidarity sometimes featured women’s strike activity, applauding the efforts of women on their own behalf as workers. The publication ran an article after the Lawrence, Massachusetts strike in 1912 that commended women’s roles, writing, “They had their orators and leaders, their rank and file, their killed and injured as did the men, perhaps more so.” The article also explained that women played important roles in the picketing as well as the strike committee that ultimately resulted in victory for the workers. Some articles described the work female strikers did to support their protests, such as a piece that mentioned working girls in the Little Falls, New York strike taking up donations and selling magazines to fund their efforts, and another that featured the efforts of striking girls from Akron collecting money to support their strike and holding street meetings to explain why they were striking. In the Akron strike article, *Solidarity* noted that the girls gained the support of the mayor

⁶¹ “Votes and Women’s Wages,” *Solidarity*, February 24, 1913.

and police to engage in their activities, and that girl strikers around Ohio were successfully enacting similar methods. However, when discussing young women strikers, *Solidarity* frequently portrayed them as diminutive, and as helpers rather than leaders. For example, in a piece about the Little Falls strike situation, the author described Wobbly organizer Matilda Rabinowitz as “a pretty little Russian-American girl” who was in Little Falls “to assist the strikers with their fight,” diminishing her leadership role and importance to the strike’s success.⁶²

Despite the IWW’s willingness to organize women and encourage their presence in typically “male” spaces and activities, the organization also frequently characterized girls and women as helpmeets to working men or as innocent victims of the capitalist class, frequently playing up their roles not as workers, but as wives, mothers, and daughters. These moves to publicly downplay women’s agency and overall militancy as strikers may have at times been a ploy to gain public sympathy, but they also spoke to the IWW’s class ideology and notions of gender. The Wobblies’ ideology stated that the economic revolution they hoped to enact would allow all workers, men, women, and children alike, to escape the tyranny of industrial capitalism, but it also recognized that women and girls were the most heavily oppressed of all by their lower wages and greater vulnerability to employer exploitation. Articles in *Solidarity* also indicate that the Wobblies prized women’s roles in the domestic sphere, specifically as mothers, and frequently placed women in the context of their familial roles and obligations.

⁶² “The Women of Lawrence,” *Solidarity*, July 27, 1912; “Standing Like a Rock,” *Solidarity*, November 23, 1912; “Akron Girls in New Castle,” *Solidarity*, March 22, 1913.

Sometimes, women's motives for striking and protesting were seated in the context of their domestic roles. In the same *Solidarity* article that extolled the bravery and involvement of the Lawrence women in the successful strike, the writer opened by attributing women's involvement to their concerns as mothers: "Maternity and its responsibilities are too often weapons in the hands of the exploiting class and a burden upon the life of the mothers...Malnutrition among children is common. They are even starved before birth through the underfeeding of their maternal parent. In brief, the position of women in Lawrence, Mass., is not the best, it is decidedly bad."⁶³ In Hoquiam, Washington, *Solidarity* reported that after police beat male strikers, their wives and children assumed the duty of picketing. A plea for financial support from the Paterson Silk Strikers Relief Committee in July of 1913 ran under the headline, "Hungry babies! Hungry Mothers! Hungry Men!" framing the women on strike as mothers rather than as workers.⁶⁴ Historian Ann Schofield's study contrasting the publications of the AFL and the IWW as contemporaneous organizations argues that the Wobblies' ideal of the Rebel Girl fought for her status as wife and mother, whether presently or as a future goal.⁶⁵ Indeed, this focus on maternalism shows that the IWW often held a traditionalist view of women's roles and place in society even as it encouraged women's participation in labor activism.

Perhaps the most extreme instance of privileging women's roles as mothers was *Solidarity's* reporting of the 1912 Lawrence strike and the strikers' efforts to

⁶³ "The Women of Lawrence," *Solidarity*, July 27, 1912.

⁶⁴ "Hungry Babies! Hungry Mothers! Hungry Men!" *Solidarity*, July 12, 1913.

⁶⁵ Ann Schofield, "Rebel Girls and Union Maids: The Woman Question in the Journals of the AFL and IWW, 1905-1920," *Feminist Studies* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1983), 336-45.

remove their children from the city. The strike committee coordinated with the IWW to send the children of strikers out of Lawrence to sympathetic homes as a form of strike relief, with two large groups of children sent away before the strikers met with any trouble. This tactic prompted the colonel of the provisional militia in Lawrence to claim intimidation was being used and that “the sending away of more children would not be permitted unless the parents expressed their willingness to the colonel’s satisfaction.” The IWW struck back in *Solidarity*, sarcastically responding to claims that they were breaking up homes and sending the children to be exploited for the strikers’ gain: “We couldn’t see why these 20,000 strikers should have made such a fuss in Lawrence if they really had comfortable homes for their children. In all of which it appears we were badly informed. The ‘humanitarian’ textile bosses and their loyal servants have now set us right.”⁶⁶

Lawrence officials’ attempts to prevent parents from sending away their children backfired when Lawrence police prevented children from leaving the city in late February. The *Oregonian* reported in its headline that, “Wails of children being taken to city home drive parents to desperation.”⁶⁷ The reporter for *Solidarity* was even more emphatic in her account of the incident, writing, “A climax came last Saturday morning, when the police, acting under orders of the City Marshall, clubbed and knocked down women and children, the innocent wives and children of the strikers.” She went on to describe the riot in detail as mothers fought to keep their

⁶⁶ “Strikers Give up Babies,” *Kansas City Star*, Kansas City, Missouri, February 11, 1912; “More Children Sent Away From Lawrence,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 18, 1912; “Exploiting the Children,” *Solidarity*, February 24, 1912.

⁶⁷ “Textile Workers in Stubborn Riot,” *Morning Oregonian*, Portland OR, February 25, 1912.

children from being taken away: “The women, their hats or shawls torn off, their hair down, their clothing torn, slapped and scratched and bit...Women were dragged down the platform at a run, to the big arsenal wagon, waiting for the purpose.” After police had taken the women and children away to the police station, the court decided that the city should hold the children until the next week, prompting mothers to attempt to take them back from the police: “Mothers snatched their children from the officers to kiss them passionately. For the second time that day, the officers drew their clubs and went after the women, snatching the children to throw them into the hacks. The women were knocked down and dragged in the muddy street.” Unions from around the country successfully petitioned Congress to investigate the situation at Lawrence, mostly based on the actions of the Lawrence police in attacking the strikers and their children. By carefully portraying the women as wives and mothers rather than as strikers themselves, the IWW garnered sympathy for them and their children, and arguably turned the tide of the strike in favor of the workers. The Lawrence incident demonstrates not only that the Wobblies often viewed women through the lens of domesticity, but also that this perspective could prove advantageous to their cause.

Solidarity did not often specifically highlight women’s roles in strikes in their reporting, generally choosing instead to focus on men as radical labor activists or referring more generically to the activities of “men and women strikers,” or more commonly, simply, “the strikers.” Despite this practice, occasionally *Solidarity* did highlight women and girl’s roles in direct labor activism, either as a way to underscore the triumphs and successes of specific actions or to further point out injustices done to the striking workers. This ambivalence in the Wobbly press reveals

a conflicted perspective on working-class women that permeated the organization and its leadership throughout its existence.

Conclusion

The Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World both sought working-class solidarity, and both of their ideologies included women in these visions of a united working class. Though their class ideologies differed significantly, both organizations had specific perspectives on class that intersected with the prevailing gender structures of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Comparing the KOL and IWW's perspectives on working-class women reveals changing notions of class solidarity for working-class radical labor groups, while notions of women's roles in society also underwent shifts. While the Knights embraced a True Womanhood ideal and women's roles as moral leaders, the Wobblies leaned more toward recognizing women's equal place in the public sphere as workers. However, both the KOL and the IWW expressed conflicted views of women that did not quite align to any one consistent perspective.

For the Knights of Labor, working-class radicalism was grounded in the ideal of industrial producerism that came to embrace wage-workers of all skills, regardless of gender or race (with the notable exception of Asian workers), and welcomed all who shared the aim of uplifting the position of workers in America. At the Knights' height of influence in the 1880s, ideas of class were undergoing major shifts as industrial capitalism cemented its hegemonic presence in the American economy, and notions of gender were changing as women and men questioned previous wisdom about woman's nature and suitability for interaction in the public sphere. The KOL's

perceptions of women represented a confluence of these changing structures as they portrayed native, skilled, and educated women as suited for skilled jobs that competed with men, but women and girls at the bottom of the economic ladder as in need of protection and uplift. These skilled women, as well as more educated women who lobbied for woman suffrage and other reform efforts aimed at uplifting workingwomen, found that they could hold leadership positions in the Knights. However, their influence was often limited to working for or with other women rather than wielding power throughout the organization, and women's leadership was by all counts miniscule compared to men's, even when their percentage of membership is taken into account.

By the early 1900s, industrial capitalism was entrenched as the dominant economic force and working-class radicals responded by shifting into an oppositional class framework that pitted the working class against the capitalist class. While the Wobblies included women side by side with men on the basis of marshaling all workers against the oppressive forces of capitalism, reflecting shifting standards for heterosociality and women's ability to act more openly in the public sphere, the IWW also portrayed women in terms that minimized their organizing efforts and cast them as helpless and oppressed. Additionally, the IWW upheld attitudes that often privileged women's domestic roles over those of public roles, indicating that their "gender blindness" did not extend to questions of women's ideal roles in the public or domestic spheres. While women did have opportunities to organize as part of Wobbly strikes and protests, as evidenced by the portrayal of women in the Lawrence strike, IWW leadership tended to ignore or disregard women and their contributions to the

organization unless it proved politically expedient or beneficial to their image as a class-conscious group that actively promoted and achieved working-class solidarity. However, some Wobbly women, particularly the organizers who gained more prominence than the rank and file women involved in local strikes and protests, had greater opportunity to lead both men and women than did women organizers for the Knights of Labor.

The KOL and the IWW, though distinctly different in the ways they approached class as well as women members, both held contradictory perspectives on the women in their ranks. Though the KOL and IWW's general perceptions of women, as seen through their journals, show that paternalistic perspectives existed even in organizations that purported to welcome women on an egalitarian basis, these journals do not reveal much about how women saw themselves in relation to the Knights and the Wobblies. To understand more fully the Knights' and the Wobblies' relationships with working-class women, the second chapter turns to the lives and writings of their most prominent female organizers. Leonora Barry of the KOL and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of the IWW worked to reach out to women workers. Their personal and professional lives reveal the challenges and contradictions of answering the Woman Question in a working-class environment at a time when expectations for women's gender roles were largely framed with the native, white middle class in mind. By analyzing Barry and Flynn, we can further grasp the complex nature of working-class radicalism, class, and gender through the lens of each woman's personal experience.

Chapter 2: Women Leaders and the Woman Question

During the height of their national influence, both the KOL and the IWW employed a prominent woman who largely defined each organization's approach to its inclusion of women. Leonora Barry spent three years, from 1886 to 1889, as the General Investigator and later the General Instructor and Director of Women's Work for the Knights. She traveled around the United States and Canada to advocate for women's labor organization and delivered talks and lectures to workers as well as other groups sympathetic to the cause of labor. Her annual reports to the General Convention as well as the articles and editorials she published in the *JUL* illuminate Barry's own class and gender ideologies and show how she, as a female leader, interacted with the larger organization's perspectives on and treatment of women workers.⁶⁸ Approximately twenty years later, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn became an organizer for the IWW in 1907, a position she dropped out of high school early to pursue at age 17. Quickly becoming known as "the Rebel Girl," she traveled the country for ten years with the Wobblies delivering lectures and organizing strikes and protests for male and female workers. Flynn's writing and life during her years with the IWW highlight the complicated nature of identifying women's roles in a "gender-blind" organization, both for a female leader and for rank-and-file women.⁶⁹

When compared, Barry and Flynn's respective experiences reveal neither woman had one consistent perspective on the Woman Question. Both held prominent roles in their organizations, and at times each displayed contradictory attitudes toward

⁶⁸ *Bureau of Labor Report*, 116-23.

⁶⁹ *Camp, Iron in Her Soul*, 17-85.

their fellow workingwomen, even as they became the voice for women on a national level. They also both displayed uncertainty about gender structures as related to their class ideologies, both as labor activists and in their later careers. Studying and comparing Barry and Flynn, two strong-willed and vocal women leaders in labor organizations dominated by men, shows that women's attempts to fit into the KOL and IWW were often uncomfortable, even for those at the top.

Leonora Barry

Leonora Barry, of all the women members and organizers working within the Knights of Labor, was perhaps the best-known and most influential woman in the organization during its heyday in the 1880s. Barry, like many members of the Knights and many of her fellow wage-earning women, was an immigrant to the United States. Born in Ireland in 1849, Barry moved with her family to New York in the 1850s. Before marrying William E. Barry in 1871, she taught school. After her marriage, Barry devoted herself to domestic life as a wife and a mother. She moved with her husband, a painter and musician, to a variety of different places and gave birth to three children. Only ten years later Barry's husband and only daughter died of a fever, leaving her to support two small boys on her own. Barry sought wage work in a factory after unsuccessfully attempting to remain in the domestic sphere by taking in sewing work and dressmaking at home. She joined the Knights of Labor in 1884, shortly after beginning work in a hosiery mill in Amsterdam, New York, reportedly bothered by the working conditions and especially the insults that the girls and women had to endure in order to keep their positions. Soon, she became the master

workman of her local assembly, and served as a delegate to her district assembly in 1885 and the General Convention in Richmond in 1886.⁷⁰

Barry quickly rose to national prominence in the Knights after the 1886 convention in Richmond, Virginia, when she and other women delegates insisted on the importance of creating a permanent women's department. The women delegates nominated Barry as the general investigator for women and children's work, and she spent approximately three years traveling constantly around the country investigating women's working conditions and organizing wage-earning women. To engage in this work, Barry had to leave her children behind, one in a Philadelphia Catholic school and the other with family.⁷¹ In many ways, Barry represented the ideal champion of women's wage work for the Knights of Labor: a young mother widowed and forced into wage work by her circumstances, she used her position to join a collective movement of producers and fought to make conditions better for women and children in the workforce.

The 1886 General Assembly was arguably the high water mark for women's participation in KOL at a national level (as well as the zenith of the Knights' overall prominence in the national labor movement), with sixteen female delegates out of a total of 660 altogether. A few women in the KOL had formed a provisional committee on women's work at the Assembly in 1885 and reported their findings, gathered from an informal survey of women's local assemblies, at the 1886 General

⁷⁰ Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women, 1607-1950, Vol. 3* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 101-02; *Bureau of Labor Report*, 116-17.

⁷¹ *Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1886*, 162-64, 287; *Notable American Women*, 101-02.

Assembly. Even a relatively informal survey demonstrated that women who already benefited from organized labor worked long hours and earned low wages, and that child labor remained prevalent despite social reform efforts and new laws meant to prevent such abuses. Mary Hanafin, the chair of the committee, followed up the survey report with a strong call to arms to their fellow Lady Knights. Hanafin stated that the purpose of the women's committee was to raise awareness of the struggles working women faced, framing her remarks in the context of women's "moral standard" and referring to protecting their "honor" from unscrupulous employees. Hanafin concluded her remarks by calling for the women of the Order to form a permanent committee in order to investigate working-women's issues, asserting, "As this is certainly a work that can only be done by woman, we think we should be accorded the privilege of forming an association inside the Knights of Labor for this purpose." The women made the three main objectives of the department to investigate abuses of women wage earners by employers, to agitate for equal pay for equal work, and to abolish child labor. Barry's duties as the General Investigator were to "investigate the condition of all working women, instruct and educate them in the Order, and organize female Locals when it will not conflict with more important work."⁷²

No sooner than beginning her work as the General Investigator did Barry learn how difficult the task of investigating women's working conditions would be. Her first annual report to the General Assembly in 1887 explained the difficulties she faced: "Having no legal authority I have been unable to make as thorough an

⁷² *Proceedings of the General Assembly, 1886*, 163-64, 287; "Women's Work," *Journal of United Labor*, December 25, 1886.

investigation in many places as I would like, and, after the discharge of Sister Annie Conboy...I was obliged to refrain from going through establishments where the owners were opposed to our Order lest some of our members be victimized..." Barry went on to describe her work throughout 1886 and 1887, which she began less than a month after the Richmond General Assembly in October. Her descriptions of the woolen mills, potteries, shirtwaist factories, silk mills, laundries, and industries where women and children workers could be found from Boston to Texas painted a bleak but familiar scene of the widespread exploitation women workers faced. Her report of the conditions in Fall River, Massachusetts summarized much of what Barry found in her first year of travel investigating women's wage work: "hard work, poor pay, stringent rules and a deplorable condition generally," though she did note a few locations where she described the working conditions as "above the average."⁷³ Barry's first report expressed palpable anger over the way the majority of female workers were treated as well as frustration at the state of labor organizing among wage-earning women as well as men.

Barry also spent much of her first year attempting to organize new local assemblies and trying to settle disputes and other difficulties among existing locals. Of Haverhill, Massachusetts, she wrote, "Organization was suffering here from much the same disease as in other places—inward dissensions, neglect and indifference, yet there were many earnest, energetic, faithful brothers and sisters, who were an honor to the Order." She expressed deep frustration and disgust for the labor situation in

⁷³ Leonora Barry, "Report of the General Investigator of Women's Work and Wages," in *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor of America*, 1887, 1581-88.

Rhode Island, where she found that employers would often pit male workers against female employees. She wrote: “The years of cruel oppression and injustice which those people have endured has so sapped the milk of human kindness from their hearts that the same system of selfishness applied to them by their employers they in turn practice toward each other,” ultimately blaming these employer-fueled dissensions for undermining organized labor. She also complained that women workers in other areas of the country enjoyed little or no formal organization, and that many women were “ignorant of its benefits, and unwilling to be educated.”⁷⁴ While Barry clearly cared deeply about the plight of exploited workers, particularly women, she also often conveyed exasperation with women who did not organize and made no apparent effort to learn why they had no interest in joining the KOL.

However, Barry reserved most of her ire not for “ignorant toilers,” but for the men and women Knights who out of selfishness or indifference did little to welcome these workingwomen into the KOL or to fight for equal pay. In the opening of her initial address to the General Assembly, she excoriated her fellow Knights for putting their own needs ahead of working women’s, stating that if they would not truly support equal pay for equal work, “then let us here and now wipe the twenty-second plank out of our platform, and no longer make a farce of one of the grandest principles of our Order.” She went on to point out the severe pay inequalities, calling on male workers who earned nine to fifteen dollars for a week’s work to “cease your demands and grievances and give us your assistance for a time to bring some relief to the poor unfortunate, whose week’s work of eighty-four hours brings her but \$2.50 or

⁷⁴ Barry, “Report of the General Investigator,” 1887, 1585-87.

\$3 per week.” She finished this scolding by appealing to the men’s sense of responsibility to their families and to the dignity of “strong, noble manhood” to ensure their commitment to equal pay for equal work.⁷⁵ Barry also advocated for the principles of the KOL and adhered to the position that the Knights should be a more centralized and cohesive body in order to truly build solidarity among workers. In several instances, she lobbied for educating male and female KOL members about the principles of the Knights and the benefits of organized labor. In this sense, Barry was deeply committed to working-class consciousness and solidarity between those who had greater advantages and those who had fewer. As historians Kim Voss and Leon Fink argue, the Knights’ hallmark of radical social change lay in their attempts to form solidarity between “labor aristocrats” and the less-skilled proletariat, and Barry’s sense of class-consciousness was highly representative of both the successes and pitfalls of this ideal.⁷⁶

Barry’s main task as a female leader in the Knights was to spread the gospel of labor organization to women workers and to serve women’s interests in the Order. Though she appealed to male KOL members for greater solidarity and outreach to their toiling sisters, most of Barry’s communication was aimed toward other women. She addressed an article in an 1887 issue of the *JUL* “To My Sisters,” and encouraged female KOL members to keep up their interest in the Knights and the work of organizing girls and women in the workforce. Her address, the first she delivered to other women in her capacity as the General Investigator, also challenged her “sister

⁷⁵ Barry, “Report of the General Investigator,” 1887, 1581-82.

⁷⁶ Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism*, 32-39; Fink, *Workingmen’s Democracy*, 12-14.

women” to help with the struggle of educating and organizing toilers. The column also introduced a new “Women’s Corner” feature in the *JUL*, meant to highlight the lives and concerns of workingwomen themselves, both for the benefit of other women and for male members to further understand the experiences of their wage earning sisters.⁷⁷

Barry not only wrote encouraging words to sister workers in the *JUL*, but also on occasion took them to task in an effort to get them to participate in the organization of their fellow working-class women. In a column entitled “Address to Working Girls,” Barry spoke both to the “toilers” in low-wage positions as well as the more well-off women in the Knights. To this latter category of women, she wrote,

There are two great evils existing among workingwomen which form a compact barrier between them and the good they could do. These are, first, selfishness on the part of those who are so situated as to have the means whereby they may relieve others. For this no one or number can be held wholly responsible, as the woman of to-day is only a creature of the system to which she has for so many years been compelled to submit...urged on by force of circumstances in the mad race of her fellow man of “every one for himself,” with no thought or care for the interest of his fellow being or how his advancement, by all the means that are and have been resorted to, may be the cause of misery, suffering and degradation to another of God’s creatures.

This message decried the lack of action taken by other women on behalf of those who had worse positions and more uncertainty than they did, and revealed Barry’s deeply held beliefs in women’s duty of solidarity with one another. Her first report to the General Assembly also appealed to women as consumers, asking them to consider the

⁷⁷ Leonora Barry, “To My Sisters,” *Journal of United Labor*, December 31, 1887.

consequences of buying cheaply-made goods, especially garments, for other working women, writing that “the welfare of a sister toiler should be ever foremost.”⁷⁸

By the delivery of her last report to the General Assembly in 1889, Barry had borne the brunt of many continued failures to effectively and widely organize workers throughout the country as the Knights continued a precipitous decline from their height of influence in 1886. The tone of her last report was decidedly more pessimistic and reflective on the difficulties of labor organizing than the previous two reports she delivered, and revisited the problem of getting those who were less in need to contribute their time and effort to organizing women. She wrote, “every effort has been made to perfect and extend the organization of women, but our efforts have not met with the response that the cause deserves—partly because...they are what they are pleased to term “all right” do not feel it incumbent upon themselves to do anything to assist their less fortunate co-workers.” She also lamented that many women did not join labor organizations because of “foolish pride, prudish modesty and religious scruples, and...the hope and expectancy that in the near future marriage will lift them out of the industrial life...often finding, however, that their struggle has only begun when they have to go back to the shop and work for two instead of one.”⁷⁹ Barry clearly felt deep sense of frustration with the lack of solidarity demonstrated by both better-off women and those poorer working girls that she felt needed organization the most.

⁷⁸ Leonora Barry, “Address to the Working Girls,” *Journal of United Labor*, August 16, 1888; Barry, “Report of the General Investigator,” 1887, 1587.

⁷⁹ Leonora Barry, “Report of the Director of Women’s Work,” in *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor of America*, 1888, 1-2.

Despite this jaded attitude, Barry did note several successes and gains that the KOL had made on the local and district levels in the 1889 report of her activities as Director of Women's Work. She described in positive terms the District Assembly based in Albany, with its bright prospects of labor organizing, and said of a woman's local comprised of various trades that, "It is one of the most active, loyal Local in the Order, and the brothers of D.A. 147 take pride in assisting the sisters to make it so." She also noted the growth of women's locals in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Alabama, and Colorado. Despite these traces of optimism about the continued possibilities of organizing women, Barry ended her report with the recommendation that the Knights dissolve the Women's Department in favor of funding more women as lecturers and educators "to tell women why they should organize as a part of the industrial hive, rather than because they are women." She argued that women should have all the benefits of Knighthood that were afforded to men, and that by not distinguishing between sex all KOL members would be willing to work harder toward a common good for all wage earners. She concluded by reiterating her disappointment in the Knights' failure to fully support a Women's Department and the futility of continuing, writing, "Repetition is but a mockery to those who are suffering, and, until we can give them practical assistance...it is useless to add to their miseries by exciting a hope that is never realized."⁸⁰ Though Barry recognized that women had specific needs as workers, by 1889 the repeated failures to address their problems led her to the conclusion that their best hopes for progress lay in non-gender

⁸⁰ Leonora Barry, "Report of the General Instructor and Director of Woman's Work," in *Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Knights of Labor of America*, 1889, 6.

specific organizing. Despite this recommendation, the KOL retained the Women's Department, but the Order was already in heavy decline, and all but died out as a national movement by the mid-1890s, leaving many workingwomen outside of organized labor once again.⁸¹

Another factor in Barry's denunciation of separate organizing for women within the Knights seemed to be her personal perceptions and ideals regarding the Woman Question. After three years of attempting to organize women workers and trying to build solidarity between women, she concluded that women could not organize effectively without male influence. She wrote, "...because she is a woman, her natural pride and timidity, coupled with the restriction of social customs, deter her from making that struggle that can be made by men." She also stated that she believed in woman's main role in the domestic sphere, asserting, "If it were possible, I wish that it were not necessary for women to learn any trade but that of domestic duties, as I believe it was intended that man should be the bread-winner." However, she went on to concede that when women did have to work, they should have every opportunity to earn equal wages and learn any trade that they wished. She also complained that women were often held back not only by men's discrimination against them, but by other women who displayed no ambition or desire for a better life, writing that many women had developed "the habit of submission and acceptance without question of any terms offered them, with the pessimistic view of life in which they see no ray of hope."⁸²

⁸¹ Weir, *Knights Unhorsed*, 156-159.

⁸² Barry, "Report of the General Instructor," 1889, 1-2.

Barry's sentiments expressed in this last report to the General Assembly reveal a complex and sometimes conflicted ideology regarding the Woman Question. Her personal beliefs, like those of many male Knights, held that men should bear the responsibility for earning a living while women were best suited for domesticity and motherhood. However, she also clearly believed that some women could, and should, learn trades and do their best to compete with men for fair wages and dignity within the workplace. Her own experiences in becoming a wage earner to support her family and her fierce involvement with the Knights show that Barry herself was willing to become the master of her own fate and also fight for the uplift of other women. Her remarks about certain women's ignorance and resignation to a life of misery and drudgery belie a definite sense of class differentiation, as well. At heart a reformer, Barry believed strongly in solidarity among workers but also appeared to view class as somewhat mutable; the role of the Knights, in her view, was to lift toiling workers out of a proletarian position and into a better class of society. However, after three years of trying and often failing to lift women out of dire circumstances, she at least partially blamed an innate or heavily ingrained sense of hopelessness and apathy for the failure of workingwomen to enact and sustain organization.

Barry resigned her position as an organizer for the Knights soon after recommending the dissolution of the Women's Department when she married printer Obadiah Read Lake in 1890, acting on her belief that women should not earn wages except when economically necessary. However, she did not leave behind her role in the public sphere, choosing instead to become active in the temperance and woman's suffrage movements. She was particularly devoted to the Women's Christian

Temperance Union and the Catholic Total Abstinence Union of America, and also took part in the Colorado suffrage movement in 1893. Barry also became a traveling public lecturer on the Chautauqua circuit, an educational movement that brought lecturers to crowds all across the United States in the early 1900s. She continued her public speaking until two years before her death at age eighty of mouth cancer.⁸³

Barry's public life and career, first in the Knights of Labor and later in adult education and reform causes illustrate the changing roles of women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as well as the complex nature of the Woman Question. Though the Knights declined and largely died out by the early twentieth century, ideas and conversations about women's roles in society continued to influence radicals who sought a more unified and powerful working class.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and the IWW

While Leonora Barry came to the labor movement through personal experience as a factory operative and a mother trying to support her family, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn was born into the world of working-class radicalism. Flynn grew up amongst an Irish-American family with ties to the Socialist movement and a long history with labor organizing and activism, including several uncles who participated in the Knights of Labor at one time, a mother who identified as a feminist, and a father who held various leadership roles as a Socialist labor activist. At a young age, she began attending meetings of labor organizations and Socialist political meetings with her father. Thomas Flynn encouraged his daughter's interest in the working-class movement. She quickly gained recognition as a powerful orator even as a schoolgirl,

⁸³ Edward T James, Janet Wilson James, and Paul S. Boyer, eds., *Notable American Women*, 101-02.

and left high school at age seventeen for a position as a labor organizer with the Industrial Workers of the World in 1907. In a 1941 oral history interview, Flynn stated that she “felt Socialism was just around the corner and had to get into the struggle as fast as I could.” However, Flynn moved into a more radical ideology after listening to the Socialist Party of America’s Eugene V. Debs and the Socialist Labor Party’s Daniel DeLeon, both of whom were active in the IWW, promoting industrial unionism. According to Flynn, she and others in the younger generation of Socialists felt that the movement was “rather stodgy” and led by increasingly bourgeois influences. Desiring to join a more radical, militant cause, Flynn threw herself into organizing for the IWW across the country.⁸⁴

Flynn spent nearly ten years with the Wobblies, organizing laborers, leading strikes, and giving speeches across the country to working men and women in diverse industries, from timber workers to textile factory hands. Following in the footsteps of prominent female organizers of an earlier generation like Mary Harris “Mother” Jones and Lucy Parsons, Flynn became a prominent voice in the largely male-dominated IWW. The Wobblies, in a similar vein to the Knights of Labor, represented a radical attitude in the labor movement that embraced class solidarity and an ideology of gender egalitarianism, and sought a major societal shift that would elevate workers and their families. Their radical vision of working-class solidarity was represented by a modified version of the KOL motto, “an injury to one is a concern to all,” which the IWW changed to the more militant “an injury to one is an

⁸⁴ Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, 4-11; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, interview by Eugene W. Plawiuk, “Memories of Industrial Workers of the World,” Gifts of Speech Archive, Sweet Briar College, 1997, accessed February 2, 2017 <http://gos.sbc.edu/f/flynn.html>.

injury to all.”⁸⁵ While the KOL founded its fairly elastic working-class consciousness and calls for solidarity in a class ideology that valued producers as important contributors to a capitalist economy, the IWW developed a class ideology that completely opposed capitalism and the capitalist class. Much of Flynn’s early writing reflected this revolutionary vision that saw all workers, men and women alike, as essential to bringing about the end of capitalism and establishing a democratic and ultimately syndicalist America. However, as she matured and her political and social identity developed further, her writing came to reveal a particular concern for working-class women and their place in the revolutionary labor movement.

Flynn began her career as an orator while she was still a high school student, and an early essay she wrote on women in 1905, at the age of fifteen, demonstrates that she felt a concern for the Woman Question from the very beginning of her life as a radical activist. The essay brought into question the societal idea of the “New Woman” who participated actively in public life and bore little resemblance to an older generation of women who were meek “household drudges for men,” and pointed out that religion, lack of education, societal expectations, the legal system, and their own submission to men had prevented women from truly becoming free. She focused on women’s roles as mothers and argued that men and women were equals “as two parts of a pair of shears are to each other.” The way for women to free themselves and embrace this equality, Flynn argued, was to “think less of clothes, fashion, style, sentimental nonsense, consider the vital questions, the great issues of knowledge, of government, of Liberty, of Humanity...” Once women were “glorious

⁸⁵ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 148-64.

and intelligent,” Flynn asserted that, “we will soon have a race of men reared by free Mothers.” She concluded by stating that, “men will never be free till woman is free. When woman is free man is free, then and then only.” Though her speech displayed a hyperbolic rhetorical style and relatively simplistic worldview typical of youth, this early essay formed a basis for Flynn’s approaches toward women during her years in the IWW. While she eventually became convinced of the class struggle and put less faith in the utility of women achieving suffrage and higher education, she retained the view that working-class women often suffered more degradation and exploitation by capitalism than did men, and that women’s circumstances had to be improved before men could be truly free as well.⁸⁶

Flynn later outlined her views on working women and their place in the class struggle after she was converted to a radical revolutionary worldview. The speech, written in 1909 to commemorate International Woman’s Day, expressed her perspective on women’s suffrage as a proponent of class revolution. Flynn quoted Socialist thinker August Bebel’s point that women were economically and socially dependent on men, and acknowledged that “this dependence may be alleviated by formally placing her upon an equality before the law and in point of rights,” but that working-class women and men alike suffered from economic oppression. She blasted “the suffragist sentimentalist” for not recognizing the inherent wrong of “economic slavery” and argued that the real societal ill was “lack of suffrage caused by economic

⁸⁶ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Early Essay on Women,” in *Words on Fire: The Life and Writing of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn*, ed. Rosalyn Fraad Baxandall (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 75-78.

dependence,” not by the technical legal rights of men and women.⁸⁷ For Flynn and her fellow IWW members, suffrage would do nothing to alleviate the societal ills that befell working-class women when the real problem, they contended, was the oppression of both men and women under the capitalist system.

While the prevailing and most visible women’s movements of the 1900s and 1910s placed sex at the center of their struggles for women’s liberty, the Wobblies and other revolutionary activists put the class struggle before all else, and frequently turned to anarchist philosophy to express their fundamental positions and goals. Anarchists sought to completely restructure society, and frequently questioned fundamental institutions such as the political system, industrial capitalism, and even sexual and familial relationships. Historian Margaret Marsh argues in her study of anarchist women that the central tenets of anarchist philosophy were individual liberty, rejection of controlling others, and repudiation of all non-voluntary authority. For women, this presented a unique opportunity to challenge traditional institutions that long limited women’s individual freedoms, and to seek egalitarianism through completely upending societal norms, including men’s patriarchal authority. However, as Marsh points out, seeking individual freedom within the anarchist movement did not always integrate smoothly into the greater goal of creating large-scale social change.⁸⁸

In her personal and professional life, Flynn embraced the individualistic spirit promoted by radical anarchist feminists by defying many conventions for women at

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, 1909 International Women’s Day Speech, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Papers.

⁸⁸ Margaret S. Marsh, *Anarchist Women, 1870-1920* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1981) 3-5, 19-20, 100-01.

the time. Flynn married a fellow Wobbly organizer, Jack Jones, in 1907 shortly after joining him on an IWW tour of Minnesota. Flynn's biographer Helen Camp recounted that Flynn felt marriage would be too constraining, but Jones convinced her to marry him through bringing up practical concerns for her safety and encouraging the romantic idea of marrying a revolutionary she liked and admired. Only seventeen at the time of her marriage to thirty-year-old Jones, Flynn endured a few difficult years of marriage marked by Jones's unemployment, the death of their first child, and several tough free speech fights with the Wobblies in the West. In 1909, Flynn, several months' pregnant, arrived in Spokane, WA to help organize a free speech, which rattled even the staunchest radical men.

Activists prevented Flynn from speaking publicly due to her pregnancy—it was deemed “indecent as well as dangerous”—but police still arrested her on conspiracy charges for editing the radical newspaper the *Industrial Worker*.⁸⁹ She wrote an account of her arrest and imprisonment for the *Workingman's Paper of Seattle* in which she played up her respectability, particularly in relation to two of her fellow female prisoners. She described her cellmates as “poor miserable specimens of the victims of society,” and expressed her gratefulness for their kindness to her, writing, “These miserable outcasts of society did everything in their power to make me comfortable.” She later described what appeared to be a prostitution scheme involving one of the women and proclaimed, “the whole performance bore the earmarks to me of a *putrid state of morals inside the county jail of Spokane*.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, 23.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Story of My Arrest and Imprisonment,” in *Words on Fire*, 88-91.

Flynn's article, though not focused on the subject of working-class women, nonetheless shows the importance of her status as a respectable woman, despite her unorthodox career as a labor agitator who frequently consorted with itinerant male laborers and who had been jailed numerous times in the past. By contrasting herself with the two other women in the jail and expressing moral outrage at their exploitation by the jailers, Flynn drew a clear line between her own experiences as a morally upright citizen fighting for the rights of the common man and the lives of women exploited into petty criminality.

Flynn, tried for conspiracy along with fellow agitator Charley Filigno, was acquitted of the charges when a prominent citizen and women's club member gave testimony on her behalf. After the Spokane fight, Jack Jones tried to convince Flynn to go with him to Butte, Montana and settle down into quiet domestic life, a plan she adamantly resisted. Camp writes of Flynn's reaction, "The prospect of becoming a tired, worn, frontier wife terrified her." Instead, she returned to New York to deliver her baby and decided to leave Jones. Regretting her hasty marriage and determined to save her career, Flynn resumed living with her parents in New York with her son, Fred Flynn, in 1910.⁹¹

Eventually leaving her young son with her mother, Flynn continued her career as an IWW organizer and spent the next several years leading strikes and protests, delivering speeches across the country, and writing articles for various radical publications. Though the IWW never instituted a separate women's department, Flynn became the voice of the Wobblies regarding women's place in the

⁹¹ Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, 18-25.

revolutionary labor movement.⁹² She often spoke on the topic of women organizing along with male workers, and advocated class solidarity above all. Depending on her audience and on the point she was trying to make, Flynn vacillated between explicitly recognizing the unique difficulties that working-class women faced and downplaying them in favor of promoting class solidarity with working-class men over allying with middle-class and elite reformers. Despite this, her message consistently sought to persuade women that their only hope for gaining equality was to organize on the basis of class in an industrial syndicalist union with their fellow workers.

According to Flynn, the mission and purpose of the IWW was to create “one big union” where all workers, regardless of race, sex, skill, or political affiliation could work toward the “abolition of wage slavery.” She explained explicitly that the Wobblies’ approach was based in class solidarity rather than sex solidarity, writing, “the success of our program will benefit workers regardless of sex, and will injure all women as well as men who depend on profits for a livelihood.” She went on to explain the futility of cross-class female organizing, recalling her interactions with middle-class women in the Spokane free speech fight and their ultimate lack of interest in working with the IWW: “Free speech police fiendishness, the suffering of sister women were forgotten, overwhelmed by the menace to their economic security.”⁹³ A 1911 newspaper article also advocated for women’s involvement in the industrial union movement, though in this piece Flynn pointed specifically to working-class women’s struggles, writing,

⁹² Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, 25-30.

⁹³ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “IWW and Women,” Elizabeth Gurley Flynn Papers.

...women's sufferings and inequalities, at least in the working class, which is our only concern, are the results of either wage slavery directly or personal dependence upon a wage worker... Women to the number of seven million have been driven forth from the home, by dire necessity, into the industrial arena, to be even more fiercely exploited than their brother workers... Multitudes of wives and mothers are virtually sex slaves through their direct and debasing dependence upon individual men for their existence, and motherhood is all too often unwelcome and enforced, while the struggle for existence... is usually so fierce that life degenerates to a mere animal existence...⁹⁴

Flynn went on to denounce the revolutionary power of the ballot in favor of industrial unionism's approach of direct action. She dismissed craft unions as useless to the cause of working-class solidarity, asserting that "men steeped of craft interests and craft selfishness cannot be suddenly lifted to the plane of class interests and solidarity." She also criticized the strikes of the "old unions" as ultimately unsuccessful and claimed that the major strikes led by International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) members were "exploited by the rich faddists for woman's suffrage, etc., until the points at issue were lost sight of in the blare of automobile horns attendant on their coming and going."⁹⁵

In 1915 Flynn spoke even more explicitly to "home women," the wives of industrial workers who were, to her, even more dependent on capitalism than men due to the patriarchal nature of society. She wrote, "Woman stands in much the same position to man, as man does to his employer... She is in a proletarian-like position, he in a bourgeois-like position, and must submit to man's government in all its extremes, as the proletarian must submit to bourgeois government to the last limit." She reasoned against the many facets of the contemporary women's movement with

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "Women in Industry Should Organize," in *Words on Fire*, 92.

⁹⁵ Flynn, "Women in Industry Should Organize," 93-95.

materialist arguments, asserting that economic freedom was the basis of all other rights and freedoms for women. She stated that, “the only sex problem I know of is how are women to control themselves, how be free...and I can see but one way thru controlling their one problem of how to live, be fed and clothed—their own economic lives.” For Flynn, the ultimate Woman Question boiled down to the economic question of dependence, and the only way for women to gain political, social, and sexual freedom was through revolution, which would overturn patriarchal norms that she viewed as inherent in capitalism. She encouraged homemakers to organize and industrialize their household labor, just as wage earners organized for factory labor, in order to recognize “a revolution in woman’s position such as the world has never known,” that would play an integral part in the overall economic revolution.⁹⁶ This particular speech revealed a gender consciousness that explicitly intersected class and gender, and was often not apparent in the wider Wobbly ideology that usually only addressed wage-earning women as equals in the struggle to end wage slavery.

Despite her apparent cynicism about women’s roles in marriage and family relationships, which she sometimes likened to lifelong prostitution and sex slavery, Flynn also expressed concern about women’s domestic roles even as she advocated for birth control and organization as homemakers. In a *Solidarity* article entitled “The IWW Call to Women,” Flynn assured readers that the point of the revolution was not to destroy the family; “The IWW,” she contended, “is at war with the ruthless invasion of family life by capitalism,” and wished to end the necessity of entire families working for pitiful wages in order to earn a subsistence living. She explained

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Men and Women,” in *Words on Fire*, 100-103.

that industrial syndicalism would not require women to work in factories if they did not wish to, writing, “this does not imply that mothers must work. Or that women must stay at home, if they prefer otherwise. Either extreme is equally absurd.”⁹⁷ To Flynn, the promise of industrial syndicalism was that of freedom and choice, especially for women who had lacked this power for so long.

It is apparent that throughout Flynn’s career with the IWW, her ideology regarding class and gender matured and developed a complex intersectionality that recognized the inevitable effects of gender and class structures on working-class women’s lives. Though she believed wholeheartedly that economic revolution was the only way for women to gain equal rights and privileges in society, she also realized that working-class men did their part in continuing women’s oppression. Despite this, she believed more strongly in the utility of women organizing along with men of their own class than with middle-class and elite women, whom she saw as exploitative and ultimately more interested in their own economic power than in the struggles of the working class. Flynn acknowledged that it was impossible to separate the economic interests of working-class women from those of working-class men, though she advocated strongly for improving the day-to-day lives of working-class women through birth control and industrial organization of housework as well as wage work.⁹⁸

Though Flynn advocated for women more visibly and consistently than any other Wobbly leader and remained committed to the ideology of class struggle

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “The IWW Call to Women,” *Solidarity*, July 31, 1915.

⁹⁸ Flynn, “Women in Industry Should Organize,” 92-96; Flynn, “Men and Women,” 100-103.

throughout her time working with the IWW, historians Helen Camp and Rosalyn Baxandall both note that her behavior and relationships were not always consistent with these ideals. For example, Flynn had a years-long affair with fellow Wobbly organizer Carlo Tresca, an Italian anarchist who had a reputation for machismo and often displayed dismissive attitudes toward women. Baxandall and Camp both pointed out that Tresca often resented Flynn's deep immersion and commitment to her work, and wanted more of her attention.⁹⁹

Flynn also had a complicated relationship with the suffragists and feminists that she so often disdained in her writing and speeches. Baxandall notes in the introduction of her anthology of Flynn's works that Flynn's closest friend was a middle-class journalist, Mary Heaton Vorse, and that she kept in contact with the WTUL's Mary Dreier and socialite suffragist Inez Haynes Irwin. At one point, Flynn joined the Heterodoxy Club, a New York-based club of bohemian intellectual women. Helen Camp writes, "the friendships she formed at these meetings and the support that these women lent her gave Flynn a more sympathetic attitude towards the women's movement and its upper-middle class supporters." Flynn and other Wobblies also sometimes relied on the fundraising efforts of middle-class and elite activists to finance strikers' defense funds as well as their own legal defense and bail as organizers.¹⁰⁰ As a strong, independently minded woman who was sympathetic to the struggles of women in society but also held a strong ideology of class solidarity and revolutionary class struggle, Flynn often embraced a pragmatism that did not

⁹⁹ Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, 42-43; Baxandall, *Words on Fire*, 20-22.

¹⁰⁰ Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, 57, 60-64; Baxandall, *Words on Fire*, 14, 21.

always consistently hold up to the ideals of either the radical labor movement or the mainstream women's movement.

Flynn eventually parted with the Wobblies around 1917, though her exit from the organization was neither swift nor a clean cut. After her tenure in the IWW, Flynn founded the Workers Defense Union (WDU) with the assistance of the National Civil Liberties Bureau in order to aid workers and activists that faced oppression, especially from the Red Scare legislation that targeted politically left-wing agitators, including the famous anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti and her fellow Wobbly and lover Carlo Tresca. She continued lobbying for worker and leftist rights throughout the 1920s, and joined the United States Communist Party (CPUSA) in 1926 as a continuation of her revolutionary ideology. She continued to remain active in the CPUSA throughout the rest of her life, which led to multiple legal issues and even prison time. For example, Flynn served on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) beginning in 1937, but was expelled for her Communist activities in 1940. Anti-Communist policies continued to dog Flynn into the 1950s, when she was tried and convicted under the Smith Act that targeted CPUSA leaders and was sentenced to Alderson women's prison, where she served almost two and a half years.

After her release in 1957 she continued working with the CPUSA, eventually becoming party chair in 1961, though the position was largely symbolic at that point in the party's development. As a well-respected CPUSA leader, Flynn visited the Soviet Union several times in the 1960s on official business, and passed away in Moscow on a visit to the Soviet Union in 1964 at the age of seventy-four. Throughout her life, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn proved willing to fight for ideologies she believed in,

from the Socialism of her youth, to the anarcho-syndicalism of the Wobblies, and finally to the Communist Party and its revolutionary vision for the world. Though in her later years she voiced much less interest in specific women's issues, such as birth control and equal pay, Flynn's perspective that a communist form of government would address economic and social concerns for men and women alike may explain this lack of attention paid specifically to women's rights. As Camp asserts, Flynn was a fighter who championed the worker and the downtrodden throughout her life, and that she and others in the radical movement "'paid the dues' of the American labor movement."¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Leonora Barry and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn both proved to be the strongest female representatives for their respective organizations, and each woman held complicated and sometimes conflicting views regarding labor organization and women's place within their radical, class-conscious movements. As prominent female leaders, both women defined the KOL and IWW's official approaches to organizing female members, even when their own ideas and ideologies did not completely match up with those of their respective organizations at large. Both women, too, lived in ways that defied conventional gender structures and even their own ideas about what women's place should be in society. Barry's career, first as a KOL organizer and then as a respected public speaker, both defined and confounded her own perspectives on proper roles for women; though she advocated for women's roles in the domestic sphere as part of her post-labor life, she never seemed to follow her own ideological

¹⁰¹ Camp, *Iron in Her Soul*, 88-325.

tenets to the letter. Flynn's unconventional life of radicalism and fighting for workers' rights challenged radical men as well as women to rethink what a woman was capable of, but also constantly tested her own ideas about class, womanhood, and solidarity.

Though they both showed great concern for working-class women and believed labor organizing provided the best opportunity for their uplift, Barry and Flynn held much different ideas about the value of women's labor organization. Barry held up dignity and respect, an integral part of the Knights' overall mission, as the goal for organizing women in the labor movement, while Flynn advocated for women's freedom and control of their economic means, which she saw as possible only through a class-based, revolutionary fight against capitalism. Both women and their approaches to labor activism were shaped by contemporary ideas about class and gender, and comparing them together shows the changing landscape for women workers and the environments in which they organized.

Barry and Flynn also both lived through significant changes in societal gender norms. Barry embodied many of the "True Womanhood" ideals prevalent in her early years by first dedicating herself to being a wife and mother, and later brought ideals of feminine moral authority to her work with the Knights as well as her temperance and suffrage activities later in life. However, she also became a public figure and remained active in public life for almost fifty years, demonstrating shifts in gender conventions that allowed women to embrace more public roles. Flynn herself exemplified a certain type of "New Womanhood," taking an independent path that

flouted the gender norms that so often constrained working-class women, thanks in large part to her singular talents as a public speaker and organizer.

Neither woman ever considered herself a feminist, though historians have sometimes projected a certain type of feminism back onto their lives and work. Susan Levine uses the term “labor feminism” for Barry and other women in the KOL who worked to promote women’s voices in organized labor. Rosalyn Baxandall acknowledged that Elizabeth Gurley Flynn sometimes participated in feminist actions, but viewed her more as a token presence in male-dominated groups, which did not quite meet the standards of Baxandall’s own second-wave feminism.¹⁰² Regardless of these determinations, Barry and Flynn each addressed the Woman Question in a way that acknowledged the intersections of gender and class by writing about and organizing rank and file women in their respective organizations, but neither answered it definitively. For both women, class ideology intersected with changing gender structures and influenced their sometimes-inconsistent approaches to their writing, their interactions with the rank and file, and their own lived experiences. These struggles to answer the Woman Question can be further explored in their efforts as organizers and leaders of women in the KOL and IWW.

¹⁰² Levine, *Labor’s True Woman*, 121-22; Baxandall, *Words on Fire*, 263-72.

Chapter 3: Organizing the Rank and File

Because both Barry, with the KOL, and Flynn, with the IWW, served as on-the-ground organizers, interaction with rank and file women was an integral part of each woman's job. Barry and Flynn each spent large amounts of time as salaried labor activists traveling around the country to address workers' concerns, though their respective duties differed significantly due to the disparate ideals and goals that the KOL and IWW held. However, both sought to bring about economic justice and to improve workers' day-to-day-lives, and both reached out to working-class women in order to fulfill their organizations' missions to develop class-consciousness, solidarity, and support for all workers.

The rank and file women themselves are in general somewhat of a mystery to historians, apart from the few whose individual voices and experiences were recorded as the result of labor activity such as strikes and protests or occasionally interviews or letters published in newspapers and magazines. In the 1880s, many of the rank and file workingwomen, especially along the East Coast, were young immigrants or daughters of immigrants of Irish, German, and French Canadian origins. Case studies by other historians show that these women, who worked in industries such as textiles, garment-making, the shoe industry, and carpet-weaving, were not adverse to enacting strikes and protests when they felt it necessary, despite the disapproval of KOL leaders such as Barry and Powderly.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ For more on workingwomen, immigration, and labor organizing in the mid to late nineteenth century, see Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana:

By the 1900s and 1910s, new waves of immigration changed the ethnic makeup of rank and file workingwomen; Italians, Southern and Eastern Europeans, Russian and Polish Jews, and Syrians came to dominate unskilled and semiskilled factory labor in the East, especially in the textile and garment industries. Many of these first and second-generation immigrant women brought traditions of protest and militancy to their new homes and workplaces, and some engaged in political movements such as Socialism and Anarchism. The Knights and the Wobblies offered each generation of immigrant women workers the benefits of labor organization and attempted to alleviate often exploitative working conditions and poor pay.¹⁰⁴

Even as Barry and Flynn held these lofty goals in mind and pursued actions they believed would benefit rank and file women, their activities and initiatives show that sometimes both women, and by extension both organizations, lacked a thorough understanding of the average workingwoman's needs and experiences. Though the KOL and IWW approached rank and file women in different ways, Barry and Flynn's initiatives on behalf of working-class women indicate that the underlying ideologies and class structures of each movement and their perceptions of gender resulted in actions that only partially met rank and file women's needs.

The KOL Women's Department

Aside from writing and delivering lectures, Leonora Barry spent much of her time as the General Investigator, and later General Instructor and Director of the

University of Illinois Press, 1988), 191-266; Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, 17-72; and Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 13-61.

¹⁰⁴ For information workingwomen, immigration, and labor organizing in the early twentieth century, see Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, 75-169 and Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 110-98.

Department of Women's Work in the Knights of Labor, working toward organizing women on local, regional, and national levels. Barry, dedicated to societal reform and the uplift of workingwomen, advocated for spending more of the national budget on educating members about the KOL's principles and ideologies and funding initiatives that would help alleviate financial pressures rather than on direct action such as strikes and protests. Barry organized two such initiatives, a national women's mutual benefit society and the founding of regional cooperative societies for women workers, both of which ultimately met with less success than she hoped.¹⁰⁵ These projects, as well as the attitudes expressed by Barry and other members of the KOL, show a disconnect between the reform-minded organizational leadership and the rank and file workingwomen they attempted to help. They also reveal fundamental issues in practicing the ideal of solidarity across the working class that the Knights' project of radical societal change depended upon.

One of the most ambitious projects attempted by the Department of Women's Work was the creation of a beneficial department exclusively for the women of the Knights. Leonora Barry, the Director of Women's Work, devised a plan that would require women to pay a twenty-five cent membership fee, with the rest of the funds coming from a percentage of women's Local Assembly monthly dues. The fund would pay out a small weekly benefit in case workers became sick or had a workplace accident, or a larger lump sum of seventy-five to one hundred dollars upon the death of a member. The fund would also find housing and employment for members without it: "In case a member be out of employment, who is without means,

¹⁰⁵ Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1887, 1581-82; Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1888, 13-16.

homeless and friendless, she shall be provided with a respectable boarding place until she gets work, and every effort shall be made by officers and members to secure her employment.” Barry’s plan also called for members to hold fundraising events such as fairs, lecture series, and dances to build up the benefit fund.¹⁰⁶ Another article in the *JUL* supported Barry’s association and lamented the terrible situation many women faced, giving an example of a young woman who starved to death due to loss of work to encourage participation.¹⁰⁷

The Women’s Beneficial Department did not become as large or successful as Barry had hoped, as she wrote in her 1888 report to the General Assembly, due to “the lack of business methods and selfishness of others, and a general apathy with which comfortably-situated women are afflicted.” However, Barry noted that the department did catch on in some areas, particularly in Rhode Island. Though Barry blamed selfishness and apathy for the department’s underwhelming results, examining her own reports as well as the articles run in the *JUL* reveals that perhaps the Department of Women’s Work experienced a disconnect between its leaders’ reform ideals and the realities of rank and file women’s lives.¹⁰⁸ Numerous articles described the difficulties that many “toilers” faced, particularly in the textile and garment industries that employed a large percentage of wage-earning women and girls.

Articles in the *JUL* described the struggles of piece-workers, who made articles of clothing on contract for a set amount. One woman in New York was paid

¹⁰⁶ Leonora Barry, “Working-women’s Beneficial Department,” *Journal of United Labor*, January 4, 1888.

¹⁰⁷ “Help One Another,” *Journal of United Labor*, January 4, 1888.

¹⁰⁸ Barry, “Report of the General Investigator,” 14.

sixty cents per dozen boys' shirts and men's drawers, and \$1.15 per dozen men's shirts. To perform this work she had to purchase a \$60 sewing machine, for which she paid \$1 per week, as well as her own thread. An article in the *JUL* stated of women like her, "they are compelled to work long hours, sixteen a day in many circumstances, and still they are unable to earn enough to keep body and soul together."¹⁰⁹ A letter-writer from Boston wrote to the *JUL* that many members of her all-female Local Assembly worked fourteen to sixteen hours per day to survive, and that "they are fast losing hope of ever bettering their condition; for what with the constant demands on their pockets for monthly dues, and assessments both to the General and District Assemblies, many of them are giving up altogether."¹¹⁰ For this Lady Knight and her fellow workingwomen, participation in labor organizing could be an extra burden in already difficult circumstances, even when it promised hope of a better life.

Barry herself described the system of factory work that kept working girls beholden to long hours, low wages, and an ever-present sense of precarity:

An industry in Philadelphia employing a large number of women and girls requires its employes to be on hand and ready for work at a certain hour in the morning. Work is paid for by the piece. For days at a time the employé must wait for work for from one to four hours within the ten hours constituting a day's work. During this time they dare not leave the shop upon any pretext whatever; but should work come in at six o'clock, requiring three, four or six hours to finish, the employé, under penalty of losing her place, must remain and complete it. Twelve and fourteen hours confinement in a close, ill-smelling shop, and all for a week's wages ranging from four to six dollars per week.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ "Woman and Bread," *Journal of United Labor*, December 25, 1886.

¹¹⁰ "Women and Men," *Journal of United Labor*, January 22, 1887.

¹¹¹ Leonora Barry, "Address to Working Girls," *Journal of United Labor*, August 16, 1888.

Though Barry mainly blamed the selfishness of people who had the means to help those less fortunate for their lack of support, there was certainly a dearth of recognition in the KOL national leaderships' ideals of uplift and education that many low-wage working women simply could not afford an initial twenty-five cent fee in addition to their regular Local Assembly dues, or that they most likely did not have time to dedicate to fundraising efforts. Even though Barry and her fellow leaders of the Department of Women's Work expected more well-off members to pull the majority of the weight in organizing the beneficial department and keeping it running, seemingly low barriers likely kept participation down in areas and industries where working women could barely get by.¹¹² Though better-off KOL members such as Barry had sympathy for these toiling women, their notions of helpfulness were influenced by a class ideology and paternalistic ideals that did not match up with the average rank and file woman's experiences.

Barry's second report, delivered to the General Assembly in 1888, included a note on the progress of the beneficial association. The society, Barry noted, did not achieve the level of success that she had hoped for, it did take hold in some places. Rhode Island, Barry observed, saw a strong growth in organization and the development of a robust beneficial department between 1887 and 1888.¹¹³ There are not further mentions of the Women's Beneficial Department program aside from this brief piece of Barry's report, which could indicate that the department did not catch on at all in other places. Barry's analysis shows that she viewed the beneficial

¹¹² Barry, "Address to Working Girls," *Journal of United Labor*, August 16, 1888; Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1887, 1581-82; Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1888, 14.

¹¹³ Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1888, 14.

department's failure as a national initiative due chiefly to the selfishness and apathy of Knights who did not see interclass solidarity as the most important tenet of the KOL platform. However, along with Barry's other perspectives on toiling women workers reveals that though she ideologically supported protecting and uplifting poorer workingwomen, her attitudes toward organizing were situated largely in a "labor aristocracy" perspective that did not fully understand the struggles of the lowest class of workers.

Another, perhaps slightly more successful, KOL initiative established workingwomen's cooperative manufacturing societies, which sought to ensure that members earned a fair wage and enjoyed humane working conditions. Historian Steven Leiken notes in his study of nineteenth century cooperative societies that these initiatives were founded on a moral vision of an economy that both met the practical needs of workers and fostered a community, but that cooperative societies largely privileged skilled male labor and often functioned to keep women out of the workforce. The Knights maintained a Cooperative Board for a number of years and frequently preached the virtues of cooperative manufacturing in their *Journal*, urging readers to buy the KOL label for goods ranging from garments to trunks to cigars. Though cooperatives often embraced the idea of men as producers and only made space for women as consumers of cooperatively produced goods, the KOL Women's Department embraced cooperatives as a way to afford women more control over their labor and working conditions. Barry, in her 1887 report, recommended that "we turn our whole undivided attention to the forming of productive and distributive cooperative enterprises," especially in the garment industries, where workingwomen

made the poorest wages. With and without Barry's help, KOL women founded several cooperatives, mainly concentrated in the textile and garment industries, in several different locations around the country.¹¹⁴

Some cooperatives were formed by women's locals, such as the Our Girls Cooperative Clothing Manufacturing Company, founded in Chicago after members of a local assembly were locked out of their former place of employment for demonstrating in a Labor Day parade. The *JUL* article that noted their endeavor approved of this form of resistance and organization for women, opining, "This is a legitimate move, and if conducted with business ability and integrity, should secure for the girls as good a return for their work as consumers are willing to pay." Another blurb in the *JUL* taken from the *Richmond Inquirer* referenced a cooperative underwear factory that would be started for female members of the KOL, and Barry's 1888 report commented on the success of a cooperative shirt factory in Baltimore managed by KOL women. An article from 1887 commented on the proliferation of cooperative societies founded by sewing women in the Knights around the country. The article noted of the cooperatives that the enterprises were started not by wealthy benefactors, but by sewing girls themselves, and that around the country "these young women have undertaken for themselves the solution of the problem how best to earn their daily bread."¹¹⁵ The Knights saw cooperative societies as a way for workers to

¹¹⁴ Leiken, *The Practical Utopians*, 81-83; Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1887; For examples of cooperative manufacturing advertisement examples, see the *Journal of United Labor*.

¹¹⁵ "The Present Need of Woman," *Journal of United Labor*, November 24, 1886; Richmond Inquirer blurb, *Journal of United Labor*, December 10, 1886; Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1888, 13; "Sewing-Women's Co-operative Societies," *Journal of United Labor*, December 10, 1887.

take control of their means of production and meet their needs for livable wages and non-exploitative working conditions, and women of the KOL set out to prove that female workers could successfully control production.

However, the Knights also evinced the attitude that many workingwomen could not start these initiatives on their own, and required assistance in organizing and maintaining cooperatives from their more well-off sisters. The same *JUL* article that profiled the proliferation of sewing cooperatives formed by poor workingwomen went on to argue that, “all cannot enter upon co-operative work, nor would it be either wise or expedient.” The *Journal* appealed to “women of wealth” to organize companies where sewing women could make fair wages, and for better-off women in general to act as responsible consumers and support the efforts of their working sisters, even at a higher cost than that of clothing made by factory owners who paid low wages and otherwise exploited their workers. As the *JUL* stated regarding sympathetic aid from women consumers, “If the heart and conscience of such can be aroused to the misery and the sin of cheap goods, another important advance could be gained.”¹¹⁶

Urging women to act in solidarity as consumers made sense, as cooperative enterprises could not survive and thrive unless people sympathetic to the cause of fair wages and control of production chose to support these workers, whose prices could not compete with those of other manufacturers looking to make a maximum profit off of their employees. Barry herself frequently expressed the opinion that women as well as men should work harder as consumers to support cooperative and union-made

¹¹⁶ “Sewing-Women’s Co-operative Societies,” *Journal of United Labor*, December 10, 1887.

goods to support workingwomen's organization, exhorting women to consider "the welfare of a sister toiler" and calling in a speech to the Women's Council in Washington, D.C. for her fellow women to "give your attention and some of your assistance to the root of all evil, the industrial and social system that is so oppressive...If you would protect the wives and mothers of the future from this terrible condition we find these in to-day, give them your assistance."¹¹⁷

Barry, along with the other KOL leaders, made appeals to better-off working class women and middle-class women about the importance of organization along with urging poorer workingwomen to organize for their own benefit. The Knights, though radical in their class ideology of solidarity and their desires to enact societal change through initiatives like cooperative factories, tended to be reform-minded rather than revolutionary. Their idea of class solidarity was not to pit workers against employers or other wealthy classes, but to convince all of society, from the poorest workers to the elites, that workingmen and workingwomen had a legitimate claim to fair pay and personal dignity.¹¹⁸ The KOL's efforts to enact this vision of labor reform with regards to women resulted in a class-differentiated and sometimes conflicting approach that both tried to empower workers themselves and advocated for their protection and care by more powerful members of society. Their chosen methods of empowerment, which emphasized support and solidarity in the form of beneficial societies and cooperative manufactories rather than through strikes,

¹¹⁷ Barry, "Report of the General Investigator," 1887, 1587; "Sister Barry's Speech," *Journal of United Labor*, April 14, 1888.

¹¹⁸ Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 116-18, 147-49.

protests, and other direct action against employers, reflected Barry's own notions of women's proper behavior and gender roles.

Ultimately, the KOL failed to transform society in its image and declined rapidly in the late 1880s and early 1890s due to internal dissensions as well as outside pressures. The Knights combined the ethos of a social movement with the practical considerations of a labor union, and as a result faced problems of fierce ideological disagreement and infighting, which extended to women in the KOL as well as affecting male leadership. As historian Robert Weir puts it, "the KOL struggled with the competing pulls of revolution versus reform and with maintaining ideological purity versus the lure of tactical and pragmatic compromise." Indeed, this is apparent within the Women's Department and the Order's perceptions of women in the workforce; though their ideology called for domesticity and women as moral voices within the Knights, the KOL women also faced issues of finding practical solutions to women's real problems as workers. In the end, the KOL was unable to fully meet the concerns of rank and file women due in large part to factionalism and lack of financial and ideological support.¹¹⁹

Barry's time as a leader in the Knights and her attempts to serve the rank and file demonstrate both the positive and negative aspects of the KOL's inclusion of women. Barry herself joined the Knights due to her own experiences as a factory worker and those of her fellow female employees, but continued to hold on to ideal of women's domesticity and woman's role as a moral voice in the public sphere rather than as a political and economic force. Though Barry herself claimed that she left the

¹¹⁹ Weir, *Knights Unhorsed*, 16, 157-58; Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 138-40.

Knights due to her remarriage, historian Robert Weir asserts that there is evidence John Hayes and Terence Powderly's sexism and inability to control her outspokenness forced Barry out of the KOL. Weir argues that Barry's ouster was made possible by conflicting perspectives on women and their inclusion in the labor movement throughout the KOL as well as the overall "faction-ridden" nature of the organization that contributed heavily to its eventual demise. Despite their factionalism and sexism within the leadership ranks, Weir reminds us that the Knights of Labor proved more effective than any other contemporary organization in organizing the female rank and file.¹²⁰ After the Knights' decline, women workers relied mainly on the efforts of women's reform groups and reluctant AFL trade unions to afford them the opportunity to organize, often options that were unavailable to lower-skilled immigrant workers.¹²¹ The rise of the Industrial Workers of the World in the early 1900s, however, offered a new opportunity for women "toilers" to participate in a movement that recognized their contributions to the class struggle.

Women, Wobblies, and Textile Strikes

By the 1910s, the IWW had been working for years to make inroads into working-class communities along the East Coast. Much of the Wobblies' work concentrated on the same areas as the KOL's efforts to reach out to non-craft workers in the 1880s: textile centers like Lawrence, Massachusetts and Little Falls, New York, the silk mills in Paterson, New Jersey and Hazelton, Pennsylvania, as well as large industrial cities such as Philadelphia and New York. Unlike the Knights of Labor, the Wobblies did not organize women into separate locals or establish a dedicated

¹²⁰ Weir, *Knights Unhorsed*, 141-59.

¹²¹ Levine, *Labor's True Woman*, 150-53; Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 86.

women's department to address female members and their specific problems. While the Knights often chose to address issues they viewed as specific to women workers, such as sexual harassment, barely livable wages, and long working hours that many workers had to spend silent and isolated at their machines, the IWW recognized female workers' problems as part of the greater struggle based on class and capitalist exploitation. Part of this organization structure and ideology may have been practical in nature, as the recent immigrants that made up a large portion of the IWW's base demographic were often relegated to poorly-paid unskilled positions, particularly in the textile and silk industries.¹²²

The Wobblies engaged in a very different organizational style than the Knights of Labor a generation before, or the contemporary AFL trade unions. Their organizing ideologies of industrial syndicalism and direct action led the IWW to become involved in workers' protests and strike action against employers; in some cases the Wobblies provided the impetus for strikes and other forms of protests and sometimes they were called in to organize and lead activities begun more spontaneously by the workers themselves. Either way, the IWW often recognized that women could play major roles in strike action, and in the words of Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "Women can be the most militant or most conservative element in a strike, in proportion to their comprehension of its purpose." To this end, Flynn said, "the IWW does not keep them in the back, and they go to the front."¹²³ As one of the IWW's

¹²² Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, 75, 121-22; Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 185-87, 194-97; Golin, *The Fragile Bridge*, 5-7.

¹²³ For a more comprehensive overview of the IWW's organizing methods and strategies, see Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*; Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, "The IWW Call to Women," *Solidarity*, July 31, 1915.

most prominent organizers, and as the organizer who exhibited the most concern about working-class women, Flynn engaged with rank and file women and worked to develop their sense of class consciousness and solidarity, and to meet their needs as workers, wives, and mothers. However, the IWW's lack of permanent structures to enable women's continued involvement in labor organization hindered their revolutionary ability.

The IWW participated in several major strikes throughout the country, but some of the most notable strikes that women participated in took place in the textile industry in the Northeast United States. In the early 1910s, strikes became frequent between unskilled workers and business owners, particularly in towns where most of the population was employed by or relied on the industry for support. Moreover, women's participation in the textile industry was much higher than in many other industries. For example, of the 21,922 textile workers in Lawrence in 1911, 44.6% were female.¹²⁴ These regions were also notable for their wide ranges of ethnic diversity as immigrants flocked to towns like Lawrence and Paterson to find employment. According to social historian Thomas Dublin, the majority of women textile workers in New England by 1900 were either native-born daughters of immigrants or immigrants themselves. He approximates that only eleven percent were of native birth and parentage, while more than half came from a wide variety of foreign countries, including Ireland, Poland, Italy, and Greece.¹²⁵ In a study on the

¹²⁴ US Bureau of Labor, *Report on Strike of Textile Workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts, 1912*, 62nd Cong., 2d sess., Senate Executive Document 870 (Washington, D.C., 1912), 71. Hereafter referred to as *Lawrence Strike Report*.

¹²⁵ Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 230.

participants in the 1912 Lawrence strike, Bernard Trubowitz noted that many of the women were illiterate, and some spoke no English.¹²⁶

Though the IWW attempted to organize workers in factory towns into sustained, permanent locals, much of their successful activity took place on the basis of strikes and protests begun by unorganized workers. For example, only a fraction of the roughly thirty to thirty-five thousand textile employees in Lawrence were unionized at the beginning of 1912; the AFL represented approximately 2,500 skilled craft workers and the IWW had about 300 enrolled members. The Wobblies also established locals and attempted to organize meetings to agitate workers in Passaic and Paterson, New Jersey, in 1912, but met with very limited success in organizing the workers until the Paterson silk strike of 1913.¹²⁷ The success of the Lawrence strike in 1912 and the momentum of the Paterson strike in 1913 prompted relatively brief spurts of organization in smaller textile factory communities, such as Hazleton, Pennsylvania, New Bedford, Massachusetts, and Little Falls, New York.¹²⁸ However, the IWW was not overly concerned with maintaining members on its rolls, but put more time and money into organizing and encouraging direct action where it was needed to pressure employers into paying a livable wage and improving working conditions.

¹²⁶ Bernard Trubowitz, "Documented During Their Detention: Researching the Lawrence History Center's Essex County Jail Records" in *The New England Journal of History* 71, no. 1-2 (Fall/Spring 2015), 119.

¹²⁷ "The IWW in Jersey," *Solidarity*, April 13, 1912; "IWW in Paterson," *Solidarity*, June 29, 1912.

¹²⁸ "In Herkimer Jail," *Solidarity*, 2-13-13; "Textile Workers of America, Unite!" *Solidarity*, January 4, 1913; "Triumphant Entry," *Solidarity*, May 3, 1913.

As the strikes in Lawrence, Paterson, and other East Coast towns reveal, living conditions and decent wages were not often available to many unskilled and semi-skilled workers, especially women and children. According to the Lawrence strike report compiled for the U.S. House of Representatives, the strike's main cause was the implementation of a new Massachusetts law which called for a reduction in hours for women and children workers from 56 to 54 hours per week, with no clear indication to the workers that this change would affect their earnings, reducing them by two hours per week, or if they would remain the same.¹²⁹ A reduction of two hours per week in pay, or roughly 3.5% of weekly earnings, was not insignificant for the lowest-paid employees in Lawrence. Almost a third of Lawrence wage earners brought home \$7 or less per week, which necessitated that multiple family members work in the factories just to make enough to survive. According to one worker's strike testimony, the wage cuts represented the loss of five loaves of bread per week.¹³⁰

While wages at Paterson were somewhat better than those at Lawrence, as well as those in other silk mills in nearby Pennsylvania towns, they were still not particularly high. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn reported that one woman working two broad silk looms averaged approximately \$7.17 per week, a male weaver working two looms averaged \$9.48 per week, and a male dyers' helper earned approximately \$10.71 per week. She also pushed back against complaints about strikers needing

¹²⁹ *Lawrence Strike Report*, 9-13.

¹³⁰ United States, *The Strike at Lawrence, Mass., Hearings before the Committee on Rules of the House of Representatives on House Resolutions 409 and 433*, 62nd Cong., 2nd sess., House Executive Document 671, (Washington, D.C., 1912), 32-33. Hereafter referred to as *Lawrence Strike Hearings*.

financial assistance to carry on, writing, “is it not a scathing commentary on the wages paid that the workers have exhausted their resources at the end of three weeks and need assistance?”¹³¹ Little Falls strikers testified to their low wages doing piece work the area mills. *Solidarity* reported of one worker, “Tina Osli...earned \$6 to \$6.50 a week at winding, but was reduced to \$5.50 the week before she quit. She takes five minutes off for lunch and could take more, but it would cut down her earnings.”¹³² In Hazleton the workers, often children and wives of miners, were paid even less than in Paterson, at an average of around \$6.56 per week.¹³³

Working conditions in the textile mills also left much to be desired, as bosses increasingly demanded long hours for low pay in a difficult working environment. For strikers at both Lawrence and Paterson, systems used to speed up productivity contributed significantly to their reasons for striking. At Lawrence, the premium wage system was used to increase worker efficiency, but according to the strike report, “the employees were very emphatic that the premium system produces a tremendous nervous strain on the employee toward the close of the premium period,” and that “the employees argue as a matter of equity that if the employer can afford to pay an advanced price for the increased output, he can also afford to pay the same advanced rate for a slightly lower output.”¹³⁴ Similarly, the introduction of three- and four-loom systems in Paterson caused employees to fear their work would be sped up and wages driven down to make prices more competitive with Pennsylvania silk

¹³¹ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, “Facts and Figures,” *Solidarity*, April 19, 1913.

¹³² “Reasons for the Strike,” *Solidarity*, January 4, 1913.

¹³³ Joyce L. Kornbluh, ed., *Rebel Voices: An IWW Anthology* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Company, 1998), 197.

¹³⁴ *Lawrence Strike Report*, 80.

manufacturers.¹³⁵ These workers, men and women alike, felt that their lives and labor were worth more than the low prices and increasing demands that employers were willing to offer, and the IWW was quick to back their attempts to protest. In Lawrence and Paterson, the Wobblies capitalized on their small presence among the workers of each town and quickly sent organizers to expand on strikes begun by frustrated mill employees.

In Lawrence, Wobbly organizer Joseph Ettor quickly formed a strike committee with representatives from each nationality, which wrote up and circulated a set of demands including pay increases, double pay for overtime work, abolishment of the premium system, and no discrimination against strikers.¹³⁶ A little less than a year later, a walkout at Doherty silk mill over attempted elimination of the four-loom system became a 25,000-worker strike with the help of IWW organizers Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, Carlo Tresca, and Patrick Quinlan.¹³⁷ Strikes in Lowell, Massachusetts in 1912 and Hazleton in 1913 fed off of the energy of the Lawrence and Paterson strikes respectively.¹³⁸ Across the Northeast, the Wobblies led varying successful strikes based in industrial-style organization that utilized every worker, man, woman, and child willing to strike. Flynn in particular encouraged and fostered women's active involvement in the strike and worked to ensure women and children's needs were being met, but after the strikes were over the IWW generally left women

¹³⁵ "Silk Industry Paralyzed in Paterson," *Solidarity*, March 8, 1913; Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 197.

¹³⁶ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 158-59.

¹³⁷ Kornbluh, *Rebel Voices*, 198.

¹³⁸ "The Massachusetts War," *Solidarity*, April 13, 1912; "Big Strike in Paterson," *Solidarity*, March 1, 1913.

workers and dependents to fend for their own needs and desires both inside and outside the IWW organization.¹³⁹

In the IWW's view, women workers formed an important part of the strike effort, as industrial organization relied on as many people as possible participating. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn recalled in her autobiography that the "old-world attitude of man as the "lord and master" was strong," and that she, with the help of Bill Haywood, tried to combat this outlook that attempted to keep women out of the streets and off the picket lines. Flynn and Haywood held separate meetings for the women and children workers and discussed issues that fell into the traditional woman's sphere in addition to shop floor issues, such as church and household responsibilities in order to convince women that the strike was worth maintaining. Flynn later wrote, "We pointed out that if the workers had more money they would spend it in Lawrence—even put more in the church collections. The women laughed and told it to the priests and ministers the next Sunday."¹⁴⁰ Flynn and the IWW recognized women's functions in creating and maintaining community networks through institutions such as the church and through their roles as consumers, and by acknowledging their importance were able to get more women involved in the strike.

However, women proved that they were not simply warm bodies to place on picket lines or agents in gaining community support for the strike, but should have a voice in the decision-making processes as well. For example, a young woman mender, Josephine Liss, acted as a Polish representative to the Lawrence strike

¹³⁹ Tax, *The Rising of the Women*, 162-63.

¹⁴⁰ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, *The Rebel Girl: An Autobiography, My First Life 1906-1926*, ed. Hyman Lumer (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 131-33.

committee. Her testimony before the House Committee on the Lawrence strike revealed that Liss was one of the main providers for her household, along with her father, and participated in strike activity on her own accord as a worker who expected better treatment from the factory. During her testimony, Liss recounted an incident during the strike in which she struck a soldier with her muff for attempting to prevent her from walking freely in Lawrence. When ordered to turn back, Liss replied, "It is funny that a person cannot scratch his own head when he wants to," and continued to rebuke him, saying, "My father pays taxes." When asked if she was a member of the IWW, Liss replied that she was not, but intended to join.¹⁴¹ Liss clearly saw herself as an autonomous person capable supporting her family along with her father and making her own decisions, as well as decisions for her community as a worker and a strike leader.

Women practiced militancy throughout the strike; in fact, the first strikers were Polish women who walked out on their jobs after learning about their cut in pay. One of the men who testified at the strike hearing, police captain John Sullivan, recalled that the women pickets got out into the streets early and defied police when they were turned back from the mills. Sullivan recounted on the stand,

...I might say that there were times when we had difficulty in keeping these women from getting in the patrol wagon to be arrested; they were martyrs; heroines; they wanted to be held up, they wanted to be brought to the police station, and when they were brought to the police station and charged with an assault and interfering with people lots of them had money in their pockets, but they would not pay fines and would not accept bail; they wanted to be sent to jail.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Testimony of Josephine Liss, *Lawrence Strike Hearings*, 241-247.

¹⁴² Testimony of John Sullivan, *Lawrence Strike Hearings*, 302.

The women's fierce behavior, both on the picket lines and in the most infamous incident of the strike when they resisted police attempts to prevent their children from leaving Lawrence, was well-recognized by both the IWW and the so-called "capitalist press." The clash with the police and the arrest of women and children sparked nationwide protests and likely turned the tide of the strike, as the mill companies began reaching settlements with workers soon afterward.¹⁴³ Though meetings, speeches, and actions such as the children's exodus were organized by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and other IWW activists, the rank and file women's militant activism and willingness to act as workers and caretakers played a decisive role in winning the Lawrence strike.

If anything, the IWW likely underestimated women's importance to the Lawrence strike and its success. Historian Ardis Cameron argues in her study of women in Lawrence that much of the strike activity conducted by women was based in communal ties that were forged between working-class women far before the famous strike took place. Cameron writes, "Based on relationships rather than memberships, female networks spun alliances that also breached the divide that might otherwise have separated workers from nonworkers, store owners from strikers, and shopkeepers from consumers." She also asserted that women shared a sense of identity due to their close contact in both work and domestic life, and that women's commonalities "helped make Wobbly notions of internationalism more continuous with familiar patterns of daily life."¹⁴⁴ To this end, women participated in direct

¹⁴³ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 250-54.

¹⁴⁴ Cameron, *Radicals of the Worst Sort*, 126-138.

action themselves and pressured other community members, including men, to toe the strike line in addition to their militant action toward police and mill owners.

Women also featured prominently in IWW-led strikes elsewhere along the east coast, particularly in the silk mill strikes at Paterson and Hazleton in 1913. Historian Steve Golin observes in his book about the Paterson strike that of the strikers arrested, almost a quarter were women and girls. He recounted a specific instance of a woman named Mary Gasperano who, while on picket duty, was arrested for “haranguing” the crowd. Golin notes that Gasperano was arrested at least four other times, two of them for physically attacking people attempting to rein in or break the strike.¹⁴⁵ Female ribbon weavers and warpers went out on strike at the Dale mill in Paterson and formed a strike committee with the IWW to present their demands to the factory manager, who refused to listen because they organized with the Wobblies. The Paterson women had plenty of reason to protest: the practice of wage-garnishment, where half of new workers’ wages were garnished until they had worked a year, often resulted in the mill discharging employees before they could work long enough to receive the lump sum of the held wages. Some employers would dock women’s wages for small offenses as well, such as having a torn apron or leaving the loom for a short time. The Dale mill ribbon workers also struck against the paternalism and condescension of their boss, who lectured the women on how to economize on their food expenditures in order to survive on lower wages. Instead of taking this advice, which they viewed as an insulting effort to make more money by

¹⁴⁵ Golin, *The Fragile Bridge*, 58-59.

convincing the women that they could work for less, the Dale mill ribbon weavers struck for higher wages and an eight-hour day with the IWW.¹⁴⁶

Women and girls participated in picketing, making public speeches, attending meetings, and presenting their grievances and demands to employers through the IWW along with men, and in turn received a share of arrests, harassment from police and employers, and financial hardship as the strike wore on for several months. However, the strike was not all hardship; Carolina Golzio recalled in an oral history interview that as a young woman, the strike was exciting and oftentimes fun, as the strikers would sing songs and hold dances. Golzio reminisced about getting onto the stage during meetings and rousing the crowd, encouraging them to stay out on strike, saying, “Why don’t we try to see what we can do? Stay out, because if we go back, we won’t get anything.”¹⁴⁷

Among other fundraising activities, the IWW devised a pageant at Madison Square Garden to raise funds for the strike in which the strikers themselves would act out the events of their lives in the mills and their protests. Female strikers participated in the pageant along with the men, performing and publicizing their struggles as workers who were actively fighting back against capitalist exploitation. Golzio remembered participating in the pageant and seeing the cheering crowds support the strikers. In her opinion, the strikers were not only working for their own gain, but that of all workers. She said of the pageant-goers, “Well you know, it was a big strike.

¹⁴⁶ Commission on Industrial Relations, *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial Relations*, Vol. 3, 64th Cong., 1st Sess., Senate Executive Document 415 (Washington, D.C., 1916), 2490, 2592-2597.

¹⁴⁷ Interview of Carolina Golzio, by Steve Golin, June 13, 1983, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College Archives.

And if you won it, it was good for them, too. Don't forget. That's what they were thinking of: 'If these people—they're starving. We're not starving yet, but if they win it, we're in for the eight-hour day, too.' No, they were not dummies."¹⁴⁸ Women like Carolina Golzio were not dummies themselves, and recognized how the IWW and the strike could benefit them.

Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Bill Haywood consciously brought women to the forefront of the strike, as they knew women could act as powerful fighters for the workers' cause. Historian Steve Golin writes of Flynn's efforts to involve women workers that, "she continually strove for the 'point of contact' between revolutionary hopes and the daily lives of women." While Flynn, along with Haywood, certainly recognized women's importance to the strike as drivers of the action, others have emphasized the significance of rank and file women's agency as strikers. Historian Jennifer Guglielmo argues that the strike "began from below," with the enthusiastic participation of Southern Italian and Jewish women, who "united out of a shared experience of oppression."¹⁴⁹ Weekly women's meetings at Paterson recalled the successes of the workingwomen's leadership in the Lawrence strike a year earlier. As in Lawrence, the working-class women and the IWW leadership, particularly Flynn, influenced one another and worked together to agitate workers and defy the factory owners.

The two major strikes in Lawrence and Paterson both saw enormous participation and leadership from rank and file women, many of whom were

¹⁴⁸ Interview of Carolina Golzio.

¹⁴⁹ Golin, *The Fragile Bridge*, 64-65; Guglielmo, *Living the Revolution*, 194-196.

immigrants whose families objected to their participation in public strikes and protests. Encouraged both by Elizabeth Gurley Flynn and Bill Haywood's dedicated organization of women's meetings and by their own feminine networks that viewed strikes as an extension of their duties both as workers and as caregivers, rank and file women organized with the IWW to advocate for themselves and their families. However, after the strikes ended and the organizers left for their next big engagement, continuing labor organization proved difficult, especially for women workers. Carolina Golzio remembered that when the strike ended, the IWW all but disappeared from Paterson. She said of the Wobblies, "They went to New York, they were from New York. They never came here no more. They done their job, and then they went."¹⁵⁰ Though Lawrence was declared an IWW victory and the Paterson strike a loss, both towns saw declines in industrial organizing and had difficulties maintaining worker solidarity within a few short years of the strikes. For workingwomen in particular, the IWW's presence and Flynn's work on their behalf benefited them in the short term, but did not succeed in creating long-term organizational structures that continually put women "at the front."¹⁵¹

In many ways, perhaps fittingly, the IWW's successes and failures in organizing women fell in line with its successes and failures in organizing their overwhelmingly male membership as well. As Meredith Tax argues, the women strikers that rose up to protest with the Wobblies did so on the basis of class solidarity, but had no specific support to sustain their efforts to continue in labor

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Carolina Golzio.

¹⁵¹ Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All*, 258-59, 284-88; Tax, *The Rising of the Women*, 272-75.

activism. Tax writes, “But when their class went under defeat, they were the most submerged, for their struggle for equality within the working-class movement could only succeed when the whole class was in motion.” Though Tax’s analysis likely applied to the majority of rank and file women, the Wobblies’ efforts did make an impact on some workers such as Carolina Golzio, who later worked with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to strike in Paterson once again, this time emerging victorious.¹⁵² The IWW may not have successfully kicked off a working-class revolution that gave women and men equal voice as workers, but it did make a lasting impression on the consciousness of the young women who saw that their voices mattered.

Conclusion

The Knights and the Wobblies as a whole, along with their most prominent women leaders, Leonora Barry and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, reached out to rank and file women as part of larger missions to improve workers’ lives. Barry, a reform-minded leader backed by the republican producerist ideology of the KOL, focused her efforts on creating alternative structures for workingwomen that would ideally allow them to experience more well-off and dignified lives with the help and support of those who were more fortunate. Flynn, on the other hand, helped women engage in direct action against employers who would keep them oppressed through low wages and exploitative conditions, and to defy expectations of working-class men and their traditionalist values that kept women constantly working in the home after their shifts in the factory. Though their methods were very different, Barry and Flynn’s overall

¹⁵² Tax, *The Rising of the Women*, 275; Interview with Carolina Golzio.

goals had certain similarities: they wanted to give women the opportunity to exercise more control and autonomy over their own lives, and each genuinely believed that labor organization and greater economic control was the ideal way for women to escape oppression. However, their differing class and gender ideologies shaped the approaches they took to organizing rank and file women.

Through the Department of Women's Work, the Knights expressed a class and gender ideology that offered rank and file women conflicting ideas about where the KOL stood on the Woman Question, particularly in regards to women's roles as part of the labor movement. The KOL's producerist ideology demanded respectable dignity for female workers as well as male workers, and the organization attempted to create structures to promote this ideal. The Knights, and Barry herself, encouraged working girls to stand up to their employers and organize, and to stand with one another to advocate for their needs within a larger, male-dominated organization. However, they also frequently conveyed the idea that workingwomen could not act effectively on their own and that it was necessary for them to rely on the help and support of other, better-off women and men. Barry also did not always seem to fully comprehend the difficulties women faced in organizing, including extremely low pay and the threat of losing their jobs if they joined the KOL. The infrastructure that the women leaders in the Knights devised, based on their comprehensions of women's needs and abilities, often focused on separating them from the larger organization and focusing on workingwomen's problems as low-paid and otherwise exploited workers. Unfortunately, this disrupted the overall goals of solidarity and equality with male workers, resulting in a less effective organizational experience for workingwomen.

The Wobblies and Flynn, by contrast, encouraged women to pursue economic freedom by standing shoulder to shoulder with male strikers on picket lines and in meetings on the basis of their ideology that united all workers under the banner of class. Flynn and Haywood, two top Wobbly leaders, prioritized reaching out to women through separate meetings and speeches that connected the strike to their lives and needs in Lawrence and Paterson. Flynn and Haywood, if not the Wobblies as a whole, answered the Woman Question for working-class women by enthusiastically encouraging women to step out into the public sphere as both workers and as part of their community-based gender roles. However, the lack of sustained organizing led by national Wobbly organizers severely limited women's actual abilities to take leadership roles in labor organizing and to create permanent organizational structures that would address their ongoing problems of low pay, workplace exploitation, and oppressive family structures. Because of their commitment to class above all else, Flynn and other Wobbly organizers did not see value in intentionally cultivating women's continued participation in organized labor, instead assuming that could and would organize on an equal basis with men. Unfortunately, realities of long working hours and endless domestic duties, along with the overall suppression of Wobbly organizing from companies and governmental force, kept many women out of sustained and formal organized labor in the 1910s and 1920s.

Conclusion

In women's history, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are remembered and studied as a time of significant change for women as society confronted the Woman Question. Similarly, scholars studying labor and the working class recognize this time period as an important transition in American capitalism and labor activism as industrial capitalism took hold, wage labor became entrenched in the economy, and labor unions began to organize on a national level. For working-class women, changing gender structures and expectations intersected with major shifts in economic and class structure to create a world in which more women increasingly sought wage work and simultaneously began negotiating public life in ways they had never before experienced. Though the Woman Question was often framed in a way that primarily addressed white, native middle and upper-class women's changing roles in society, it also applied to working-class women, some of whom turned to labor organizing and activism for the first time in order to address both material and identity-related concerns.

Women turned to many types of organizations to address their working conditions, including cross-class organization based in women's solidarity such as the WTUL, trade unions that were affiliated with the AFL and those that were not, small local and regional unions that addressed the concerns of workers in particular area and industry, and of course class-conscious unions like the Knights of Labor and the Industrial Workers of the World. Like their male counterparts, workingwomen's relationships with labor organizations was often complex; some aligned themselves with multiple organizations at once, or switched to different groups when one fell

apart or stopped meeting their needs. Unlike their male counterparts, working-class women almost always had to struggle to be heard, even in organizations that ostensibly welcomed and encouraged their participation. This was certainly the case in the Knights and the Wobblies, both of which simultaneously made women's equal participation part of the overall agenda and often displayed paternalistic or dismissive attitudes toward female members and working-class women in general.

However, the Knights and Wobblies did open up unique spaces to workingwomen, both skilled and unskilled, to act in ways that acknowledged their identities as workers and as caretakers and recognized that for many working-class women, the public and private spheres were not so separate. Though neither organization or its prominent women leaders completely embodied the labor feminism or industrial feminism discussed by Annelise Orleck and Dorothy Sue Cobble in relation to women's involvement in trade unionism in the twentieth century, both the KOL and IWW provided women a space to organize and lent an ideology that—once again, in theory if not always in practice—encouraged them to work on an equal basis with their fellow working-class men to create a better world for the producer. By comparing these two organizations, we see that opportunities for working-class women's labor movement participation changed over time, as did the goals for including women on an equal basis with men. While the KOL and its female leadership sought to imbue working-class women with dignity and respect due to producers, the IWW and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn in particular fought for women to have freedom and control over their economic means alongside male workers.

For women in the Knights of Labor and in the Industrial Workers of the World, class ideologies and shifting gender structures intersected to create particular, and sometimes conflicting, ideas about how women could and should participate in the workforce, in labor activism, and in the creation of the working-class as a whole. The class ideology expressed by the Knights advocated equal pay for equal work, suffrage rights, and women's equal involvement in labor organizing, but still retained many facets of the True Womanhood ideal. The KOL viewed women as a force for moral good and often advocated for their involvement in labor activism and reform on the grounds of providing moral guidance and uplift for workers. However, sometimes the KOL expressed perspectives that indicated radical ideas about women as workers, such as speaking highly of women who became educated, ran businesses, or worked in skilled positions that allowed them to become producers. Additionally, the KOL also saw lower-skilled workingwomen, "the toiling masses," in a paternalistic light and expressed doubts that they were able to better their lives without the help or protection of the Knights. The Wobblies also held a specific class ideology that saw an equal place for women, but the IWW largely conceived of its women as partners in the class struggle rather than as separate and fundamentally different. Contradictorily, the IWW still often portrayed women as different from men by privileging their roles as wives and mothers, and by representing them as helpers and aids in the class struggle rather than as leaders in their own right. These conflicted perspectives on women in both the Knights and the Wobblies show that while both organizations developed class ideologies that acknowledged women's equal claim to fair wages and labor activism, the organizations were also influenced

by the Woman Question and its changing answers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The KOL and IWW's perspectives and actions on women were also largely influenced by the presence of women who held leadership roles and further developed how each organization dealt with its female members. As the two most prominent female leaders in the KOL and IWW, Leonora Barry and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn held their own complicated ideas about gender, class, and women's roles in labor organization. Barry, a widow who came to labor organizing after seeking work in a factory to support her family, strongly believed in providing women a place to organize and advocate for their rights as workers, but also expressed the opinion that a woman's true place was in the home and that she should only work out of necessity. She believed that women should work to organize and educate themselves, but also that those who were better off, such as men who made living wages while women earned a pittance, had a moral duty to work in solidarity to help the less fortunate. Barry acted out her contradictory ideas about class solidarity and gender in her own life, ending her involvement with the KOL upon her own marriage, but continuing to lead a long and varied career in the public sphere, advocating for suffrage, temperance, and education. Flynn, an inveterate "New Woman" renowned for her oratory skills and her unconventional life as a single and independent woman, also expressed and experienced contradictions about class and gender. Flynn was a true believer in the importance of class over sex and consistently preached the necessity of working-class revolution in her work with the IWW, but also understood and acknowledged that women had specific concerns and problems that stemmed from

their gender roles. Like Barry, Flynn's own life sometimes contradicted her expressed ideologies of class solidarity above all as she formed friendships with middle-class and elite reformers and feminists. Barry and Flynn were often the public facing representatives of women in the Knights and Wobblies and both exemplified in many ways the conflicts between class ideology in each organization and the changing gender structures of American society at large.

Barry and Flynn, along with their fellow male and female organizational colleagues, worked directly with rank and file women in their pursuit of turning their ideologies into realities for the working classes, and often imposed their ideals of class and gender upon first and second generation immigrant women. Barry, as the main driver of the KOL's Department of Women's Work, devised uplift programs like a the Workingwomen's Beneficial Society and cooperative factories in order to meet the needs of rank and file women whose positions were precarious and who faced all manner of exploitation in the workplace. However, these initiatives seemed to strongly reflect Barry's own ideas about proper gender roles, behavior, and what workingwomen required, rather than the voices and needs of workingwomen themselves. Flynn, as a Wobbly strike leader and organizer, reached out to working-class women in the Lawrence and Paterson strikes to encourage their active public participation in picketing, protesting, and making their needs known. Though Flynn worked to involve women and promote their leadership during the strikes, she and her fellow Wobbly leaders did not continue to engage these women once the strikes were over, providing no infrastructure for women to continue working toward the class revolution. Barry and Flynn's interactions with rank and file women reveal that even

in organizations that welcomed women as equal participants and that employed strong women leaders, female members often went unheard and underserved.

These chapters show that the meeting of ideology and practical reality for these radically-minded labor organizations and the working-class women they attempted to reach was often messy and not always successful. Examining how the Knights and the Wobblies perceived, included, and interacted with women and the contradictory stances they took reveals that even for working-class organizations that claimed ideologies promoting gender egalitarianism and working-class solidarity, their perceptions and ideas about women and their abilities as organizers and activists often conflicted. While these few pages cannot, of course, capture the vast range of workingwomen's challenges, opportunities, and experiences in the labor movement, they hopefully bring us a bit closer to understanding another small piece of how class ideologies and gender structures affected their lives.

Needless to say, there is much more work to be done on women's participation in both the Knights and the Wobblies that would examine the full breadth and depth of working-class women's interaction with radical class ideologies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This study only scratches the surface of the many complexities and contradictions that lay at the heart of any significant radical social movement, particularly in regards to the complicated question posed by shifting gender norms and structures. Regardless, my hope is that it contributes to our continued efforts to understand the intersectionalities between gender, class-consciousness, and the realities of working-class women's lives.

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